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The Impact of the Deviant on Small Group Behavior: A Conformity-Deviation Exercise

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OBJECTIVES

- A. To participate in and observe the reactions of a group when confronted with conforming and/or deviating behavior.
- B. To experience the similarities between the reactions to deviant behavior and perception of creative effort.

PREPARATION

- A. Read the General Discussion
- B. Consider the varying leadership styles which you have experienced in earlier work situations.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

This exercise is somewhat related to any exercise dealing with supervisors and subordinates. The existence of different subcultures is quite pronounced when employees are technicians and/or professionals. The “institutionals” and the “professionals” often are perceived as conformists and deviants, respectively.

Deviation and Rejection

An experiment, conducted by Schachter, is one in which we can examine the problem of conformity from the standpoint of the group pressures exerted on the individual, rather than the point of view of the subjective experience of the group member himself. In this situation, groups were composed of around 10 members. Unknown to the typical member, there are three informed or instructed people in each group; the other seven are naive. When the groups came together, they were told that the local judge would like advice about a juvenile delinquent problem. He would like for them to discuss it and come to some agreement in the group as to the disposition of the case that would be most appropriate from their point of view.

We have a situation, then, in which there are ten people. They are to spend their time discussing young Johnny, and they are to

Credit is given to Professor Philip Worchel, Department of Psychology, The University of Texas for the substance of these comments.

spend their time discussing young Johnny, and they are to come to an agreement as to what the disposition of the case should be. The three instructed people are informed in advance that when the group starts discussing the problem one of them should take the typical attitude of the group; he should find ways of agreeing with the emerging standard of the group. The first person we could call the model person. He starts on the side of the majority view and maintains this position throughout the discussion. Another one, whom we shall call the slider he starts by taking a very deviant position, i.e., "Johnny needs to be treated like a man. He needs good solid punishment to straighten him out." Half way through the discussion, however, he slides over and gradually takes over the group's views.

The third person is the deviant. He starts out taking the "punishment" side of the issue and holds it all the way through the discussion. He never moves from his basic position. At the end of the meeting, we can get data from all the participants in the group, asking for nominations of people for president, vice-president, and also nomination for the recording secretary, the lowest position in the series. Also they can be asked to indicate that if the group had to be decreased in number by one, which person could it most easily do without? During the period, when the discussion is going on, we also can code who talks to whom, and how frequently.

Communication to the person who adopted the emerging group standard is not conspicuous. The model person is talked to as much, but not significantly more, than to the naive group members. During the period when the slider is deviant, more communications are addressed to him. After he comes over to the side of the group, there is not much need to talk to him. The deviant on the other hand, is the one most frequently spoken to.

What happens to the deviant? After the slider ceases to be a deviant and is with the group, even more communications are addressed to the deviant. He is maintaining the position away from which all members want him to change. The discussion goes on and a new phenomenon appears: before the end of the meeting the amount of communication previously addressed to the deviant disappears. It is as though the boundaries of the group are withdrawn, excluding the deviant from membership. It's as if the group is saying, "If we can't capture him, we can remove him. We will ignore him." This may give us rather significant implications about the meaning of giving a person the "freeze treatment

How did the results from the nomination data appear? The results are the following: The model person is nominated to be president as frequently as any of the naive members, and this is true in the case of the slider also. On the other hand, the deviant, significantly frequently, was the one "we could best be without." He also was a frequent candidate for the recording secretary's job. Under the conditions of this experiment the price of deviation is repudiation by one's peers. Thus, we see the consequences

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for a person who maintains a position different from others within the group. If you look at the treatment given the person in the process group who was instructed to deviate, you find that his position was not a comfortable one. There is no doubt that he, as well as the members, began to question whether or not he was a "good group member" and also whether or not he was personally accepted!

Since the publishing, in 1956, of William F. Whyte's The Organization Man, conformity to the requirements (of all kinds) of the organization have been under scrutiny. The "now" generation of affluent youth are not the only ones seeking the "whys" of rules and policies. The striving for quality work according to personal standards and the freedom to perform at a high quality level is frequently interpreted as deviant behavior by those whose reference group or work is different. A productive society needs challenge as much as it needs cooperation; critical effort is required for greatness. /1, pp. 42-50/

Peter F. Drucker, has made some interesting comments regarding the future workers and managerial problems already being created by them. The most demanding worker will be the "knowledge worker" - who works with his head and his education, instead of his hands and his physical skills.

The following remarks are drawn largely from Drucker's book The Age of Discontinuity. /2, pp. 287-291/ We experience trouble in managing the knowledge worker so that he wants to contribute and perform. Motivation for knowledge work must come from within the worker himself. The traditional motivators such as external rewards (pay, etc.), do not motivate him. Their absence prevents good performance, but their presence is neutral vis-à-vis high level performance. What the knowledge employee needs for positive motivation is achievement. He requires a challenge -- needs to know that he is an important contributor. We have often heard, "A fair day's work for a fair day's pay." But knowledge workers should be expected to do "an exceptional day's work," and, they should then also have a chance to earn "exceptional" recognition as well as financial rewards.

The demands made by the knowledge worker on the firm are much greater than those of the manual worker, and the demands are different. The manual worker was (is) satisfied with a "livelihood," but the knowledge worker has different and wider expectations. Those who work with knowledge as their talent require that demands be made on them by knowledge rather than by bosses --that is, by objectives rather than by people. Therefore, they require a performance-oriented organization rather than an authority-oriented organization.

A superior (supervisor) is still needed in the knowledge society or organization, but knowledge work itself knows no hierarchy, since there are no "higher" or "lower" knowledges. The knowledge

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is either relevant to the given task or irrelevant to it. The holders Of knowledge therefore, have to be organized as a team in which the work to be done “decides” who is in charge, when, for what ends, and for what time period.

PROCEDURE

A. Case I
(Approximate time: 15-20 minutes)

The instructor will divide the class into teams of four to six participants each. Each team has twenty minutes (maximum) to review the given situation in Case I. “Tom, Dick and Harry”. Then the team is to discuss the six given alternatives and rank them. Choice 1 would be the best, choice 2 next-to-best, and so on. Agreement must be unanimous among the team members to insure complete participation. Each team gives one copy of their unanimous rankings to the instructor.

B. Reactions - Case I (Time allotted: 4 minutes)

Every member of each team, as an individual, fills out a Reaction Form. These are gathered by an individual from the team (or, if all teams are present in one large room, simply passed foward) and given to the instructor. Case I should be checked in the upper left corner. This is an opportunity for your honest feelings to be reported, since the instructor is interested in what you are thinking/feeling rather than who is reporting what.

C, Case II
(Approximate time: 20-25 minutes)

Case II, “David Coleman” is a slightly more difficult situation relaxtive to Case I. Here again the team is to review the situation and decide, unanimously, on the ranking of the stated alternatives. This procedure is the same as in Case I, with each team giving a copy of their results to the instructor,

D. Reactions - Case II (Time allotted: 4 minutes)

The second Reaction Form should be completed by each person individually - and returned to the instructor, being certain that Case II is checked in the upper right corner. The instructor is interested in comparing the reactions of the groups in Case I compared with Case II.

The instructor will want to spend a short time relating the data he has collected from the participants. He may want to compare various group reactions with other groups, or he may wish to combine all groups in the class and use a class average for three of the categories on the Reaction Form.

CASE I

Tom, Dick and Harry

You are an employee of the Tampa Pump and Valve Company. Your job is sales promotion. Your work record indicates your superior ability in this line of work, and as a consequence you have been assigned the task of breaking-in three junior sales trainees. These three men, Tom, Dick, and Harry, are all recent college graduates and have no previous experience in sales promotion. Your superior expects you to teach these men quickly so that they can take over sales in new marketing areas which are beginning to open up. The one which proves the most capable will be promoted within a few months. What method of training Tom, Dick, and Harry would you choose?

- _____1. Give each man an area in which to work. Be sure that they know to call on you when a difficulty arises. Give them free rein and support them as much as possible in their initial efforts.
- _____2. Make it known to them that they are competing for the promotion. Let each one know exactly what you expect of a salesman and give each one an opportunity to prove himself on a specific assignment. Try to equate the assignments so that each one has an equal chance. Be sure that you check them and let them know how they are doing each step along the way.
- _____3. Discuss with the three men the goals of the sales department and their work opportunities within the department. Encourage the men to work out as many problems as they can together working with them as a group to set schedules, sales targets, coordinate their efforts within the area and so on. Try to acquaint them with the problems you and the other salesmen face.
- _____4. Give the men each the same product to sell in a given area and have them turn in to you a record of the number of sales they make.
- _____5. Keep the men with you for awhile and demonstrate for them your methods of attacking problems and promoting sales. Show them "the ropes" so to speak and encourage them to learn by your example.
- _____6. Discuss with Tom, Dick, and Harry as a group the goals of the sales department and assign each one a sub-goal for which he is personally responsible. Have each man report to you his progress and give him suggestions and encouragement.

CASE II

David Coleman

You are an engineer in the research lab of the Tampa Pump and Valve Company. One of the lab assistants, David Coleman, who works under your supervision is one of the men who has been promoted up through the ranks recently and has no formal engineering background. He is somewhat older than the lab assistants, most of whom are in the process of completing engineering degrees at the University in your town and are presently part-time employees of Tampa. The other assistants often complain about David Coleman and make sly jokes about him. They tell you that he often bothers them when they are engaged in some project by asking foolish questions and in general making a nuisance of himself. The general opinion of the group is that David is in "over his head" and interrupts with too many questions and irrelevant suggestions. David's record with the company is quite good and you know he has come up through the company the hard way. It was his choice to take the lab assistant job rather than a job on the line with more managerial requirements and responsibilities (What would you do?)

- _____1. Talk with David and explain to him the feelings of the other men. Try to encourage him to listen more and learn from the others since they have a lot they can teach him which will help him in his new job. Suggest in a tactful way the he not talk when he should be listening.
- _____2. Do nothing at the present time. When the opportunity arises, however, get David transferred into a job where he is with other men of his age and with the same kind of background.
- _____3. With David's consent, discuss with David and the other assistants this problem in a meeting. Encourage David and the others to tell each other and you their feelings on the subject. Try to bring into the open what it is about David's questions and suggestions that make them appear foolish to the others. Proceed on the assumption that both sides have something to learn about research work.
- _____4. Encourage David to visit your office every so often. Make it your personal goal to teach him the things he needs to learn.
- _____5. Give David assignments in the lab which will not involve him so much with the other men. Try to keep him on jobs that are not over his head. Let the other assistants know that as long as David is doing his work you are satisfied and furthermore, if they were busy themselves, they should have little time to talk or to complain,

- ____6. Talk with David. Tell him that you are satisfied with his work and that you are happy he is so interested and enthusiastic. Try to get him to understand, however, the importance of good morale. Point out to him in a tactful way the effect he is having on the group's morale and solicit his cooperation in keeping things on an even keel.

PARTICIPANT REACTION FORM

Check One:

Case I _____

Case II _____

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>1. How satisfied did you feel with the manner in which your group dealt with the problem? I felt:</p> <p>9 Completely satisfied
8 Quite satisfied
7 Moderately satisfied
6 Slightly more satisfied than dissatisfied
5 Neither very satisfied nor very dissatisfied
4 Slightly more dissatisfied
3 Moderately dissatisfied
2 Quite dissatisfied
1 Completely dissatisfied</p> <p>2. How much tension did you feel while working on this problem? I felt:</p> <p>9 Completely relaxed
8 Quite relaxed
7 Moderately relaxed
6 Slightly more relaxed than tense
5 Neither very relaxed nor very tense
4 Slightly more tense than relaxed
3 Moderately tense
2 Quite tense
1 Completely tense</p> | <p>3. How good at problem-solving is your group? My group is:</p> <p>9 The best possible
8 Quite good
7 Moderately good
6 Slightly more good than bad
5 Neither very good nor very bad
4 Slightly more bad than good
3 Moderately bad
2 Quite bad
1 The worst possible</p> <p>4. While working on this problem, how would you describe the atmosphere in your group? (Circle as many as you like.)</p> <p>9 Rewarding
8 Sluggish
7 Cooperative
6 Competitive
5 Playful
4 Work-oriented
3 Flighty
2 Fighting
1 Frustrating</p> |
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REFERENCES

1. Dutton, R. E., "Dealing With the Critical Mass," The Southern Journal of Business, October, 1970, pp. 42-50.
2. Drucker, P. F., The Age of Discontinuity (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1968), pp. 287-291.