

**THE NATURE OF LEADERSHIP**

**BY**

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*President, New Jersey Bell Telephone Co.*



**1940**

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CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS, U.S.A.

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The following paper contains the substance of two similar addresses given on January 24, 1940 before the Chemical Reserve Officers of the Second Corps Area, U. S. A., under Colonel A. Gibson, C. W. S., U. S. Army, then Chemical Officer of the Area; and on March 9, 1940 before Professor Philip Cabot's Week End Conference of Business Executives at the Harvard Graduate School of Business Administration. On both occasions the speaker submitted to questions at considerable length. The substance of the important questions and answers is also incorporated in this paper.

Some parts of the background of this paper are contained in the writer's book "The Functions of the Executive," Harvard University Press, 1938; in the Brackett Lecture, "Mind in Everyday Affairs," Princeton University Press, 1936, also reprinted as an Appendix in that book; in the Stafford Little Lecture "Dilemmas of Leadership in the Democratic Process," Princeton University Press, 1939 and in the Article "Comments on the Job of an Executive," Harvard Business Review, Spring 1940 number.

# THE NATURE OF LEADERSHIP

## INTRODUCTION

“Leadership” has been the subject of an extraordinary amount of dogmatically stated nonsense. Some, it is true, has been enunciated by observers who have had no experience themselves in coordinating and directing the activities of others; but much of it has come from men of ample experience, often of established reputations as leaders. As to the latter we may assume that they know how to do well what they do not know how to describe or explain. At any rate, I have found it difficult not to magnify superficial aspects and catch-phrases of the subject to the status of fundamental propositions, generalized beyond all possibility of useful application, and fostering misunderstanding.

Seeking to avoid such errors, I shall not tell you what leadership is or even how to determine when it is present; for I do not know how to do so. Indeed, I shall venture to assert that probably no one else knows. These statements may seem strange and extreme, but I hope to convince you that they are not expressions of false modesty or of ill-considered judgment. At any rate, what I intend to discuss is *the problem of understanding the nature of leadership*.

The need for wide consideration of this subject was most forcibly impressed upon me by two observations, made on a single occasion, which revealed the extent of public misunderstanding of it. Some time ago I attended a large joint conference of laymen and members of the faculty of an important university to consider the subject of educational preparation for leadership. At this meeting my first observation was that *leadership* was confused with *pre-eminence* or *extraordinary usefulness* both by speakers and by audience. In their view a leading writer, artist, pianist, mathematician, or scientist, exemplifies leadership substantially as does an executive or leader of an organization. No one appeared to be aware of the double meaning of “leadership” and its implications for the discussion of the subject of preparing “leaders.” Among the meanings of the verb “to lead” we may say that one is: “to excel, to be in advance, to be preëminent”; and another is “to guide others, to govern their activities, to be head of an organization or some part of it, to hold command.” I think the distinction between these meanings is rather easy to see. Most individuals

matured in a well-organized effort recognize it as a matter of course, so that it may be difficult for many who from long experience thoroughly understand the distinction to believe such a confusion common. I fear that it is common, however, and is making coöperation and adequate organization increasingly difficult.

My second observation at this meeting, further evidence of the same fact, was this: During the period of open discussion a well known engineer protested the subjection of engineers to supervision or management by those not engineers. The superiority of engineers in nearly all respects, especially in intellect, training, and science, was implied. Though the audience was not one of engineers, it expressed derision generally at the absurd state of affairs portrayed. Could there have been a more striking proof of the misconception of the subject these several hundred earnest, intelligent, educated people were discussing — how better to prepare people to be leaders?

These observations show the importance of public discussion of the problem. Mere knowledge of how to solve it would not be sufficient. Often, in similar matters, when a solution is available it will not be accepted unless the problem itself is either acknowledged as such by reliance upon a responsible authority, or is recognized and accepted by agreement and understanding. Otherwise a correct solution is merely "one man's idea, a little queer"; and a "solution" is something that cannot be made effective because it *will* not be used. This seems often not to be adequately taken into account in the discussion of social and organization "remedies."

Now it seems to me evident that the problem of leadership, like some others which now obsess us, is not yet suitably formulated. For this reason, if for no other, it is not generally understood. This needs emphasis because within our own organizations we usually do not experience much difficulty on this account; for we already have an approximately common understanding or sense, coming from long interconnected experience, which is workably adequate. Such an understanding is a substitute, and a superior one, for abstract knowledge of the matter — at least for any I imagine being available for a long time. But outside these circles of intimate experiential knowledge, understanding fails, even among leaders.

Not only misunderstanding but positive need for leaders warrants our attention to this subject. The large scale integrations of our present societies — the great nations, the immense organizations of war and peace, of culture and religion — make the needs

of leadership relatively greater and its functions more complex than heretofore, so that the necessary proportion of leaders to the population has greatly increased. In other words, the "overhead" of any organization or society clearly tends to expand more rapidly than its size. Moreover, technology and specialization make the arts of leadership even more complex than consideration of size alone would indicate. These facts suggest that scarcity of leaders of requisite quality may already limit the possibility of stable coöperation in our societies.

I think we may agree, then, that public misunderstanding and misinformation, and the need for provision of more adequate leadership, both urge our effort to understand the nature of leadership. My present attempt to contribute to this end ought chiefly, I think, to make evident the present obscurity of the subject and the complexity of the functions and conditions involved in it. This method of approach will surely try our patience and may be discouraging to some; but we shall be wise in this matter not to give answers before we have found out what are the questions. The attitude that I think we may best have has been admirably stated by T. S. Eliot:

The fact that a problem will certainly take a long time to solve, and that it will demand the attention of many minds for several generations, is no justification for postponing the study. And, in times of emergency, it may prove in the long run that the problems we have postponed or ignored, rather than those we have failed to attack successfully, will return to plague us. Our difficulties of the moment must always be dealt with somehow; but our permanent difficulties are difficulties of every moment.\*

In the light of these preliminary remarks it may be well for me to state the meaning of the word "Leadership." As I use it herein it refers to the quality of the behavior of individuals whereby they guide people or their activities in organized effort. This is its primary significance. Organized effort takes place, however, in systems of coöperation which often include property or plants. When this is so, the activities coördinated relate to or are connected with the property or plant, and the two are not separate. Hence, the management or administration of such properties, as distinguished from the command or supervision of personnel, is also included as a secondary aspect of leadership.

Whatever leadership is, I shall now make the much over-simpli-

\* T. S. Eliot: "The Idea of a Christian Society," Harcourt, Brace & Co., New York, 1940.

still retain followers. I do not pretend to be able to explain this very well. It seems to be connected with knowing whom to believe, with accepting the right suggestions, with selecting appropriate occasions and times. It also seems to be so related to conditions that a good leader in one field is not necessarily good in others, and not equally good under all circumstances. But at any rate, to say what to do and when requires an understanding of a great many things "on the whole," "taking everything into account," in their relations to some purpose or intention or result — an understanding that leads to distinguishing effectively between the important and the unimportant *in the particular concrete situation*, between what can and what cannot be done, between what will probably succeed and what will probably not, between what will weaken coöperation and what will increase it.

#### THE SECOND SECTOR — THE MANIPULATION OF MEANS

There is undoubtedly an important difference between the kind of effort we have just considered and the direction of detailed activities that are parts of technical procedures and technological \* operations as the subsidiary means and instruments of accomplishing specific objectives already determined. Sometimes an exceptional leader can effectively guide technical operations in which he has no special competence, whereas those of high competence are often not successful leaders. I shall not attempt a general explanation of these facts; but on the whole we may regard leadership without technical competence as increasingly exceptional, unless for the most general work. Usually leaders, even though not extraordinarily expert, appear to have an understanding of the technological or technical work which they guide, particularly in its relation to the activities and situations with which they deal. In fact, we usually assume that a leader will have considerable knowledge and experience in the specifically technical aspects of the work he directs. I need not say much about this, for it seems to me that at present we overestimate the importance of technical skill and competence and undervalue or even exclude the less tangible and less obvious factors in leadership.

Nevertheless, the technical and technological factors in leader-

\* Throughout I use "technological" exclusively to refer to conditions of physical technology — plants, machines, chemical processes; and "technical" to refer either to systems of procedure in accounting, management, etc., or in a more general sense to cover both ideas.

ship not only constitute a variable of great importance, but they introduce serious difficulties, which should be mentioned, especially in respect to (1) the development of types of leaders and to (2) the limitations these technical factors place upon the "mobility" of the leaders in an organization or society; and also (3) because of the restrictive effect of technical study and experience on the *general* or "social" development of individuals.

(1) It is almost a matter of course that leadership "material" will be inducted into organization through some particular technical channel. Such channels are now highly specialized. When the course has been run, the man has been trained for leadership only with respect to a narrow range of activities. Otherwise he is untrained and hence, (2) the mobility of leadership resources may be seriously reduced, because it is difficult to use a good leader of one narrow field in another field or in more general work — a fact which I suppose is now well recognized at least in all large organizations of industry and government and education. This difficulty, which is real, has become exaggerated in our minds, so that in my opinion we all — leaders and followers — tend to overlook superior leaders who at the moment may be lacking particular technical qualifications.

(3) Concerning the third difficulty — the effect of specialization upon the individual — it is only necessary to note that while men are concentrating upon techniques, machines, processes, and abstract knowledge, *they are necessarily diverted to a considerable extent from experience with men, organizations and the social situations, the distinctive fields of application of leadership ability*. Thus at the most impressionable period they become so well grounded in "mechanical" attitudes toward non-human resources and processes that they transfer these attitudes then and later toward men also.

The technical sector of leadership behavior is not a new thing in the world, but its importance has greatly increased. By technology and specialization we have accomplished much; but the resulting complexity of leadership functions and the restriction of the development and supply of general leaders seems to me one of the important problems of our times.

#### THE THIRD SECTOR — THE INSTRUMENTALITY OF ACTION

Leadership obviously relates to the coördination of certain efforts of people. There is little coördination or coöperation, with-

out leadership, and leadership implies coöperation. Coördinated efforts constitute organization. *An organization is the instrumentality of action so far as leaders are concerned, and it is the indispensable instrumentality.* Many promising men never comprehend this because of early emphasis upon plans, structures, techniques, and abstract institutions, especially legal institutions such as the law of corporations.

The primary efforts of leaders need to be directed to the maintenance and guidance of organizations as whole systems of activities. I believe this to be the most distinctive and characteristic sector of leadership behavior, but it is the least obvious and least understood. Since most of the acts which constitute organization have a specific function which superficially is independent of the maintenance of organization — for example, the accomplishment of specific tasks of the organization — it may not be observed that such acts at the same time also constitute organization, and that this, not the technical and instrumental, is the primary aspect of such acts from the viewpoint of leadership. Probably most leaders are not ordinarily conscious of this, though intuitively they are governed by it. For any act done in such a way as to disrupt coöperation destroys the capacity of organization. Thus the leader has to guide all in such a way as to preserve organization as the instrumentality of action.\*

Up to the present time, leaders have understood organization chiefly in an intuitive and experiential way. The properties, limitations, and processes of organization as systems of coördinated action have been little known in abstraction from concrete activities and situations; but the persistence and effectiveness of many organizations are evidence that leaders know how to behave with respect to them. On the other hand, we know that many very able, intelligent and learned persons have neither understanding nor correct intuitions about concrete organizations.

#### THE FOURTH SECTOR — THE STIMULATION OF COÖRDINATED ACTION

To repeat a commonplace, it is one thing to say what should be done and quite another to get it done. A potential act lies outside organization, and it is one task of leaders to change potentiality

\* The conception of the nature of organization — as a system of coördinated activities — involved in this paragraph is carefully developed and defended in

into the stuff of action. In other words, one important kind of thing that leaders do is to induce people to convert abilities into coördinated effort, thereby maintaining an organization while simultaneously getting its work done. I need hardly say that this kind of activity of leaders is sometimes the most striking aspect of what they do. In a broad sense this is the business of persuasion. Nor need I say that the sorts of acts or behavior by which executives “persuade” to coördinated action are innumerable. They vary from providing the example in “going over the top,” or calm poise inspiring confidence, or quiet commands in tense moments, to fervid oratory, or flattery, or promises to reward in money, prestige, position, glory; or to threats and coercion. Why do they vary? Some obvious differences of combination in leaders, in followers, in organizations, in technology, in objectives, in conditions, will occur to you. But the effective combinations are often so subtle and so involved in the personalities of both leaders and followers that to be self-conscious about them, or for others to examine them when in process, would disrupt them.

My chief purpose in this brief account of four sectors of leadership behavior has been to indicate how interconnected and interdependent they are, and to suggest how great is the variation in what “leadership” means specifically, depending upon the relative importance of the kinds of behavior required.

## II

### THE CONDITIONS OF LEADERSHIP

Already it has been necessary to allude at least by implication to differences in conditions of leadership, such for example as are involved in the degrees and kinds of technological operations. I shall now confine the discussion to differences of conditions of another sort, relating to the degree of tension of the action of leaders, followers, or both. It will be sufficient to consider only the two extremes.

The first is that which we may call stable conditions. These may be complex and of very large scale; but they are comparatively

“The Functions” Chapter VII, “The Theory of Formal Organization” and is made more explicit in the article “Comments on the Job of an Executive.” See the preliminary note of the title page.

free from violent changes or extreme uncertainties of *unusual* character or implying important hazards. The behavior of leaders under such conditions may be calm, deliberate, reflective and anticipatory of future contingencies. Leadership then is lacking in the dramatic characteristics often observed at the other extreme and this is one of its difficulties; for its function of persuasion must be carried on without the aid of emotional drives and of obvious necessities, and against the indifference often accompanying lack of danger, excitement and sentiment. Stable conditions call for self-restraint, deliberation and refinement of technique, qualities that some men who are good leaders under tense conditions are unable to develop.

The other extreme is that of great instability, uncertainty, speed, intense action, great risks, important stakes, life and death issues. Here leaders must have physical or moral courage, decisiveness, inventiveness, initiative, even audacity; but I believe we tend to overstate the qualities required for this extreme, due to its dramatic aspects and because the outcome of action is more easily judged.

This is enough to suggest that differences of conditions of this type, that is, differences in tension, are important factors in leadership behavior. It should be apparent that we could expect only rarely to find men equally adapted to both extremes, and that quite different types of leaders are to be expected for this reason. Yet it is obvious that emergencies may be encountered in any kind of coöperative effort and that leaders have to be adapted to function under wide ranges of conditions. Indeed, intermittent periods of severe stress are the rule in navigation, in military organizations, in some kinds of public utility work, in political activity, to cite a few examples in which particular types of *flexibility* are necessary to continuous leadership. It may be apparent here, as perhaps it was in considering the sectors of leadership behavior, that the practical problem in selecting specific leaders would be to ascertain the *balance of qualities* most probably adapted to the conditions or to the variations of conditions.

### III

#### THE ACTIVE QUALITIES OF LEADERS

I have already stated why I do not think it useful to discuss leadership exclusively in personal terms. Leaders, I think, are

made quite as much by conditions and by organizations and followers as by any qualities and propensities which they themselves have. Indeed, in this connection, I should put much more emphasis upon the character of organizations than upon individuals. But this is not the common opinion; and I certainly should not fail to discuss that quite variable component, the individual.

I shall list and discuss briefly five fundamental qualities or characteristics of those who are leaders, in their order of importance as regarded for very *general* purposes. Probably I shall not include qualities that some think essential. I would not quarrel about what may be only a difference in names or emphasis. Perhaps also, there will be disagreement about the order I have chosen. This I shall mildly defend, my chief purpose being to correct for a current exaggerated and false emphasis. The list follows: A. Vitality and Endurance; B. Decisiveness; C. Persuasiveness; D. Responsibility; and E. Intellectual Capacity.

#### A. Vitality and Endurance

We should not confuse these qualities with good health. There are many people of good health who have little or moderate vitality — energy, alertness, spring, vigilance, dynamic qualities — or endurance. Conversely, there are some who have poor health and even suffer much who at least have great endurance. Generally, it seems to me, vitality and endurance are fundamental qualities of leadership, though they may wane before leadership capacity does.

Notwithstanding the exceptions, these qualities are important for several reasons. The first is that they both promote and permit the unremitting acquirement of exceptional experience and knowledge which in general underlies extraordinary personal capacity for leadership.

The second is that vitality is usually an element in personal attractiveness or force which is a great aid to persuasiveness. It is sometimes even a compelling characteristic. Thus few can be unaffected by the violent energy with which Mussolini throws his arm in the Fascist salute, or by the vehemence of Hitler's speech, or by the strenuous life of Theodore Roosevelt. Similarly, we are impressed by the endurance of Franklin D. Roosevelt in campaign.

The third reason for the importance of vitality and endurance is that leadership often involves prolonged periods of work and extreme tension without relief, when failure to endure may mean

permanent inability to lead. To maintain confidence depends partly on uninterrupted leadership.

### B. Decisiveness

I shall be unable to discuss here precisely what decision is or involves as a process, but I regard it as the element of critical importance in all leadership, and I believe that all formal organization depends upon it. Ability to make decisions is the characteristic of leaders I think most to be noted. It depends upon a propensity or willingness to decide and a capacity to do so. I neglect almost entirely the appearance or mannerism of being decisive, which seems often to be a harmful characteristic, at least frequently misleading, usually implying an improper understanding and use of authority, and undermining confidence. Leadership requires making actual appropriate decisions and only such as are warranted.

For present purposes decisiveness needs to be considered in both its positive and negative aspects. Positively, decision is necessary to get the right things done at the right time and to prevent erroneous action. Negatively, failure to decide undoubtedly creates an exceedingly destructive condition in organized effort. For delay either to direct or to approve or disapprove, that is, mere suspense, checks the decisiveness of others, introduces indecisiveness or lethargy throughout the whole process of coöperation, and thus restricts experience, experiment and adaptation to changing conditions.

### C. Persuasiveness

The fundamental importance of persuasiveness I have already mentioned. Here I refer to the ability in the individual to persuade and the propensity to do so. Just what these qualities are defies description; but without them all other qualities may become ineffective. These other qualities seem to be involved, yet not to be equivalent. In addition, persuasiveness appears often to involve or utilize talents, such as that of effective public speaking or of exposition or special physical skills or even extraordinary physique; and many others. The relation of specific talents to leadership we cannot usefully consider further here. But at least we may say that persuasiveness involves a *sense* or understanding of the point of view, the interests, and the conditions of those to be persuaded.

### D. Responsibility

I shall define responsibility as an emotional condition that gives an individual a sense of acute dissatisfaction because of failure to do what he feels he is morally bound to do or because of doing what he thinks he is morally bound not to do, in particular concrete situations.\* Such dissatisfaction he will avoid; and therefore his behavior, if he is "responsible" and if his beliefs or sense of what is right are known, can be approximately relied upon. That this stability of behavior is important to leadership from several points of view will be recognized without difficulty; but it is especially so from that of those who follow. Capricious and irresponsible leadership is rarely successful.

### E. Intellectual Capacity

I have intentionally relegated "brains" to the fifth place. I thereby still make it important, but nevertheless subsidiary to physical capacity, decisiveness, persuasiveness, and responsibility. Many find this hard to believe, for leaders especially seem to me frequently to be inordinately proud of their intellectual abilities, whatever they may be, rather than of their more important or effective qualities.

#### A DIGRESSION ON THE IMPORTANCE OF THE NON-INTELLECTUAL ABILITIES

This attitude may be partly due to a confusion between pre-eminence and leadership — an instance of which I gave in my introduction — and partly to the high social status now given to intellect, to which I shall refer later. Disagreement as to the subordinate place to which I here assign intellect may also be partly due to a matter of definition; for I think we usually confuse *acquisition* by intellectual processes with responsive, habitual, intuitive *expression* or *application* of what has been acquired, which I take to involve processes largely non-intellectual.

However, I believe sensitiveness about our intellects is often due especially to the fact that the part of behavior of *which we are most conscious* is at least largely intellectual, whereas much of our most effective behavior, such as reflects vitality, decisiveness, and responsibility, is largely matter-of-course, unconscious, responsive;

\* An extended exposition and illustration of this definition are given in "The Functions" in Chapter XVII, "The Nature of Executive Responsibility."

and on the whole has to be so to be effective. Self-consciousness in these respects would at least often check their force, speed or accuracy. Moreover, leaders, like others, are for the most part unaware of their most effective faculties in actual behavior, for they cannot see themselves as others do.

This last point is so important both in theory and in practical administration that I think it worth further consideration here. The point is easy to prove but its implications are difficult to explain. For the proof we may take, as an example, speaking and its accompanying gestures. It is well known that no one hears his own voice as it sounds to others chiefly because much of the vibrations of the speaker's voice are conducted within the structure and passages of the head. I believe that an individual without previous experience rarely recognizes his own voice from a good reproduction. Some are greatly surprised and often displeased at hearing such a reproduction for the first time. Obviously, too, an individual cannot see his own demeanor or many of his movements. Yet in all our relations to others the use of voice and gestures is of first importance and both are effectively controlled to a considerable extent so as to accomplish specific reactions in listeners. If we cannot hear and see ourselves as others do, how can we accomplish such control of our behavior?

I think the explanation may be as follows: We learn to correlate our own speech and action, as we hear and feel them, with certain effects upon others. We are only approximately successful, and some are much more so than others. Listeners and observers, on the other hand, learn to correlate the entirely different thing, our observable behavior, with our meanings and intentions. This is also only approximate, and is done more successfully by some than others. Since leadership primarily involves the guidance of the conduct of others, in general leaders need to be more effective than others both in conveying meanings and intentions and in receiving them.

These fundamental processes are certainly not to any great extent intellectual. We all know that the capacity to understand the logical significance of sentences, even when written or printed, is limited, and that repeatedly we understand by the manner of speaking. We can with some success teach by logical processes what to do in the operation of a machine or process, though even here we know that often to state a direction correctly in language is to mislead, whereas an incorrect statement especially with ap-

propriate gesture or facial expression may well convey the precise meaning. But to teach by logical exposition how to behave with other people is a slow process of limited effectiveness at best. This is why I think it will be widely observed that good leaders seldom undertake to tell followers *how* to behave, though they tell what should be done, and will properly criticize the manner of its doing *afterward*. Whereas inferior leaders often fail by trying, as it were, to tell others how to live their lives.

#### THE LIMITATIONS OF INTELLECTUALS

Whatever may be the explanation of our strong predilection for our intellectual attainments, it is difficult to evade the emphasis I have placed on other qualities in leadership. We all know persons in and out of practical affairs of superior intellects and intellectual accomplishments who do not work well as leaders. In matters of *leadership*, for example, they prove to be irresponsible (absent-minded, non-punctual) non-decisive (ultra-judicial, see so many sides they can never make up their minds) non-persuasive (a little "queer," not interested in people). Moreover, we can observe that intellectual capacity rarely rises above physiological disabilities in active life, that the utmost perspicacity is useless for leadership if it does not decide issues, that persuasive processes must take full account of the irrational by which all are largely governed, that responsibility is a moral or emotional condition.

#### THE IMPORTANCE OF INTELLECTUAL CAPACITIES

Intellectual abilities of high order may achieve prominent usefulness. They are sometimes an important element in leadership, but not sufficient to maintain it. However, as a differential factor — that is, other qualities being granted and adequate — intellectual capacity is of unquestioned importance, and especially so in the age in which complex techniques and elaborate technologies are among the conditions of leadership. Leaders of the future, in my opinion, will generally need to be intellectually competent. However, the main point, which I wish greatly to emphasize, is that intellectual competency is *not* a substitute, at least in an important degree, for the other essential qualities of leadership.

Though it may be unpleasant to some, I have laid stress upon my opinion in this matter for two principal reasons. The first is that under present trends an excessive emphasis is placed upon intellectual (and pseudo-intellectual) qualifications by responsible "selecting" authorities, which artificially limits the supply of leaders. The same excessive emphasis upon the intellectual is made by followers who are intellectuals. Thus it is often difficult for them (experts and professionals of many kinds) who have no administrative capacity (or interest) to follow even extraordinary leaders. This is a form of conceit frequently accompanied by exhibitions of temperament and disruptiveness, and by false, ruthless and irresponsible professions of individualism and freedom, especially professional and academic freedom. All of this tends to a limitation of the supply of competent leaders, because it discourages men from undertaking the work of leadership, and it restricts their effectiveness.

My second reason is that a general condition amounting to intellectual snobbishness, it seems to me, has a great deal to do with industrial unrest. I see this in the propensity of educated people, whatever their economic status or social position, to underestimate the intelligence and other important personal qualities of workmen; in the tendency of some supervisors, quite honestly and sincerely, to blame failure to lack of brains in subordinates instead of to the stupidity of instructions; in the assumption of some men that "pure bunk" dressed up in "high brow" jargon is effective in dealing with people; in the excessive popularity of white-collar occupations; in the desire of so many intellectuals to tell others how to eat, save money, dress, marry, raise families, take care of their own interests. These are symptoms of attitudes and it is the latter, not the symptoms, which are important. They cause division of interest artificially and lack of sympathetic understanding that are destructive of coöperation and cannot be corrected by mere "measures of good will."

I am well aware that there are differences in the intellectual capacities of men, and know that such differences are important especially as respects the ability to acquire knowledge and understanding by study in those matters which can only be learned in this way. Nevertheless, after a fairly long experience in dealing with many classes of men and women individually and collectively,

the destructive attitudes I am attacking seem to me to be unwarranted by anything I know about intellect, education or leadership. Intellectual superiority is an obtrusive thing which even intellectuals dislike in others except as they *voluntarily* give it their respect.

#### OUR IGNORANCE OF THE QUALITIES OF LEADERSHIP

After this long digression it may have been forgotten, though observed, that in this discussion of personal qualifications I have failed, with one exception, to define my terms. Though in a general way I am confident that my meaning is understood, greater precision of meaning seems quite impossible, at least without extended space, and is not needed here. Indeed, a significant fact to emphasize is that neither in science nor in practical affairs has there yet been attained a degree of understanding of these qualities now vaguely described which permits much clear definition even for special purposes.

It is worthwhile to illustrate this with reference to "decisiveness." The making of decisions is one of the most common of the events of which we are conscious both in ourselves and others. We believe that many decisions are momentous either to ourselves, to our enterprises or to our society. We may agree that those incapable of making *any* decisions are at least morons if not insane. We are aware that to make decisions is a leading function of executives. We also know that decisions are made collectively, as in committees, boards, legislatures, juries; and that such work is one of the most characteristic features of our social life. Yet decisive behavior, as contrasted with responsive behavior, seems to have received little attention in the psychologies,\* in the literature of logical operations, in sociology, and seldom in economics. More-

\* While writing this sentence I have taken off the shelf at random more than a dozen books on psychology and social psychology. In only two is "decision" indexed (Lewin: "Principles of Topological Psychology" and Guthrie: "The Psychology of Human Conflict") and in both cases the citations are few and quite secondary. Of course, perhaps all of the elements of the decisive processes may be covered in all these books though from my recollection of them I doubt it. The fact is that one of the most conspicuous factors in common current observable behavior simply has not been recognized as such, notwithstanding that decision is the culmination of whatever we mean by "free will," "will," "voluntary," "determined" (in some meanings). The situation recalls what one psychologist has said of others, though in another connection: "All such explanations fail to explain why we think that A is A. For, even when the psychologists told us that A really was B, we stubbornly persisted in calling

over, in business I rarely hear appraisals of men in terms of their capacity for decision, except when they fail apparently for lack of ability to decide. It seems clear that we know so little of this quality or process that we do not discuss it as such, though "decision," "decisive" and "decisiveness" are words frequently on our lips.

I am aware, as I said earlier, that I have omitted several qualifications of leadership which are commonly stated. In my intention they are all comprehended in the five I have named or in some combination or derivation of them. Three omitted qualifications are great favorites: "honesty" ("character"), "courage," and "initiative." They may be added; but for myself I find them words which depend for their meaning in the specific case upon the *situation*, not merely the individual, either as interpreted by the actor or leader or others; and that his interpretation will often differ from the interpretations made by different observers.

However, the important point is that the qualifications of leadership however discriminated and however named are interacting and interdependent. We do not assemble them as we would the ingredients of a compound, yet we may suppose that different combinations of qualities produce quite different kinds of leaders, and that the qualities and their combinations change with experience and with conditions.

#### IV

##### THE DEVELOPMENT OF LEADERS

I think I have now shown that my profession of ignorance of this subject and my doubts with respect to the knowledge of others concerning it were both justified. Yet I recognize that however lacking in knowledge we may be, we nevertheless endeavor in our educational systems and at least in the larger organizations to increase the number of available leaders and their competence. It might be suggested that I should say something on this aspect of the subject in the light of my earlier remarks. I shall confine myself briefly to development methods and in the next Section to the processes of selection.

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it A and not as B. . . . For in the long run it has proved to be more profitable to accept an A as an A and explain it as such. . . ." (K. Koffka, *Gestalt Psychology*, Harcourt, Brace and Co., Inc., 1935, p. 179.)

Concerning the development of leaders, I shall in this Section discuss the following topics: A. Training; B. Balance and Perspective; and C. Experience.

##### A. Training

As I understand it, the only qualification for leadership that is subject to specific preparatory training by formal processes is the intellectual, including therein the inculcation of general and special knowledge. My opinion as to the relative importance and status of intellectual qualities has already been stated to the effect that such qualities are increasingly necessary to effective leadership in technical and technological fields, and also in large-scale organizations where complexity and the remoteness of concrete activities calls for capacity in the handling of abstract material. The latter are the conditions in which leadership also usually involves management of extensive coöperative systems as well as of organizations.

Nevertheless, I believe it should be recognized that intellectual preparation by itself tends to check propensities indispensable to leadership. For example, study and reflection on abstract facts do not promote decisiveness and often seem to have the opposite effect. Analysis, which broadly is characteristic of intellectual processes especially in the early stages of education and experience, is the reverse of the process of combining elements, of the treatment of them as whole systems involved in concrete decisive action, for instance in persuasion. As a result of intellectual training many prefer to recognize only what has been stated or is susceptible of statement and to disregard what has not been stated or is not susceptible of statement. The emphasis upon abstract facts characteristic now of the "more intelligent" and dominant classes of our population has its results, in innumerable instances, in the "fallacy of misplaced concreteness," the confusion of the fact with the thing and of *an aspect* with an indescribable whole, in the disregard of the interdependence of the known and the unknown.

An example of this or of its general effects may be found in the excessive emphasis upon knowledge as against skill in nearly all fields except sports and individual artistic performance. Yet but a moment's reflection is needed to acknowledge that many of the noteworthy efforts of scientist, teacher, lawyer, physician, architect, engineer, clergyman — to take professions in which intellectual discipline and experience are indispensable — are expressions not of intellect but of skills, the effective behavior by which

the appropriate adjustment to the infinite complexity of the concrete is accomplished. Indeed, we repeatedly confess the point in our practical emphasis upon experience, if not upon intuition, in every profession.

Nowhere is the emphasis upon fact to the exclusion of the thing to which it relates more harmful, it seems to me, than in the human side of industrial relations. We may think of employees as mechanics, clerks, laborers, or as members of an organization; but to lead requires to *feel* them as embodying a thousand emotions and relationships with others, and with the physical environment, of which for the most part we can have no knowledge.

The dilemma which this state of affairs presents is, I think, concealed by the increasing extent to which prestige and status based on education are the basis of general social and industrial discrimination. I mean by this that a certain intellectual and educational status has become important, to the relative disregard of other qualifications, in getting a job, or at least a job generally regarded as desirable or distinctive. We can hardly help believing that an attitude is useful to society as a whole if we find that same attitude socially imposed upon us as individuals.\*

## B. Balance and Perspective

It may be thought that changes in curricula might be sufficient to correct for the tendency toward distortion of judgment which I have described. This may be possible in the future, but not yet. So far as I know there is not developed the basic material for such changes, and it is unlikely that there will be unless my view of this problem, assuming it to be correct, should be accepted widely. But at best I should expect such studies only to offset the prejudices inculcated, possibly excepting the humanities, by higher education.

Hence, for the present, it seems to me that balance, perspective and proportion in the senses relevant to leadership are to be acquired almost exclusively from responsible experience in leading.

## C. Experience

In speaking of experience, it will be well to avoid the common error of regarding it as primarily a matter of repetition through a

\* An analogous problem is presented in "oversaving" theories of depressions, in which it is asserted that it is possible for a society as a whole to over-save, whereas the desire to save is commendable as to individuals.

period of time. When experience is merely repetition of action, it is better called practice to acquire patterns of behavior. It is often convenient as a rough approximation to speak of hours, days, months, or years of experience, but we know that some men learn slowly, others quickly. Moreover, the possibility of learning depends upon activity. If nothing happens, little can be learned. Significant experience is secured largely by adapting one's self to varieties of conditions and by acquiring the sense of the appropriate in variations of action.

The acquirement of experience under modern conditions presents us with another dilemma; for the refined specialization and the technical complexity through which men are now introduced into the world of affairs give limited opportunity for general experience in leadership. The most "natural" opportunities at present formally available seem to me to be the small *general* business, political party work in communities, and perhaps to a less extent, labor union leadership. These are insufficient sources for the supply of general leaders. Hence, we need to develop the artificial methods of giving wide experience which are now attempted to some extent in large organizations.

The effect of technical work is so strongly opposed to the acquirement of experience in the arts of leadership that I cannot forbear to add a suggestion that encouragement should be given in gaining experience informally in "extra curricula" activities. In fact, though we can as yet apparently do little in a formal way to develop leaders, we can encourage potential leaders to develop themselves, to seek for themselves the occasions and opportunities when leadership is needed, to learn the ways of making themselves sought as leaders, to acquire experience in leading by doing it. I have myself been so encouraged and inspired in my youth and since then, as no doubt we all have, so that to give such encouragement seems to me an important private and social duty; but I believe whatever we do in this respect will be harmful if not done in full realization that *there is no substitute for the experience of recognizing and seizing opportunities, or for making one's own place unaided and against interference and obstacles*; for these kinds of ability are precisely those that followers expect in leaders.

## SELECTION

Thus we have to recognize that leaders, almost blindly created by physiology, physical environments, social conditions and experience, are now secured chiefly by selection, not by formal preparation. Our success is relative in the sense that we select as best we may of the quality that is presented, but are little able to affect favorably that quality as a whole except as to the intellectual element. If this is a fact it is admittedly difficult to observe because to do so requires comparison of what we have with what we think we might have. Yet if we believe it to be a fact it implies a precarious position; for the most perfect selection would not suffice to give adequate leadership if the supply of the "raw material" were of inferior quality; no more, for example, than the best selection among untutored electricians would be likely to afford an adequate supply of superior electrical engineers.

The test of the adequacy of leadership is the extent of coöperation, or lack of it, in relation to our ideals; and this is largely a matter of the disposition of followers. Even in this brief discussion it should be stated that in all formal organizations selection is made simultaneously by two authorities, the formal and the informal. That which is made by formal authority we may call appointment (or dismissal); that by the informal authority we may call acceptance \* (or rejection). *Of the two, the informal authority is fundamental and controlling.* It lies in or consists of the willingness and ability of followers to follow.

To many who have struggled and worried regarding appointments or dismissal of leaders, and to whom the maintenance of formal authority is the very keystone of coöperation, order and efficiency, what I say may seem absurd or even subversive. But we have all many times proved it correct. For has not our first question always been in effect "Can he lead and will they follow?" If our answer were "No!" would we not appoint at the peril of our own leadership? And when there has been failure of followers to

\* Under some, usually small or local, situations leaders are acclaimed spontaneously and are induced or forced to lead by pressure of social opinion. There is often some element of this even in large and institutionalized organizations, chiefly expressed on the negative side, i.e., it is socially or organizationally not countenanced to quit leading or to refuse promotion, and loss of "caste" would be involved.

follow, writhe as we would, were not our only recourse to change the leader or possibly to change the followers?

If it is thought that this doctrine is subversive this may be because it is thought to be what uninformed preachers of the vague thing called "industrial democracy" want; and we suppose they know less of leadership and organization than even we do. But what they advocate and what we fear is the transfer of *formal* authority from leaders to voters, forgetting that the informal authority must finally determine, whatever be the nature of the formal authority. Indeed, this latter fact is the chief reason for our fear; for we recall the men who have been enthusiastically elected, but never followed. As to most (but not all) leadership *appointment* by responsible leaders has proved, and I believe will continue to prove, more effective and more satisfactory to followers than any other formal process.\* And the followers make the leader, though the latter also may affect and must guide the followers.

I turn now to the process of selection, by formal authority of appointment or dismissal. In the selective process we eliminate for positive disqualifications — bad health, lack of ability to decide, irresponsibility, lack of adequate intellectual or technical ability. Frequently this is all disregarded most conveniently by saying "lack of experience" when what we mean is "lack of successful experience." For although a few eliminations are made for positive disqualifications, the really important basis of selection is that of prior achievement. Since we know so little about the qualifications for leadership, this often proves a fallacious method sometimes resulting in tragic errors and often in a great deal of foolish rationalization. Nevertheless, we must confess that the past record is the best basis of selection we have. Thirty years ago Mr. Theodore N. Vail, a great leader and organizer in his day, and then President of the American Telephone and Telegraph Company, said to me: "You never can tell what a man will do by what he has done; but it is the best guide you have." I believe this still to be true; but I do not think it is an adequate basis for selection of leaders for our society of the future.

If leadership depends, as I have said, upon the individual, the followers, and the conditions, there must be many failures that are not the result of original errors of selection. For men, followers and

\* My reasons are developed at length in the lecture, "The Dilemmas of Leadership in the Democratic Process," cited in the preliminary note.

conditions all change. We are prone to forget this and to condemn, perhaps because it imposes upon us one of the most serious problems in the selective process. Failure of leadership if not corrected by replacement means the checking of the experience and development of potential leaders. Hence the elimination of super-annuated, obsolete, and incompetent leaders is recognized as extremely important in most organizations, perhaps most systematically in the Army and Navy. But this process is extremely delicate; for though followers cannot follow those who cannot lead, those who have been superior leaders embody or personify the spirit of an organization, and represent the aspirations of their followers. Crude dismissal at any level of organization destroys morale and ambition, and thus does violence to organization itself. In all types of organizations I believe this often means retaining a leader in the interest of everyone concerned after he has passed the peak of his capacities and sometimes even when the latter have become inadequate. When this is a matter of favoritism there can be no good defense of it; but when it is a part of the process of *organizing leadership* involving the supplementing of incapacities by auxiliary leaders, it must be defended.

Here we are confronted with another problem of balance — another of the dilemmas of our subject. Who will say that we now know enough about it, or are sufficiently successful with respect to it?

#### CONCLUSION

In this short study of one aspect of life, I have tried to emphasize the extent of our limitations and the importance of overcoming them, both from the standpoint of the effect of public blindness to the nature of the problem — which results so often in obstruction and in destructive criticism — and also from the standpoint of preparation to meet the future needs for leaders. These are ever increasing as the integrations of our societies grow larger and as specialization and technological progress continue. Whether such an account is depressing, perhaps appalling, or is challenging and inspiring, will depend I suppose upon one's philosophy, outlook or temperament.

It is in the nature of a leader's work that he should be a realist, and should recognize the need for action even when the outcome cannot be foreseen; but also that he should be idealist and in the broadest sense pursue goals some of which can only be attained in a

succeeding generation of leaders. Many leaders when they reach the apex of their powers have not long to go; and they press onward by paths the ends of which they will not themselves reach. In business, in education, in government, in religion, again and again, I see men who, I am sure, are dominated by this motive, though unexpressed, and by some queer twist of our present attitudes often disavowed.

Yet "Old men plant trees." To neglect today for tomorrow surely reflects a treacherous sentimentalism; but to shape the present for the future by the surplus of thought and purpose which we now can muster, seems the very expression of the idealism which underlies such social coherence as we presently achieve; lacking which we see no worthy meaning in our lives, our institutions or our culture.