

CONTROL AND PARTICIPATION

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The word *control* has unpleasant connotations in a democratic society where individual freedom is valued. Yet a democratic society, like any society, requires organizations, and organizations cannot exist unless, as Lyndall Urwick put it, "Some person or persons are in a position to 'require action of others.'"¹

The formal responsibility for exercising control in most work organizations belongs to management; the managerial function is said to be a control function. But "requiring action of others" is not easy. Control in organizations means that persons must do what they might not prefer to do and, therefore, control sometimes implies conflict between those who exercise it and those who are subject to it. Furthermore, a manager who exercises control may feel some conflict within himself or herself because of the unfavorable connotations associated with the control function. Thus, the problem for many managers is not simply how to exercise control effectively, but how to do so in ways that are consistent with social norms and with the manager's own values.

ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT CONTROL

The resolution of this problem may depend on the appropriateness of assumptions about control in organizations. One such assumption we refer to as the "fixed pie" assumption of power.² This assumption argues that the amount of control exercised by members of a group or an organization is a fixed quantity; thus, increasing the power of one individual, e.g., a worker, automatically decreases the power of another, e.g., a manager. "Fixed pie" means that managers may attempt

to make their organization more democratic by putting power in the hands of lower-ranking persons, but in so doing, managers give up some of their own power -- a prospect that few find agreeable.

Influence of Leadership Climate

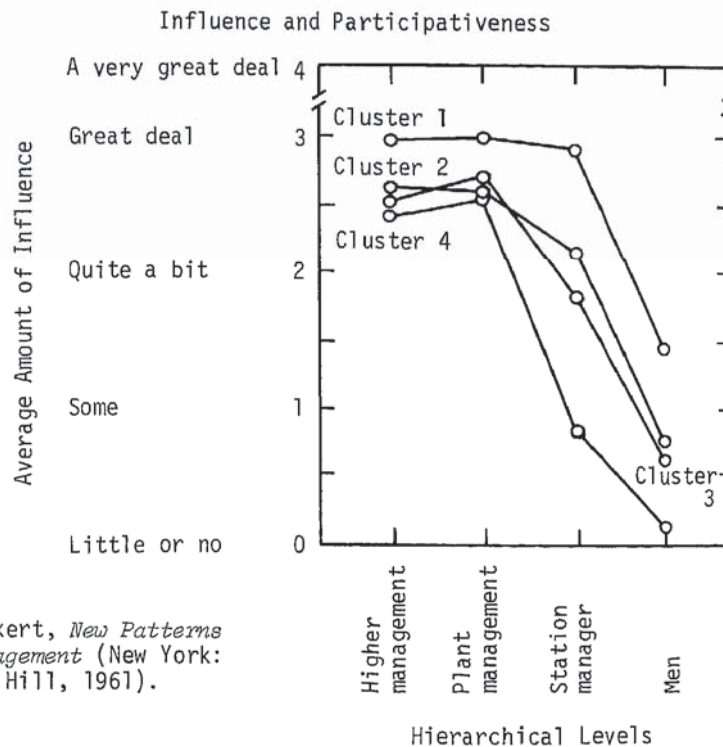
In fact, the appropriateness of this "fixed pie" assumption may depend in part on how the manager approaches the job of management; it may depend on the *style of leadership*. Some managers seem to create an organizational climate in which they exercise substantial control and in which their subordinates, including the workers themselves, also exercise substantial influence. For such managers, strong leadership need not imply weak followership. This, at least, is implied in research in which members of organizations describe, through questionnaires, the distribution of control in their organization.

A first hint of this implication came from a study in four trade union locals--not from industrial or business organizations. In that study we found that unions in which members were relatively active -- taking an interest in the affairs of the union, attending meetings frequently and participating actively in decision making in the union -- were not necessarily unions with weak officers. On the contrary, the union with the most apathetic and powerless membership was also the one with the weak leaders. No one in the union exercised much control, thus it was correspondingly weak and ineffective in its relations with management.³ Of course, such findings in four union locals do not mean that powerful leadership *necessarily* means a powerful membership. Certainly many examples to the contrary can be cited. But it does suggest that strong leadership *can* occur in an organization with a strong rank and file, at least under certain conditions. We are not sure what these conditions are, but some evidence suggests that the style of leadership and character of decision making in the organization may help to define these conditions.

Figure I, based on research in 31 geographically separated departments of a large service organization, provides an illustration. Each department performs essentially the same work, and careful records of productivity are kept by the company. Employees in these departments were asked the following question: "In general, how much say or influence do you feel each of the following groups has on what goes on in your

department?" Answers were checked on a five-point scale from "little or no influence" to "a very great deal of influence," for the following hierarchical groups: higher management, plant management, the department manager and the men. The figure shows the average response to the above question for each of several clusters of departments that are distinguished by their leadership and decision-making atmosphere. Cluster 1 includes the departments that are most participative and cluster 4 includes the departments that are least participative. The most participative departments (cluster 1) are not only higher in the influence exerted by the men, but also in the influence exerted by the several levels of management. Furthermore, the more participative and more highly controlled departments are, in this case, the more productive of the group.

Figure I*



*R. Likert, *New Patterns of Management* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1961).

According to an analysis of these departments by Likert,⁴ "The high performing managers actually have increased the size of the 'influence pie' by means of the leadership processes which they use. They listen more to their men, are more interested in their men's ideas and have more confidence and trust in their men." These managers are more likely than others to interact and communicate with their subordinates through group meetings in which they welcome opinions and elicit influence attempts. Suggestions which subordinates offer make a difference to

these managers, and subordinates are responsive, in turn, to their managers' requests. Furthermore, workers are members of cohesive work groups and, at the same time, mutual attitudes of workers and their managers tend to be favorable. In these circumstances, influence by workers is not a threat to managers; on the contrary, it is part of a process leading to more effective organizational performance.

To what extent is the leadership climate, suggested by Likert's analysis, found in other organizations where members report high levels of control exercised by all (or most) echelons? A number of studies since the early ones in trade unions and the industrial service organization provide a tentative answer.

For example, in a recent international study of 50 industrial plants (10 each in the United States, Italy, Austria, Yugoslavia and Israel), members at all levels were asked to report about the distribution of control in their plants.⁵ Members also were asked to respond to four questions designed to measure the participativeness and supportiveness of their immediate superiors. The four questions were:

- Does your immediate superior ask your opinion when a problem comes up that involves your work? [1 He never asks my opinion ... 5 He always asks my opinion].
- Is your immediate superior inclined to take into account your opinions and suggestions? [1 Not at all ... 5 Very much].
- Is your immediate superior friendly and easily approached if there are problems? [1 Not at all ... 5 To a very great extent].
- Do you have trust in your immediate superior? [1 Never ... 5 Always].

An index based on an average of these questions in each of the plants correlated .61 with the summary measure of control that included the control exercised by managers, supervisors and workers.

This correlation might be better understood by noting that the American plants in this group showed the highest amount of control exercised by managerial personnel and workers, and the Italian plants showed the least amount of control by managerial personnel and workers. American managers are relatively influential in this international comparison, but American workers are by no means uninfluential. American plants as

a group also rank high in response to the questions that help to define the participativeness, supportiveness and trust that characterizes the superior-subordinate relationship. According to responses to the four questions, American plants rank second only to the industrial plants in Israeli kibbutzim. The Italian plants rank at the bottom of the list; managers in the Italian plants are not participative or supportive in their relations with subordinates, nor do members feel much trust in their superiors in these plants.

Ferrarotti, who is familiar with the Italian industrial organization, describes leadership in a way that both corresponds well to the results found in this study and helps define some of the conditions that may affect the appropriateness or inappropriateness of the "fixed pie" assumption of power:

"The rigidly hierarchic pattern of family-centered and -motivated society reflects itself in the management structure and in management-labor relations..... In general, Italian enterprise authority is highly centralized and personalized and reflects the paternalistic orientation of the patrimonial business elite. This means that Italian managers are reluctant to delegate authority and they tend to think of their authority in terms of personal power rather than in terms of a necessary function related to, and coordinated with, other equally necessary functions within the enterprise. The enterprise is seen as some sort of private kingdom.... In fact, the logical outcome of the refusal to delegate authority is the unwillingness or the inability to train junior executives and young assistants.... Again as a consequence of [the manager's] practice of power centralization, he is too busy with too many things and he wants to do everything himself. In Italian industry the manager who feels hurt if anything has been done without his direct knowledge and participation is a familiar character."⁶

The approach to the management function suggested here not only limits the amount of influence exercised by workers, but also limits the control by management itself. This is ironic because the approach is designed precisely to increase the control of the managers. On the other hand, while American organizations are not very participative in absolute terms, the relatively participative leadership philosophies of many managers operate to expand the influence pie compared to that in

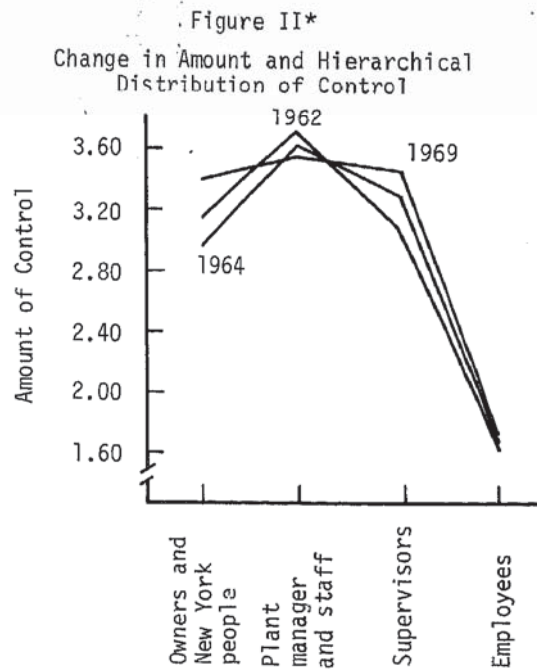
Italy. Analyses by Rosner and his associates of data from this international study suggest that in the "high control" plants where workers have relatively high influence, they also have correspondingly strong feelings of responsibility and trust -- one basis for the high influence of their managers.⁷ "...The key to control," as Blake and Mouton suggest, "is commitment."⁸

The participative leader may increase his or her own power by creating a climate of trust, responsibility and favorable subordinate-superior relations. A less participative leader may resort to other means -- possibly to coercion or threat of coercion -- in trying to secure the cooperation of subordinates. The different means by which leaders attempt to obtain the compliance of subordinates may explain, in part, the different amounts of control found in different organizations. Data from studies conducted in a number of American organizations indicate that the total amount of control is *not* likely to be high where members comply with their superior's requests because he or she is able to penalize or pressure them.⁹ Data from the international study also show that coercion as a "basis of power" for the supervisor tends to be negatively correlated with the total amount of control in organizations. However, these correlations are not always large, and an exception occurs in 10 Yugoslav plants where, for reasons that we do not understand, a high level of control is positively associated with coercive leadership practices. However, more generally, research findings suggest that the total amount of control is likely to be high where members indicate that they cooperate with their superior because of confidence in his or her technical expertise or because they see the manager as a psychologically attractive person.

EXPANDING ORGANIZATIONAL CONTROL

Seashore and Bowers report the results of an organization development effort that illustrates the "expandable pie" notion of control and shows how an increase in the total amount of control in an organization might be achieved through a change in style of management.¹⁰ The organization studied, a textile manufacturing company, had a poor climate of industrial relations and was inefficient and unprofitable prior to its acquisition by a more successful competitor, the Harwood Manufacturing Company. Harwood had already distinguished itself from its competitors by, among other things, its concern for "human relations" and its

relatively participative managerial style. For example, workers were brought into decisions about the way certain production techniques were to change, rather than just being told how they were to change.¹¹ Because Harwood had developed what was an apparently successful management style, the board of the company decided to try to create a similar management system in the newly acquired plant, and Seashore and Bowers set out to document some of the changes that might occur as a result of the developmental effort. They compared at the outset (in 1962, before any managerial changes were introduced) the distribution of control in the new plant with that in the successful and relatively participative Harwood plant. The old Harwood plant clearly showed a greater amount of control according to reports by members.¹² Figure II shows the results of follow-up measures of control in the newly acquired plant after changes in management practices, along with technological changes, had been introduced (1964). Control was assessed again in 1969, well after the change program had diminished in intensity and conditions in the organization had stabilized.



*S. Seashore and D. Bowers, "Durability of Organizational Change," *American Psychologist*, 25, No. 3 (March 1970).

The changes in control are not radical or dramatic, but they do indicate at least some expansion of control in the new plant consistent with the intent of the development effort. However, most obvious increases appear to have occurred at managerial levels rather than among the rank and file. Therefore, these results do not correspond entirely to the expectation that workers' influence would increase substantially along with that of managers', but the results do fit the suggestion of Strauss and Rosenstein that the "chief value" of participation "may be that of providing another forum for the resolution of conflict as well as another means by which management can induce compliance with its directives."¹³ In any event, under the new conditions of leadership, increases in total amount of control have occurred and increases in the net control exercised by management did not take place at the expense of the control exercised by the rank and file.

Data from the company records indicate that these changes in control occurred along with improvements in the productive efficiency and in the profit picture of the plant -- although these performance changes probably took place as much as a result of technological improvements as they did because of changes in managerial practices. But it is difficult to separate the managerial and technological "causes" of the favorable outcomes in the organization. Effective management in this case involved the introduction of technological change along with changes in management practice which were *accepted* rather than resisted by workers. Resistance to change might very well have been the reaction under the old system of management.

CONTROL, SATISFACTION AND PERFORMANCE

Seashore and Bowers' study showed that the increase in control and the improved performance of the organization were accompanied by an increase in the satisfaction felt by members. Employees' attitudes did not improve along every dimension measured, but satisfaction with their work and their attitudes toward the company improved markedly. Furthermore, a number of studies in a variety of organizations including manufacturing plants, insurance agencies, stock brokerage offices, voluntary associations and community colleges yield similar results.¹⁴ Therefore, we believe that we are dealing with principles that may apply widely in organizations: control is expandable in organizations, and participative and supportive leadership styles may be associated with high levels

of control and with criteria of organizational effectiveness including member satisfaction.

Yet we face some problems in interpreting the results of these studies. First, the positive results suggested above do not occur in all of the studies where research on this subject has been undertaken.¹⁵ There are undoubtedly conditions that affect the applicability of the principles suggested above, but we do not yet know very much about what they are. Furthermore, it is not always possible to tell cause from effect in these studies. For example, is control high in an organization because the organization is productive and profitable, or is the organization productive and profitable because control is high? Or is there a third factor which affects both control and performance? One study in an insurance company showed that the correlations between the total amount of control and criteria of performance (taken from company records) in each of 40 agencies were greater when the measures of performance were taken for the year *after* the measure of control rather than for the year preceding the measure of control. This means that variation in performance followed variation in control, thus performance is not likely to be the cause of control because a cause is not likely to follow its effect.¹⁶ But the study in the Harwood Company showed productivity to increase before an increase in control was detectable. Thus, we are inclined to think that causation may work either or both ways -- productive efficiency may affect control just as control may affect efficiency.

We also have questions about the *measures* of control. They are based on the judgment of members in response to questionnaires, and these judgments can be erroneous. Persons in effective organizations compared to those in ineffective organizations may only *think* that the various hierarchical levels are relatively influential when, in fact, no "real" difference in control exists between the organizations. In order to check this out, Bachman went into a number of organizational units where measures were available from company records about the productivity of *each worker*. He correlated these productivity scores with each worker's perception of the total amount of control in the organization and found very small, statistically nonsignificant, negative correlations. Apparently a worker's performance here was *not* related to his or her perception of control, even though the productivity of the

organizational units as a whole did correlate in the predicted way with the average judgment by members about control in the unit.¹⁷ Therefore, there seems to be something more in the correlation between organizational productivity and control than can be explained simply by the proposition that persons who are highly productive will report a high level of control in their organization. Yet it is clear that some members disagree with others in their judgment about control--thus, distortion undoubtedly occurs.

We are left with a number of questions about the meaning of research on control -- questions about conditions, causation and measurement. Nonetheless, there seems to be a message in what members in effective and ineffective organizations are telling us -- if we are prepared to accept what they are saying. Their responses indicate that control in an organization is not a fixed quantity and that managers or workers might increase their control without necessarily decreasing the control exercised by other groups. They also suggest that organizations with an "expanded pie" of control are likely to be more productive than organizations with a "contracted pie," and that an expansion of control is related to the way managers exercise leadership. A high level of control is more likely in organizations with supportive and participative leaders and with leaders who seem to be technically competent rather than in organizations with coercive leaders.

According to members, the difference in influence between managers and workers is not necessarily smaller in the productive compared to the less productive organization. But the *meaning* to members of a difference in influence may be quite different in an organization where the total amount of influence is high and where the total amount is low.¹⁸ Thus, the influence pie can be seen as analogous to the economic pie. A given difference in income does not have the implications in an affluent society that it has in an impoverished one where this difference can mean survival or starvation. American society has avoided the revolutionary implications of differences in income by expanding the economic pie and, thus, by increasing the income of all segments of society rather than by reducing these differences. Similarly, some American managers may have reduced the conflict inherent in differences in influence within their organizations by expanding the influence pie and, thus, by increasing the influence of *all* groups. Participative

leadership styles may not always reduce the absolute difference in influence between workers and managers; however, participation often is associated with high levels of influence by both groups and with a high level of member satisfaction and organizational effectiveness.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Lyndall Urwick, *The Elements of Administration* (New York: Harper, 1943).

² A. S. Tannenbaum, *Social Psychology of the Work Organization* (Belmont, California: Brooks/Cole, 1966).

³ A. S. Tannenbaum and R. Kahn, *Participation in Union Locals* (Evanston, Illinois: Row, Peterson, 1958).

⁴ R. Likert, *New Patterns of Management* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961).

⁵ A. S. Tannenbaum, et al., *Hierarchy in Organizations: An International Comparison* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1974).

⁶ F. Ferrarotti, "Management in Italy," in F. Harbison and C. Meyers, eds., *Management in the Industrial World* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959).

⁷ M. Rosner, et al., "Worker Participation and Influence in Five Countries," *Industrial Relations*, 12, No. 2 (May 1973), pp. 200-212.

⁸ R. Blake and J. Mouton, *The Managerial Grid* (Houston: Gulf Publishing Company, 1964).

⁹ J. Bachman, D. Bowers and P. Marcus, "Bases of Supervisory Power: A Comparative Study in Five Organizational Settings," in A. S. Tannenbaum, ed., *Control in Organizations* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968).

¹⁰ S. Seashore and D. Bowers, "Durability of Organizational Change," *American Psychologist*, 25, No. 3 (March 1970), pp. 227-233.

¹¹ L. Coch and J.R.P. French, Jr., "Overcoming Resistance to Change," *Human Relations*, 4, No. 1 (1948), pp. 512-533.

¹² A. Marrow, D. Bowers and S. Seashore, *Management by Participation* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967).

¹³ G. Strauss and E. Rosenstein, "Workers' Participation: A Critical View," *Industrial Relations*, 4, No. 2 (February 1970), pp. 197-214.

¹⁴ A. S. Tannenbaum and R. A. Cooke, "Organizational Control; A Review of Studies Employing the Control Graph Method," in C. J. Lammers, ed., *Comparative Sociology of Organizations* (forthcoming).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ E. Yuchtman, "Control in an Insurance Company: Cause or Effect," in A.S. Tannenbaum, ed., *Control in Organizations* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968)

¹⁷ J.G. Bachman, C.G. Smith and J.A. Slesinger, "Control, Performance and Satisfaction: An Analysis of Structural and Individual Effects," in A.S. Tannenbaum, ed., *Control in Organizations* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968).

¹⁸ A.S. Tannenbaum, et al., *Hierarchy*.