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# Group Cohesiveness in the Industrial Work Group

by STANLEY E. SEASHORE

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## Foreword

This investigation is one of a series conducted within the Human Relations Program of the Survey Research Center, Institute for Social Research. This program of research has as its aim the exploration of social and psychological factors related to the effectiveness of organizations. The word "program" is used with its full meaning and the study described here is but one in a sequence of closely related studies conducted over a span of seven years.

I am particularly indebted to Dr. Rensis Likert, Director of the Institute, and to Dr. Robert L. Kahn, Director of the Program, who provided the data for the study, encouraged the work, and made available the substantial resources, facilities and personal consultation needed for a study of this kind.

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This report was prepared originally as a doctoral dissertation. For guidance in the design of the study and in working through some of the knotty problems of analysis I acknowledge the generous and competent counsel of my dissertation committee: Professor Daniel Katz, Chairman, Professors Dorwin Cartwright, Ronald Freedman, Clayton Hill, and Dr. Kahn. Professor Katz provided guidance for several years toward the definition of the research objective; Professor Cartwright provided much of the theoretical orientation for the study; Dr. Kahn, in connection with an earlier study, obtained data sufficiently rich and well-conceived to serve purposes beyond those originally contemplated.

Members of the Institute staff, other than those already mentioned, have given freely and capably of their advice on

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Stanley E. Seashore

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### Summary and Conclusions

Prior research on the characteristics of groups has suggested that the variable group cohesiveness is of considerable consequence in relation to the functioning of the group and the behavior of the individual members. The variable has been explored principally in laboratory experiments with groups of small size, although there is a rich literature of anecdote and careful observation with respect to the cohesiveness of "natural" groups in industry and in other kinds of social settings.

For the present investigation, group cohesiveness was conceptualized as attraction of members to the group in terms of the strength of forces on the individual member to remain in the group and to resist leaving the group.

The objective of this study has been to explore in an industrial situation some of the facilitating conditions and consequences of group cohesiveness. The research hypotheses were as follows:

1. Members of high cohesive groups will exhibit less anxiety than members of low cohesive groups with respect to matters relevant to group activities or the group setting.
2. The degree of cohesiveness within a group determines the power of the groups to create forces towards uniformity of behavior among members (group standards).
3. In the case of a cohesive group subjected to forces toward an uncertain or unobtainable goal imposed by an external agent, the point of equilibrium of forces toward and away from the goal (group standard) will be a function of the perceived supportiveness of the external agent.

4. The degree of cohesiveness developed in a group will be a function of the attractiveness of the members of the group as determined by the prestige of the members.
5. The degree of cohesiveness developed in a group will be a function of the attractiveness of the members of the group as determined by the degree of similarity among members of the group.
6. The degree of cohesiveness developed in a group will be a function of opportunities for interaction among members of the group.

The study design uses the correlational technique, with group cohesiveness treated as the independent variable, and measures of anxiety, productivity standards, member similarity, member prestige, and opportunity for interaction as dependent variables. The data are drawn from a population of 228 groups (formally designated work sections in a machinery factory) ranging in size from 5 to over 50 members. The data were obtained through a questionnaire completed by all members of these groups, 5,871 in number.

The major findings relevant to the hypotheses outlined above were as follows:

1. Members of high cohesive groups exhibit less anxiety than members of low cohesive groups, using as measures of anxiety: (a) feeling "jumpy or 'nervous'," (b) feeling under pressure to achieve higher productivity actual productivity held constant), and (c) feeling of lack of support from the company. The hypothesis was not clearly supported in the case of a fourth measure of anxiety, namely, report of frequent worry about certain work-related matters such as earnings, lay-off, etc., although a majority of these findings were in the predicted direction and one (out of eight) was statistically significant.
2. High cohesive groups have less variation in productivity among members than do the low cohesiveness groups. This is regarded as confirmation of the existence of a more effective group standard in the high cohesive condition.
3. High cohesive groups differ more frequently and in greater amount than low cohesive groups from the plant norm of productivity. These deviations are towards both high and lower productivity.

4. The direction of deviation of group productivity (i.e., towards higher or lower productivity) is a function of the degree to which the larger organization (the company) is perceived by group members to provide a supportive setting for the group.
5. The prediction regarding degree of group cohesiveness and similarity among members was not confirmed, using as measures, similarity in age and similarity in educational level.
6. Group cohesiveness is positively related to the degree of prestige attributed by the group members to their own jobs.
7. Group cohesiveness is positively related to opportunity for interaction as measured by (a) size of group, and (b) duration of shared membership on the job.
8. The findings with respect to group standards (2, 3, and 4, above) using actual productivity as the measure, were not confirmed when an alternative measure of group productivity standard (perceived level of reasonable productivity) was used.

In addition to these findings, which relate directly to the research hypotheses, there were several theoretical and methodological by-products which seem worth a passing note. These are summarized below with suggestions for their interpretation.

1. Homans (24) makes the distinction between group norms (actual behavior) and group standards (ideal behavior). He further holds that there is likely to be a discrepancy between the two and that within a group there will be greater uniformity with respect to the verbalized standard of behavior than with respect to the behavioral norm. Our data do not support this conception; actual productivity is found to have about the same variability within groups as is perceived reasonable productivity. Both differ from the formal company standard of 100 per cent, which very few employees appear to accept even as an ideal level of productivity. It seems more useful to conceptualize group standards in terms of group-induced uniformities of behavior regardless of whether the behavior in question is overt physical behavior, verbal behavior, or private attitudinal response. This does not deny the utility of Homans' conception in a context of societal norms and the precedence of behavior change over ideal change.

2. Schachter, et al., (52) in an experiment on group cohesiveness and productivity found differential group cohesiveness to be related to differential degrees of change in group productivity when the group induction was in a negative direction, i.e., towards lower productivity, and when there were external forces towards higher productivity. On the other hand, the differences in degree of cohesiveness of the group had no apparent effect when the group induction was in a direction consistent with external forces towards higher productivity. He gives a rationale leading to the hypothesis that positive group induction would have been accepted by the members, differentially in high and low cohesive groups, if the restraining forces against higher productivity had been of greater magnitude than his experimental conditions provided. Our findings are that the hypothesized relationship between cohesiveness and productivity holds for both positive and negative directions of group induction. This offers some confirmation for his formulation of the matter.
3. We have encountered the finding, not statistically significant but consistent for four sets of data, that under conditions of relatively low group cohesiveness, perception of a high degree of support from the company is coincident with low productivity standards while low support is coincident with high production. This result is paralleled by findings from other studies: for example, several studies relating productivity to employee attitudes toward the company suggest that high-producing employees may tend to be more critical of the company and its policies (29, 30). We are inclined to interpret this finding with reference to primary group processes, and hypothesize that in the absence of the security provided by a primary group, the insecure employee will experience greater anxiety regarding his fulfillment of company demands and will tend to adopt productivity standards which are relatively high in order to minimize this anxiety; in the opposite case—an employee feeling relatively secure in relation to the company—this additional force towards higher productivity will be minimized.
4. We assumed in designing this study that formally-designated section-shift groups, so designated for accounting purposes, would in fact function to some degree as primary social groups. This seemed a rather large

assumption considering the fact that the "groups," for the most part, are of a size greater than is ordinarily considered to be optimum or "natural" for primary groups, and in view of the fact that there is no assurance that conditions of physical proximity and sub-group formation would permit the section-shift units to function as groups. The assumption, however, appears to be supported by the fact of significant findings which stem from group-related influences. To a significant degree, the formal units of organization in this factory—and presumably in other factories—function as effective social units. This enlarges considerably the convenience and potential scope of future research on group processes in industrial settings.

We opened this report with the general assertion that the behavior of people in large formal organizational settings cannot be understood unless we take into account the forces generated by their association in primary groups. We specifically set out to determine whether these group associations were relevant factors in the mental health and adjustment of the individual with reference to his work, and in the determination of standards of productivity.

The formulation of our research hypotheses stemmed in part from prior research focussing upon the problems of organization management and the problems of the individual seeking a satisfactory way of life in a society characterized by the association of people in large organizations. Our manner of thinking about the problem—the choice of concepts, and the development of relationships to be tested—was drawn largely from the field theoretical approach which views the individual's behavior in terms of a dynamic field of forces exerting influence upon the individual, with the direction and magnitude of these forces determined in part by social interaction and specifically by interaction within the primary group.

We emerge from this study with some new ideas, but mainly with considerably increased respect for some old ones. We see demonstrated in a typical social setting the dependence of the individual upon his primary associations for feelings of security and the reduction of his anxieties. We see the primary group as a source of potent influences which may or may not be marshalled in support of the goals of the larger organization. We come to a conception of group cohesiveness—the attraction of the group for the members—as a facilitating factor which determines the

amount of influence a group has, but not necessarily the direction or the goal toward which the group influences operate. We see the variable, group cohesiveness, as being of sufficient importance so that its effects are measurable; they are measurable even in a complex setting in which the formal social structure is designed to ignore or even suppress group effects and in which there are strong factors, such as individual mobility, multiple group membership, out-plant associations, problems of reliable measurement, and others, which tend to obscure primary group effects.

Finally, we observe that some, at least, of the factors determining the degree to which group cohesiveness is developed, are external to and prior to group formation. The work group is more likely to become cohesive if administrative actions are designed with these ends: (1) to lend prestige to the group members, (2) to structure the organization so that there is provision for groups of relatively small size, and (3) to maintain a continuity in group membership over a period of time.

The administrator of an organization may draw from these findings some hints regarding policy and action. It is clear that the association of employees in cohesive groups may generate influences that are or may be of considerable consequence to the success of an organization. With respect to employee morale—in the context of anxieties at work—the cohesive work group appears to have a favorable influence. But with respect to productivity the positive value of cohesiveness in the work group appears to be contingent upon the administrator's success in developing among the employees a feeling of confidence and security in the management of the organization. The popular admonition to supervisors that they should develop a cohesive team, if carried out indiscriminately, may merely lend force to the divisive influences within the larger organization. To assure a positive benefit to the organization from group cohesiveness the administrator might well take steps first to provide the basic conditions of equity and supportiveness which warrant employee confidence in management. A policy of "divide and conquer," as expressed in an emphasis on man-to-man relationships and suppression of group processes, may be partially effective; but the greater gains appear to lie in a policy to "unite in common cause," as expressed in the positive emphasis upon the formation of cohesive work teams.

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