

lay Assemblers had periodic conferences with the superintendent. They were told what experimental changes were contemplated; their views were canvassed; and in some instances they were allowed to vote on what had been proposed. They were part of an experiment which they felt was interesting and important. Both groups developed an informal social organization, but while the Bank Wiremen

were organized in opposition to management, the Relay Assemblers were organized in cooperation with management in the pursuit of a common purpose. Finally, the responses of the two groups to their industrial situation were, on the one hand, restriction of output and, on the other, steady and welcome increase of output. These contrasts carry their own lesson.

Formal and Informal Organization

MELVILLE DALTON

Formal and Informal as Terms

Systematic focus on the terms "formal" and "informal" as applied to organizations, began with Barnard's theory in 1938, and was fortified with data the next year by Roethlisberger and Dickson, who talked especially of informal activity among workers. Since then the terms have been in common use by sociologists and others. More recent thought and research have shown, however, that multiple relations, with continuous interaction and change, become too dynamic to be handled entirely inside such conceptual walls as "formal-informal." Students are increasingly aware that this is the same kind of trap as "form versus substance," "individualism versus collectivism," "romanticism versus classicism." The bare scheme of formal-informal is helpful but inadequate for grappling with all aspects of the behavior we have been talking about. Exclusive reliance on this couplet ig-

nores the whole confused middle ground where there are "mixtures," and where new formal and informal action are obscurely initiated. Although this area may be impossible to deal with concretely, we should at least recognize that there can be numerous concurrent interplays, interrelated and not, of varying importance for the organization.

The term *informal* has become especially troublesome in the context of organizations. To some it connotes only conspiracy. And when used as the counter pole of a couplet there is difficulty in saying where the informal ends and the *formal* begins. The term is so broad that embarrassingly often it requires delimitation and redefinition. If "informal" is used as "functionally interrelated to the formal," it implies a complete knowledge of formal expectations by the informal group under focus. These points merit enlargement.

Probably in part from the influence of studies on work restriction as an informal technique implicitly confined to workers, the moral feelings of some people are inflamed by their experience with the term. They think of "work paid for but not done," "failure

to fight in the open," and the like. Repeatedly my own students, from various disciplines, have raised questions about the distinctions between informal, on the one hand, and intrigue, plotting, frame-ups, "or any other kind of sneakiness" on the other. They require correction to see that informal action may work for many ends: to change and preserve the organization, to protect weak individuals, punish erring ones, reward others, to recruit new personnel, and to maintain dignity of the formal, as well as, of course, to carry on power struggles, and to work for ends we would all frown on.

On the second point, when a clique is recognized, or when grapevines are known and counted on by all, or when higher management considers such a clique or practice in its policy making, obviously the informal is formal for most purposes. Since it is utilized by all and lacks only official recognition, it is more correctly called *unofficial* than informal.

On the third point, one can think of informal organization as Barnard does, as incidental or accidental association without purpose, but this distinction includes story-telling and small talk of all kinds and confines the term largely to what we earlier called a "random clique." Such incidental association admittedly can give a basis for later cooperative activity, but always intermingled with the socializers are members who calculatingly participate with additional purposes in mind. So for our aim of stressing the *ties* between formal and informal we need to consider more than what supplies a potential for joint activity; we must talk of the activity itself. This largely conscious action is what we primarily mean by "informal."

Finally, when one uses "informal" as a necessary counterpart of "formal,"

the implication is that they somehow match and balance each other, that those participating in the informal activity have full knowledge of formal expectations. This oversimplifies the behavior. As we have seen, it is unrealistic to assume that all the managers of a firm have complete knowledge of formal expectations. Since (1) there are varying and inconstant gaps between official and actual influence of members; and (2) the more fully committed members necessarily have secrets not shared by the fringe members; and since (3) some directives are known only by a minority to be for nothing but the record, obviously formal purpose is not shared by all except in the most general way. That is, knowledge of changing policy is often withheld from some subordinates because of belief that they will react unfavorably to the full picture at *this* moment. Then, too, in firms like Milo and Fruhling, procedures, demands by the customer, etc., may change so rapidly that middle and lower officers have only partial knowledge of the formal expectations. Also there is both ignorant and indifferent action in the organization that falls outside this simple scheme.¹

These criticisms are not to reject the couplets of "formal-informal," "official-

¹ For example, in a large office at Fruhling—apparently typical in terms of nonsupervisory staff skills, interest, and morale—the employees frequently showed fluctuating concern for important procedures. Correction of errors found in the time charged to various departmental accounts required much paper work and checking of all departmental records. Most of this crew, however, merely shuffled the correction cards they received and distributed them equally among members. Each person then divided the total time, on the cards he received, among the accounts *currently* on his desk. To my friendly but unauthorized question about this procedure, they answered, "What difference does it make?"

unofficial," etc., but to note their limitations and point the need to study the intervening action.

Formal and Informal as Aspects of Organization

Specialists variously evaluate these two phases of effort. Brief comment on the merits ascribed to each, or to the one that is stressed, will prepare us to talk of how the two interact.

Dimock thinks of what we usually call the official and unofficial as the engineering versus the psychological approaches. Since the two represent inherent bodies of activity in organizations, he demands more effort to correlate them. Overemphasis on the official, he insists, is likely to engender "psychological quirks" in the individual. When the organization tries to entirely replace discretion with certainty it deserves the popular insult of "bureaucracy." Such "routine is the institutional equivalent of personal inversion."

The sociologist, Tönnies, long ago implicitly denied the possibility of a purely official, or planned, structure, and Urwick ridicules the emphasis placed on "official channels." He admits their necessity but sees them as largely "for the record," except during a change of leaders or the breakdown of "good personal relations." Normally only a simpleton would think that effective collaboration is created simply by setting up formal procedure. The "fiction" that the president "runs" the company, Stryker says in agreement, is built on management's reverence for formally charted relations. Experienced managers know that things get done informally, and that the informal exists in management as its "biggest intangible asset" and "touchiest open secret."

Great emphasis has been placed on the merits of the informal by Donham, Roethlisberger, Mayo, Whitehead, Homans, and others. One executive values the informal because it can be absorbed into the daily routine without official notice. This allows him to win unofficial ends without raising questions.

Like the formal, the informal phases can be overstressed. Some groups are prone to make informal communication an end in itself. Where this occurs, formal procedure may be regarded as not even a necessary evil. The informal takes on such prominence that in-plant luncheons and out-plant socializing become the chief vehicles for communication. Facility in party giving, as the ideal atmosphere for policy making, becomes an informal requirement for acceptance, so that a condition develops comparable to that noted by Willkie.

Some students implicitly stress the formal organization by reluctant admission that "there seems to be a certain minimum amount" of informal activity that remains in organizations whether welcome or not.

Students of bureaucracy as an administrative structure designed scientifically to accelerate movement toward stated goals are, of course, stressing the formal phases. In addition to their evaluations and those of Barnard, Urwick, and Dimock on the subject, the weight of the formal phase in organizational practice is clearly shown by the avoidance of discussion of delegation and by the niceties often attending so-called delegation to authority.

For example, Rees, Milo's Head of Industrial Relations, wished to support first-line foremen by giving them the appearance of being quite independent, while he informally made their decisions. The editors of *Fortune* cite

similar cases in large corporations of subtle, "even unconscious" communications between higher and lower executives that enable the latter to make "correct decisions." As the editors see it, the subordinate officers "sustain their egos," by the appearance of authority, while the higherups continue to make the decisions.

The weight of formal organization, even when those in high place seek to share their authority, was shown in an English study. The "Managing Director" of a plant which had long tried to "raise the level of democratic participation" found that subordinate executives were likely to interpret sudden delegation of authority—allowing them to act entirely on their own—as concealed punishment and an attempt by the superior to abdicate his responsibility.

Shartle ironically attributes advantages to excessive formality, as when "red tape" slows action that in the thinking of some department should be delayed, or prevents interference with a fast-moving program.²

These conflicting emphases also show awareness of the potential for varying gaps to develop between formal and informal. Emmerich, however, believes that the two phases "are so closely related that the attempt to isolate [them] can be as misleading as the newer tendency to equate them." In diverse terms, others see the problem of a breach between formal and informal and propose *integration* in some way. Urwick, for example, speaks of ceaseless reorganization, or a "continuous evolution," which must be constantly guided by permanent machinery for that purpose. . . .

² Shartle, *Executive Performance and Leadership* (Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1956), p. 201. . . .

The Interplay of Formal and Informal

These discussions of official and informal action in the dynamics, development, reorganization, and evolution, of the organization do not, to repeat ourselves, deal explicitly with the interplay of formal and informal. However difficult, we need to focus more on the interconnections between formal and unofficial as they draw apart, collide, and/or irregularly perform functions. Though the action is colored at times with economic, individual, and even chance factors, we have already seen many interplays springing from this orderly disorder. For example, rise of the FWD at Milo as a response to the developing conflict between Maintenance and Operation; breakdown of the FWD largely as a result of informal evasions and attacks on it; formal action by the Office which was countered and adapted by Milo chiefs; the blocking of Jessup's proposal at Fruhling and his informal perfection of the process which was later adopted; the circumvention of labor agreements by union-management cliques leading to some modification in later contracts; the rise of sinecures and the use of the assistant-to-office to soften formal rigidities; the use of unofficial criteria in the selection of new officers; the rise and action of specific clique types to meet recurring situations growing out of formal changes; the informal use of materials and services to supplement formal reward; the endless formal-informal exchanges through Reynolds at Attica; the responses in O'Brien's department to the formal ranking of shifts by their production level; and the whole cluster of interplays between safety regulations and accidents. . . .

Some important steps and mechanisms that connect the formal and informal and enable them to maintain ongoing action are (1) official meetings, (2) command from high levels for unofficial action from below, (3) informal requests from below for the right to engage in specific unofficial actions, (4) transitional roles, (5) recourse to prefigured justifications, (6) the use of "two-way funnels," and (7) adoption by the formal—acknowledged or not—of unofficial widespread practices that have proved their worth or have become an accomplished fact.

Meetings

As we all know, conferences may be used for more than official purposes. It should be no surprise that the periodic meetings in business and industry are at times much like those of parliamentary gatherings. Because the internal power struggles of business and industry are largely denied and must be cloaked, it is clear that the ferment of unofficial activities may be more intense at times than the frankly parliamentary action.³ Right down the hierarchy one finds meetings a stage for exploratory skirmishes; for making authoritative hints to those moving too far in some direction; for study of faces and inflections; for catching slips and checking on premeeting tips, etc. The formal meeting is a gallery of fronts where aimless, deviant, and central currents of action merge for a moment, perfunctorily for some, emotionally for others. All depart with new knowledge to pursue variously altered, but rarely the agreed, courses.

One finds executives called into meetings to solve problems precipi-

tated by their own informal activities, which naturally bind their hands. At the meeting they may learn—as Milo staff forces did by turning luncheons into meetings—how much of their problem is known, and they may pick up helpful leads from responses to guarded questions they raise. Pre- and postmeeting confabs with clique members incorporate these findings. Where the gap between formal and informal phases becomes great, some officers seek to settle issues in meetings and escape the commitment of written statements. We saw this concern in Chapter 5. This allows greater expression to the free-wheelers and tacticians, but inspires fear among the rule-bound.⁴ The existing "balance" of formal-informal action is partially provoked by variants of these two types, and newcomers are in turn selected to some extent in terms of how they will fit into the balance.

Total time spent in meetings can indicate roughly the rate of change and the intensity of interaction between the formal and informal; and also, of course, lack of assurance in making decisions on the part of those calling the meetings. At Milo and Fruhling there were nine to over a dozen different kinds of periodic meetings. Department heads averaged about six hours daily in conferences. General policy, production planning, staff-line, and cost meetings especially reflected the two-way influence. The ostentatious

⁴ For example, E. Flandin, a general foreman and a formalist on procedure, refused to participate in meetings. He remarked, "I just set and listen. You know a damn sight better than to say anything. You're licked before you go in a meeting. If you speak up and make a complaint, you'll have to prove it and you'll make a dozen guys sore. If you make a suggestion there'll be a dozen guys against it because it'll bother them some way or show up their dodges. I'd rather just keep my mouth shut and draw my pay."

sibly final reports or agreements they brought forth were often tentative. When subject to disapproval and rejection at higher levels or by "powerful" individuals, the reports were officially unofficial for they were often frankly requested to be in pencil—a forewarning that the play of interests would result in revisions and "graphite analyses."

Ordered Unofficial Action

In various emergencies and unusual situations, higherups demand limited unofficial, and even illegal, action by subordinates. . . . Orders to flunk certain job examinees is a case in point. However, when the demand embraces too many personnel moral disturbances break out. . . . Restricted demand confined to tested personnel is more common and is more likely to accomplish formal ends without damage to its dignity. Organizationally necessary change introduced in this way gradually blends into ongoing action.

Granted Departures

Where camaraderie is high, so that subordinates do not fear unofficial punishment by superiors, they may ask permission to settle some issues informally. [For example,] unofficial blanket instructions to all from above to use containable informal methods. This of course embraced an area of issues crucial to production. In many less important cases formal and informal are similarly bridged without indignities to the formal. For example, the dealing with another department, the rewarding—or even penalizing—of some individual who must be lived with, the handling of some plant-community issue, etc., are all made easier by permission, and sometimes cooperation, from above,

though the superior, as in other cases, prefers to remain officially ignorant.⁵

Both commanded and requested informal actions are likely to be followed by protective official statements, which are "orders for the record." The intent is of course usually known only to the chosen. An order for the record may be a temporary blind to cover movement toward an end; or it may start as a stopgap and become semi-permanent when conditions show that dropping it would bring greater problems. Orders for the record may also be issued at lower levels to placate threatening formalists or to follow established disciplinary procedure. . . .

The Transitional Role

I implied just above that "orders for the record" may induce further complications. Both such orders and the various uses of the office of assistant-to are related to the operation of unofficial transitional roles. Typically the accumulated influence of such roles would be little relative to some of the other factors with which they overlap. Usually these roles arise from defective operations, which may have been induced by other informal action, and start as attempts to get the work done and to make loose ends meet. They may be called out by unofficial orders, or start through the voluntary action of some officer who wants to experiment with something new, speed up something underway, or who draws together functions of operation that others have overlooked—or know about and want to avoid. In any case, some-

³ Barnard (*Functions of the Executive*), p. 226, notes the limited "overt division on formal issues" that authority can tolerate. Hence the volume of informal activity in both cases.

⁵ Here again, industry and business have no monopoly on unofficial action. In at least one community of a state in which it is illegal for public school students to give presents to their teachers, student cliques sometimes obtain permission from their well-loved principal to give gifts with the proviso that "I know nothing about it."

one with an official role carries out "temporary" functions (or as Stein said, "sticks his neck out") that become more important than expected. This person may become so expert with these unofficial functions that he must weaken his official contribution. He becomes identified with the function and may be maintained and protected where he is as he is without official changes. If he clamors for reward, he may or not receive it but the function is formalized and someone takes the role.

While this direct interplay of informal and formal can lead to official change, the formal role may merely be enlarged to incorporate informal functions without an official change, according to the abilities of the person playing the role. . . .

Prefigured Justifications

Meetings steer only a part of the course between the formal and informal. The clashes and schisms, the interests of the part and the whole, the action of the bored and the partially committed—all are interwoven by tentative prearranged defenses that cloak much of the action in and out of meetings.

Since integrity of the formal must be preserved, the gap between it and the informal must be within the tolerance of understood propriety. Where personnel must depart from expectations, they feel obliged to have ready explanations at hand. The executive who stumbles onto irregularities he did not order, and that uninvolved persons know about, must do something for the record and demand an explanation. He cannot tell *everyone*, "I don't care what you do, but don't let me see you." In many cases he must act on what he knows, or, as we have noted repeatedly, feign ignorance. Because he resents having to take action when his

subordinates can easily protect him against action-demanding situations, they typically, as in the vertical symbiotic clique, set up essential appearances. The subordinates of course also have a general interest in protecting the formal phases of organization as well as their superior.

Hence from fear of alienating a touchy superior as well as to protect him, they develop logical explanations to cover essential but irregular actions. This is not necessarily defiance of the system. The action may also conceal the spearhead of an embryonic procedure not yet ready for the light. . . . Defenses may cover a short-cut that saves time, economizes currently limited materials, etc., but one that requires rare judgment in its use and for that reason cannot be adopted as a common practice. Or the justification may screen a forbidden stopgap. In any case, the officer concerned would neither advertise his use of the make-shift nor be disturbed about preparing a justification. If detected and questioned by that kind of chief, his convincing response would save both from embarrassment. Justifications can of course become pretexts to conceal malfeasance.

Defenses may be offered by an individual or a team. Some superiors openly welcome ideas and constructive departures. But where rivalries for individual credit are strong in the group and the superior "wants no complications," the departure, though worthwhile, may be hidden, used privately, and not pushed for development or seriously defended. Where no issue of change or improvement in the firm moves deviants they may instead, as is usually said, "dream up explanations," and "keep a drawerful of right answers." There is comparable behavior when line officers prepare to face the effects of staff reports.

As the area of concern becomes more individual than group, the interplay of formal and informal declines and defenses may become only personal subterfuges, as when the ambitious and demanding subordinate supplies his obliging chief with convincing pretexts to forestall the objections of others to favors he receives. In maintaining harmonious appearances, however, probably all departments and key executives must at times exhaust their justifications and have some re-

course to pretexts. Among other things, this arises from the obvious practice in most departments of camouflaging those of their activities running counter to plant logic. Incomplete knowledge of practices behind the screens of other departments forces a given department to maintain a store of pretexts to meet criticisms, and thus enable it to control other departments to a degree and win their aid when necessary. . . .

Correlates of Organizational Participation: An Examination of Factors Affecting Union Membership Activity

EUGENE C. HAGBURG

Studies of union organizations in contemporary U.S. society have revealed that most members of trade unions are inactive with respect to organizational matters. That is, many union members do not vote in organizational elections, attend meetings, run for elective offices, serve on committees, or even keep themselves informed about organizational policy and activity. Some exceptions, of course, do exist for certain unions are more active, i.e., have larger proportions of participating members, than do others,¹ and within the same national organizations, some locals are

more active than others.² Nevertheless, inactivity among union members is by far the prevalent rule within contemporary unionism.

Despite the body of literature on the subject of organizational participation, at present there is not sufficient clarification of those factors associated with this inactive condition. For example, is membership inactivity a consequence of their lack of interest in the union organization stemming from individual attributes or is it that unions, as relatively complex organizations, do not fully encourage integration into their groups?

Much of the work that has been directed toward this question has been philosophical in nature.³ Other work,

Eugene C. Hagburg, "Correlates of Organization Participation: An Examination of Factors Affecting Union Membership Activity" *Pacific Sociological Review*, 9 (1966), 15-21, with omissions.

¹ See, e.g., Seymour Martin Lipset, Martin Trow, and James Coleman, *Union Democracy* (New York: Anchor Books, Inc., 1962), a study of the International Typographical Union, one of the most active organizations in the U.S. as far as its members are concerned.

² See Arnold S. Tannenbaum and Robert L. Kahn, *Participation in Union Locals* (Evanston, Illinois: Row, Peterson and Co., 1953), a study which depended on locating several active local unions for the purpose of contrasting them with inactive locals in order to explain the differences between them.

³ See, for example, Solomon Barkin, *The Decline of the Labor Movement* (Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, 1961). See also, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, November, 1963.