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Groups and Teams

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To understand leaders and leadership, one must understand groups and their dynamics. Leadership can occur across great distances, as when a leader influences followers who are distributed across differing contexts, but in many cases leadership occurs in an intact group that exists in a specific locale: Teams, boards, advisory councils, and classrooms are all examples of groups that work toward shared goals with, in many cases, the help and guidance of a leader. Leadership can be considered a set of personality traits or a specific set of behaviors enacted by an individual, but an interpersonal, group-level conceptualization considers leadership to be a reciprocal, transactional, and sometimes transformational process in which one or more members of a group influence and motivate others to promote the attainment of collective and individual goals.

Leaders in Groups

Groups are and always will be essential to human life. For eons, *Homo sapiens,* as a gregarious species, protected itself from dangerous animals, enemies, and natural disasters by joining together in groups (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). The earliest histories of civilization describe teams of workers who combined their efforts to build dams, protective edifices, and colossal monuments. As trade developed, merchants formed developed networks that facilitated the exchange of goods and guilds to organize their business practices. As groups of armed forces grew larger, these armies were organized into groups, with methods of warfare linked to refined organizational strategies. Religious rites, too, have traditionally been group activities. These groups,

then as now, rely on one or more individuals—leaders—to guide them in their collective pursuits, often by organizing, directing, coordinating, supporting, and motivating their efforts (Forsyth, 2010).

The Leadership Role

The role of leader is a common one in most groups. Groups can function without a leader, but this role is usually the first to emerge when a group forms. In some cases, the group's leader is formally recognized and is identified through a specified procedure, but in many groups, a leader gains authority implicitly, as other group members come to rely on him or her to guide the group (Berger, Ridgeway, & Zelditch, 2002). Group members often complain about the quality of their leaders—surveys that ask employees to identify the worst thing about their job find these complaints converge on a leader—but they seek out better leaders rather than avoiding them altogether. Group members are usually more satisfied and productive when their groups have leaders (Hogan & Kaiser, 2005).

Leadership Differentiation

Group leaders must be able to respond to the many and varied demands that their groups make of them, but researchers studying groups in countries around the world have identified two central features of a leader role. *Task leadership* focuses on the problem at hand, including setting goals, defining problems, establishing networks and procedures for relaying information, providing evaluative feedback, facilitating coordination of the members with one another, proposing solutions, and removing barriers.

Relationship leadership focuses on the quality of the relationships among the members of the group. Leaders often boost morale, increase cohesiveness, manage interpersonal conflict, establish positive relations with members, and show their concern and consideration (Lord, 1977).

These dual leadership concerns reflect the key responsibilities of group leaders. Groups are generally task focused; members are usually united in their pursuit of goals. Teams, in particular, stress task performance to such an extent that their very existence is threatened should they fail to achieve their common goals. Leaders are therefore expected to facilitate the attainment of tasks. Yet, leaders must also make certain the group remains satisfying for members. If a leader ignores the interpersonal side of the group, then the interdependency, communication, commitment, and cohesion required for the group to work as a unit may suffer.

Some group leaders can meet both task and relationship demands in their groups, but in many cases leaders specialize. When Bales (1958) studied newly formed discussion groups, he discovered that, in the first session, the same leader occupied both the task and the relationship roles in the majority of the groups. But, by the fourth session, fewer than 10% of the groups were led by a single task and relationship leader. In most cases, individuals dropped their role as task leader in favor of the relationship role, and another member of the group emerged to help the group focus on its goals. Bales concluded that group leaders, as they provide structure for the group, must ask members to put the group's needs before their own. Should the members react negatively to these task-oriented activities, they will look to others in the group for emotional and relational support. This bifurcation of the leadership role is not inevitable, however, some leaders—although rare—provide their groups with a high degree of task structure, yet they are also well liked by the members (Borgatta, Couch, & Bales, 1954). This division of task and relationship roles is more likely when a group is experiencing conflict and when the group is large rather than small.

Distributed Leadership in Groups

Large organizations, because of their complexity, generally require specific individuals who are identified as leaders, but in smaller groups, leadership is often distributed across the members rather than concentrated in a single individual (Pearce & Conger, 2003). Kerr and Jermier (1978), in their leadership substitutes theory, suggest that contextual factors can serve as substitutes for leadership by negating the need for guidance from a specific member of the group. Aspects of the group (e.g., members' indifference to rewards), the task (e.g., the level of intrinsic reward), and the organization (e.g., the organizational culture) can make task-focused and relationship-focused leadership unnecessary and unlikely.

Responsibility for leading may also be shared across the entire group rather than concentrated in a single individual. As Kelley's (2004) analysis of followership suggests,

effective group members act as leaders themselves, for they take responsibility for setting their own goals and procedures. Followers, by definition, follow a leader, but they must be able to exercise their independence and monitor themselves and their progress. Ineffective followers are overly dependent on a leader and unable to execute their duties without considerable guidance from a leader.

Distributed, shared leadership is particularly appropriate in smaller groups and is the guiding principle behind self-managed teams. Hackman (2002) describes three regions of control that are often assumed by a leader in organizational settings: managing the work process, designing the team itself within the organization context, and setting objectives. In a traditional *manager-led team*, members do the work of the team, but someone external to the group acts as their leader by carrying out all executive functions for the team. Members of *self-managing teams* have more autonomy, for they are charged with both executing the task and monitoring and managing the team's work. *Self-designing teams* enjoy more discretion in terms of control over their team's design, for they have the authority to change the team itself. The team leader sets the direction, but the team members have full responsibility for doing what needs to be done to get the work accomplished. Finally, members of *self-governing teams* control and carry out all the group's leadership functions. The group not only carries out the work of the group, but members also manage the process, design interpersonal systems, and identify their mission and goals. Thus, as the team moves up in terms of its autonomy over its processes and outcomes, it takes on more and more responsibility for its own leadership and also distributes that responsibility throughout the entire group.

Leadership Emergence

Leaders gain their positions within the group through a variety of means, including election by a majority of members, appointment by an external authority, or implicit recognition by a substantial proportion of the group members. The question of leadership emergence—who becomes a leader of a particular group—requires a multilevel answer that considers aspects of the individual, the group, and the organizational setting.

Status Organizing Processes in Groups

Groups tend to be structured—organized by patterns of regular relations and interdependences among the members. This structure is sometimes deliberately specified in founded groups, but even in the most informal of groups, certain individuals acquire the authority to coordinate the activities of the group, to provide others with guidance, and to relay communications to other group members. The so-called leaderless group does not remain that way for long, for leaders emerge gradually as groups develop stabilities in their structures and relations.

This status-organizing process is an interpersonal one. Group members may display cues that signal their interest in leadership, but their success in securing a leadership role depends on how the rest of the group responds to them. As expectations states theory explains (Berger et al., 2002), groups will support individuals as leaders if they seem to possess the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed for success on the specific tasks the group faces (specific status characteristics). Groups will also, however, support people who display qualities that members assume are related to successful leadership (diffuse status characteristics), but may instead be irrelevant. Such qualities as height, sex, age, ethnicity, race, occupation, family background, and interpersonal style can all influence status allocations, even when the individuals who possess the qualities the group values are not suitable for the position of leader.

Leadership is also linked to the individuals' power within the group (French & Raven, 1957). Individuals who can control any rewards or punishments the group members receive, those who are liked and respected, members who have been appointed or elected to their position through legitimate means, or experts who have some special skill can draw on their power base to achieve status in the group. Those who cannot reward or punish are not respected, hold no office, and are not experts, in contrast, have no power base in the group and hence they are likely to end up at the bottom of the group's organizational structure.

Implicit Leadership Theories

Leadership depends, to some extent, on the eye of the beholder. People's implicit notions of what it means to be a leader have a powerful impact on who emerges and is deemed effective in a leadership role. Although these expectations can serve as effective heuristics to help people navigate the vast amount of social information that confronts them daily, they can also serve to disadvantage people who are qualified to lead their groups but are disqualified from consideration because they do not fit the mold of the traditional leader (Lord, 1977).

Individuals are deemed leaders—and effective leaders—to the extent that their behaviors and traits are compatible with people's implicit notions of leadership (Forsyth & Nye, 2008). These widely held conceptions of leaders and leadership are referred to as implicit leadership theories (ILTs), and they generally concern the two central features of the leadership role: task and relationship behaviors and traits. Most people assume that leaders are active, determined, influential, and in command, but that they are also relational, for they are caring, interested, truthful, and open to others' ideas (Kenney, Schwartz-Kenney, & Blascovich, 1996).

ILTs intersect with perceivers' expectations and stereotypes of people based on social categories such as gender and race. Like many social psychological processes, individual perceptions and expectations—even though mistaken—generate a series of reactions that fundamentally shape

social outcomes. As already mentioned, expectation states theory maintains that people assign others' group status in large part because of preconceived expectations individuals have of people from various social categories (Berger, Rosenholtz, & Zelditch, 1980; Ridgeway, 2001). Because of group members' expectations of what a leader is (ILTs) and their leadership-related expectations based on social category stereotypes, they are often biased in favor of some individuals (e.g., whites and males) and biased against others (e.g., minorities and females).

Gender and Leadership

A number of nondominant social groups fail to come to mind when people think about or imagine elite leaders, and one group in particular is women. As social role theory explains, people in virtually all cultures, when asked to describe women, speak of their expressive qualities, including nurturance, emotionality, and warmth. They expect a "she" to be sentimental, affectionate, sympathetic, soft-hearted, talkative, gentle, and feminine. When describing men, they stress their instrumental qualities, including productivity, energy, and strength roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002). But when group members are asked to describe the qualities needed in a leader, their implicit leadership theories prompt them to emphasize the instrumental side of leadership. In consequence, the expectations associated with leadership mesh with the male sex-role stereotype, but the leadership role is inconsistent with widely held stereotypes about women. Schein (1973) was one of the first to demonstrate this inconsistency between the female gender role and the leadership role by showing that descriptions of men were much more similar to descriptions of managers than were the descriptions of women.

These incongruent expectations contribute to prejudice and discrimination against female leaders resulting in more negative attitudes toward female compared to male leaders, more difficulty for women to reach top leadership positions, and greater difficulty being seen as effective in leadership roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Substantial empirical evidence supports this contention that stereotypes alter the perception and evaluation of women such that they are presumed to be less competent leaders than men and less worthy of a leadership position across a variety of contexts. This negativity is particularly prevalent among those with conservative gender role beliefs (Forsyth, Heincy, & Wright, 1997). As a result of these stereotypes, women find themselves in a double bind: showing too much agency and not enough communion will engender hostility, but not showing enough agency and showing too much communion results in not being perceived as an effective leader (Heilman, Wallen, Fuchs, & Tamkins, 2004).

Women are keenly aware of these stereotypes and that others may expect them to be inferior leaders and will treat them according to those beliefs. Psychologists use the

concept of *stereotype threat* to describe the apprehension that individuals experience when they are at risk of confirming a negative social stereotype, and they have demonstrated how it can result in deleterious responses, such as underperformance (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Stereotype threat has been shown to impact women in the domain of leadership. For example, women who were exposed to gender-stereotypic commercials had decreased leadership aspirations for an upcoming task (Davies, Spencer, & Steele, 2005), and on a masculine sex role–type managerial task, women did not perform as well as men (Bergeron, Block, & Echtenkamp, 2006).

The threat of the gender leader stereotype, however, does not always result in negative vulnerability outcomes. For example, women do not underperform men on a managerial task that is feminine sex role–typed (Bergeron et al., 2006), and gender stereotypic commercials do not undermine women's leadership aspirations when the leadership task is described as producing no gender differences (Davies et al., 2005). Furthermore, some women actually react to negative stereotypes with constructive responses, such as when women are explicitly presented with the gender and negotiation stereotype and they outperform men at the bargaining table (Kray, Thompson, & Galinsky, 2001). Additionally, Hoyt and colleagues have demonstrated that, unlike female leaders with low leadership efficacy, high-efficacy female leaders exhibit positive responses in the face of negative stereotypes (e.g., Hoyt & Blascovich, 2007).

Leadership in Groups

Studies of leaders in all kinds of group situations—flight crews, politics, schools, military units, and religious groups—suggest that groups prosper when guided by good leaders (Hogan & Kaiser, 2005). The ingredients for effective leadership in groups, however, are often debated, for leadership involves finding the right balance between (a) keeping the members working at their tasks and improving relationships, (b) providing guidance without robbing members of their autonomy, and (c) maintaining stability but also promoting positive change.

Dual Concerns of Small Group Leadership

Many researchers, when examining the effectiveness of leaders of small groups, stress the distinction between task and relationship leadership. This distinction, as noted earlier, suggests that effective leaders help their groups maintain a balance between accomplishing their tasks and enhancing the quality of the interpersonal relationships within a group. A period of prolonged task activity may strain the group's relations, and an effective leader must be able to intervene to increase the unity of the group. Conversely, a unified group is not always a productive one,

and a leader must know when to focus the group on its work rather than its relations.

Contingency Theory of Group Leadership

Which leader will be more effective: the one who can get the job done or the one with interpersonal skills? Fiedler's (1978) contingency theory of leadership offers one answer. He suggests that most leaders lean toward one of these two orientations: Some people tend to be task oriented, whereas others tend to be more relational. Furthermore, this tendency represents a relatively stable aspect of the individual, tantamount to a personality trait. To assess this tendency, he asks people to rate the person they least prefer to work with on a series of adjective pairs, such as *pleasant-unpleasant* and *friendly-unfriendly*. People who give relatively low ratings to their least-preferred coworker are assumed to be task-oriented in their overall approach to group interaction. In contrast, people who are positive, even when rating their least-preferred coworker, tend to be interpersonally focused.

Fiedler does not recommend task leadership over relational leadership or vice versa. Instead, he maintains that leadership effectiveness depends on a leader's control in the situation, with control meaning degree of stress or challenge put on a leader. Fiedler argues that control is lowest if a leader is low in status, the group is unstructured, and leader–member relations are poor. For example, low control may occur in an unstructured training group with a novice leader if the members don't support their leader, a leader is not recognized as particularly expert in the position, and the goals of the task are unspecified. As each one of these factors is improved—a leader has high status, the group is structured, or leader–member relations become positive—then the group becomes easier for a leader to control.

Taking both a leader's style and situational control into account, Fiedler predicts that the task-oriented leader will perform most effectively in extremely favorable or unfavorable situations. If, for example, a group is composed of volunteers who can leave any time they wish and is led by a novice whom the group members distrust and dislike, then a leader will be most effective if he or she is task oriented. In contrast, the relational leader will be ineffective in this situation. Fiedler suggests that attempts to build positive interpersonal relations in irretrievable situations are inefficient. The person-focused leader will, however, be most effective in moderately favorable or moderately unfavorable situations.

Terror Management and Leadership

Terror management theory (TMT) suggests that the appeal of a task or relational leader depends, in part, on group members' existential concerns. TMT assumes that human beings, because of their awareness of their mortality,

are prone to existential anxiety. However, most cope with their anxiety by developing defenses against thoughts of death. TMT suggests, for example, that culture diminishes this psychological terror by providing meaning, organization, and a coherent worldview. Self-esteem and pride also function to elevate one's sense of worth and serve as a defense against the intrusive thoughts of death (Greenberg, Solomon, & Pyszczynski, 1997).

TMT theory suggests that leaders provide members with a defense against their existential anxieties, particularly during a time of crisis. After the terrorist attacks on the United States in 2001, for example, U.S. citizen's approval ratings of then-president George W. Bush jumped from 40% to 50% to 90%. TMT suggests that the attack made citizens aware of their mortality and also threatened their worldview. Bush, by promising to find the terrorists responsible for this horrible action and bring them to justice swiftly, provided an antidote to their existential concerns. Other research suggests that task-oriented leaders, in particular, are appreciated by group members when they are reminded of their morality (Cohen, Ogilvie, Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 2005; Cohen, Solomon, Maxfield, Pyszczynski, & Greenberg, 2004; Landau et al., 2004).

Group-Centered Leadership

Which leader is most effective: the one who takes charge and directs the group with a strong hand or the one who consults with group members and lets them share the reins of leadership? Lewin, Lippitt, and White (1939) examined this question in their classic analysis of small group leadership. They put a male adult in charge of small groups of boys who were working on hobby projects after school. In some groups, the man made all the decisions for the group without consulting the boys. This directive, or autocratic, leader told the boys what to do, he often criticized them, and he remained aloof from the group. Other groups were guided by a participatory, or democratic, leader who let them make decisions as he provided guiding advice. He explained long-term goals and steps to be taken to reach the goals, but he rarely criticized the boys or gave them orders. Other groups were given a laissez-faire leader who allowed the boys to work in whichever way they wished. He provided information on demand, but he didn't offer information, criticism, or guidance spontaneously.

The boys responded very differently to these three types of leaders. Groups with directive leaders spent more time working (74%) than participatory groups (50%), which in turn spent more time working than the laissez-faire groups (33%)—provided a leader remained in the room. Groups with a participative leader kept working when their leader left, but the boys working under the direction of a directive leader did not. Laissez-faire and member-centered groups were also less aggressive than groups with a directive leader. In the latter group, observers noted high rates of

hostility among members, more demands for attention, more destructiveness, and a greater tendency to single out one group member to serve as the target of almost continual verbal abuse.

Lewin, Lippitt, and White's findings suggest that directive (autocratic) and participatory (democratic) leaders each have strengths and weaknesses. The strongly directive leader often succeeds in pushing the group to high levels of productivity, although at an interpersonal cost. The participatory leader, in contrast, increases feelings of satisfaction and members' involvement in the group. Therefore, effective leaders plan their management style accordingly, depending on the situation they face and the goals they wish to attain. If, for example, the group members are unmotivated, then a directive style may work best. An autocratic approach is also warranted when the issues to be settled are minor ones, the group's acceptance won't impact the members in any way, and when the group members are, themselves, autocratic. In general, however, group members are more satisfied if they are involved in their group decisions (Vroom & Jago, 2007).

Leading Change in Groups

Groups, like all living things, change over time. A group may begin as an assortment of unrelated individuals, but in time roles develop and friendships form. New members join the group and old members leave. The group may become more cohesive or begin to lose its unity.

Group Development

These changes, however, follow a predictable pattern. In most groups, the same sorts of issues arise over time, and, once resolved, the group can develop further. Tuckman (1965) maintains that this group development often involves five stages. In the forming phase, the group members become oriented toward one another. In the storming phase, the group members find themselves in conflict and some solution is sought to improve the group environment. In the norming phase, standards for behavior and roles develop that regulate behavior. In the performing phase, the group has reached a point where it can work as a unit to achieve desired goals. And the adjourning stage ends the sequence of development; the group disbands. Throughout these stages, groups tend to oscillate back and forth between the task-oriented issues and the relationship issues, with members sometimes working hard but at other times strengthening their interpersonal bonds.

Group Socialization

Individuals also experience change as they pass through the group, and effective leaders monitor each group member's degree of socialization within the group. Moreland and Levine's (1982) model of group socialization describes

this process. During the investigation stage, prospective members are outsiders: interested in joining the group, but not yet committed to it in any way. Once the group accepts a person as a member, socialization begins: the new members learn the group's norm and take on different responsibilities depending on the role they have chosen or been assigned. Even though they are full-fledged members at this point, changes still occur. As the group matures and accepts new tasks, the roles and responsibilities of its members change as well. During this maintenance phase, members may have to learn new ways of doing things or accept responsibilities that they would rather avoid. If a leader coordinates this maintenance process successfully, then the group will prosper and members will likely remain until the group or their membership ends as scheduled. If, however, this change falters, then a leader and the group may begin the resocialization of the member. Resocialization occurs when the group's expectations about the member and the member's expectations are inconsistent, making it necessary for the individual member to change his or her behavior to comply with the group's requirements. In any case, once membership in the group is concluded, individuals pass through yet another stage: remembrance. They are no longer members, but they still remember, sometimes with fondness, sometimes with regret, what membership in the group was like.

Decision Making and Leadership

Decision making is integral to the leadership process in groups ranging from juries to political caucuses to community organizations to boards of directors. The process of making a decision, however, is strongly influenced by group dynamics, and this influence is oftentimes counterproductive to good decision making. The forces that undermine effective decision making are varied and include those that work to decrease the generation of ideas, to impel people to focus solely on information everyone shares, to make extreme decisions, and to strongly seek concurrence within the group to potentially disastrous ends.

Brainstorming

One popular approach to facilitating the generation of ideas and solutions during decision making is called brainstorming (Osborn, 1957). During brainstorming sessions, group members convene to generate a large number of ideas, building off from each others' ideas, and feeling safe to say whatever comes to mind in an environment free from criticism. Although this approach to idea generation has intuitive appeal, it is surprising that it is still so popular given the ample empirical findings that point to the pitfalls of this approach. Research dependably shows that brainstorming groups are less effective in generating more and better ideas than aggregates of individuals (Mullen, Johnson, & Salas, 1991). There are a number of factors

that contribute to the underproduction of ideas in brainstorming groups: listening and contemplating others' ideas can interfere with generating or remembering one's own ideas (production blocking), having to publicly present one's ideas can be anxiety provoking (evaluation apprehension), and if people do not generate a lot of ideas, that may set a low productivity norm for all the members of the group (social matching). Skilled group leadership is an essential ingredient for successful brainstorming. A leader, to avoid problems that limit group creativity, can help the group adopt and maintain facilitating processes by reminding the members to follow the rules of brainstorming, intervening to revitalize the group when its motivation lags, and providing a record of the group's work so that members can build off earlier suggestions.

Biased Information Sampling

One apparent benefit of making decisions in groups is that people come to the group with varying backgrounds and information and all members can pool their information, which will enable them to make a more informed decision that any one individual could make. However, group members are generally not very effective at sharing and talking about information that only a small minority of the group members know. This pitfall of group decision making is particularly problematic when the unshared information is important (Stasser & Titus, 1985). This effect has been demonstrated in clever experimental studies using a hidden profile paradigm. In these studies, researchers give all participants some similar, shared information, but they also give unshared information to different group members. The decision-making problem is set up such that if the group considers all of the information (shared and unshared), it arrives at a correct decision, but if the group members focus solely on the shared information, they make a poor decision. Research using this hidden profile paradigm shows a strong tendency for groups to focus on shared information and fail to properly take into account the information that only a minority of group members have. Leaders can work to counteract this group tendency by encouraging group members to pool and consider all relevant information.

Group Polarization

One widely held assumed benefit of making decisions in groups is that group members have a moderating effect on each other and ultimately they make less risky decisions than individuals. However, empirical testing does not support this conventional wisdom. In fact, initial studies showed that groups made more risky decisions, a *risky shift,* in comparison to individuals (Stoner, 1961). Further investigations, however, revealed a larger process of group polarization, whereby group discussions resulted in groups making more extreme decisions in the direction the group members initially favored (Levine & Moreland, 1998).

Polarization effects have been shown across an assortment of topics and groups, ranging from groups of prejudiced people becoming more prejudiced (Myers & Bishop, 1971) to jury members becoming more extreme in their initial guilty/not guilty positions (Myers & Kaplan, 1976) to French students becoming more pro–Charles de Gaulle and anti-American (Moscovici & Zavalloni, 1969).

Explanations for this group phenomenon include people becoming more convinced of their position by other members' persuasive arguments, members feeling pressured to conform to a perceived extreme group norm, and members comparing themselves to others and wanting to have a stronger position than others in the favored direction. The skilled group leader can, however, intervene to prevent the development of polarization in the group by asking members to spend time discussing the process they will use to reach their decision and make certain no one individual dominates the discussion.

Groupthink

One last potential pitfall of making decisions in groups that leaders should work to avoid is extreme consensus seeking that can result in serious errors in judgment. Groupthink can occur when group members feel pressured to conform and maintain a high level of group cohesiveness, when they have an illusion of invulnerability and an inflated belief in their inherent morality, and when they rationalize their decisions and hold negative stereotypic views of outside groups (Janis, 1982). A number of well-known disastrous group decisions, such as the decision to launch the space shuttle *Challenger,* have been linked to groupthink processes. Rather than surrounding oneself with like-minded individuals, leaders should consider forming a "team of rivals," correcting misperceptions, and limiting concurrence seeking when confronted with difficult and weighty decisions. This is exactly what President Kennedy did a year and a half after the disastrous Bay of Pigs decision when threatened with the Cuban missile crisis, resulting in a successful resolution.

Social Influence and Leadership

In a general sense, social influence refers to people's ability to influence the thoughts and behaviors of others. Thus, social influence is at the heart of leadership processes, with followers and leaders engaged in constant and mutual influence tactics. With leaders, there is a special instance of influence involving the tendency for people to obey those who have authority over them. Likewise, followers—either a majority or a minority of group members—can have a powerful impact on the group.

Obedience

Individuals have a seemingly innate proclivity to blindly obey others who are considered authority, or leader, figures.

The first well-known demonstration of this obedience tendency was Milgram's (1975) shock experiments. In these now-classic experiments, participants were led to believe they were participating in research examining the impact of punishment on learning. Participants, always in the role of the teacher, were required to give increasingly stronger shocks to a learner who was in actuality a research confederate who did not receive any shocks. Counter to the expectations of Milgram and many other experts, the majority of participants continued to obey the researcher and shock the learner even after he cried out in pain and requested to stop the experiment. Various permutations on this basic paradigm revealed the enormous power that authority figures can wield over individuals and groups, even when a leader is a complete stranger and has questionable credentials. This human tendency to obey those with legitimate power grants authority figures immense power over the groups they are leading.

Majority Influence

Although leaders have an enormous impact on the members of the groups they lead, the group members themselves also have very powerful effects on one another. Not only do group members show a strong obedience tendency, but they also show a propensity to conform to the majority of group members and the perceived group norms. This pressure is so strong that it will lead people to conform even when they know that the group members are wrong. For example, in Asch's well-known conformity studies, people judged the length of lines in groups composed primarily of research confederates with only a single real participant (Asch, 1955). In the critical test trials, the confederates all gave the same predetermined incorrect response and the assessment of conformity was whether the participant would give the obviously correct answer or would conform to the group and give the incorrect response. The majority of participants conformed at least once under this subtle yet powerful group pressure.

Even when the participants in the Asch experiment conformed to the majority, most of them still knew the answer that they gave was objectively incorrect. At times, however, this tendency for people to conform to group members results in people actually changing their beliefs, behaviors, or perceptions to be in-line with the group. In a clever demonstration of this tendency, participants convened in groups of three to judge how far they thought a pinpoint of light at the back of a pitch black room was moving (Sherif, 1936). The trick here is that the light was stationary, and because of the visual illusion known as the autokinetic effect, it appeared to move. This research demonstrated that over time, the three participants' judgments began to converge as they conformed to the emerging group norm. As can be seen in both Asch's and Sherif's work, group members influence and conform to one another both because people do not want to appear deviant and because

people often look to fellow group members for information, particularly when they are in ambiguous situations.

Minority Influence

The discussion thus far on obedience and conformity suggests that individual group members are powerless in relation to their leaders and the group majority. That, however, is not the case; individuals and group minorities can have considerable impact on group processes (Moscovici, 1985). Indeed, in Asch's line experiments, when there was only one other group member (research confederate) who broke from the incorrect majority and gave the correct response, the level of conformity in the participants decreased dramatically. Indeed, an individual or small group of followers can be instrumental in leading the group at large. The power of minority influence was demonstrated in the play *Twelve Angry Men,* in which one lone dissenter in a 12-person jury was ultimately able to influence the entire jury to his point of view. Although minorities are rarely so effective in actual juries, their impact is greater when they present a realistic alternative viewpoint and when they are persistent and consistent in advocating their view.

Leadership: A Group-Level Process

Many assume that once one understands a leader, then one understands leadership. Yet, leadership is primarily a group-level process that depends fundamentally on the dynamic and complex reciprocal relations that link leaders to the group and its members. Leaders therefore cannot be studied in isolation, away from their teams, work groups, executive committees, squads, and so on, but must be considered in the group context. Effective leaders, too, recognize that they do not directly reach individuals, but instead work through the groups to which each individual belongs. If leaders seek to improve productivity in a factory, problem solving in a boardroom, or learning in the classroom, they work with and through the groups that populate such settings. Any attempt to lead change in society will succeed only if the groups within that society change.

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