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PEOPLE, PROBLEMS AND PROFITS

PEOPLE, PROBLEMS AND PROFITS

The Uses of Psychology in Management

SAUL W. GELLERMAN
Psychological Consultant

McGRAW-HILL BOOK COMPANY, INC.

New York Toronto London 1960

PEOPLE, PROBLEMS AND PROFITS

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To my father with love and gratitude

PREFACE

Psychology is very much in vogue in business, government, labor, and voluntary organizations. Indeed, anywhere that people work together, some form of applied psychology is likely to be brought in to ease tensions and improve productivity. This popularity has not developed because psychology has provided many hard and fast answers to the problems of people at work but simply because the demand for answers far exceeds the supply. The gravity of the problems with which psychologists in industry deal is far better recognized than are the limitations of the techniques and ideas that they use.

Despite its many imperfections, psychology can be an instrument of great subtlety and power for the improvement of morale and efficiency—if *the executive understands it well enough to ask the kind of questions that will keep a psychologist on his toes, and to appreciate the problems that the psychologist faces in arriving at his answers.* A good industrial psychologist works best with a client who has at least a detailed “layman’s knowledge” of the specific

difficulties they are facing and the specific techniques they can use.

To get this kind of understanding, the executive has to go well beyond the generalities of elementary psychology courses or of books that translate these generalities into the idiom of the business world. What he needs is nothing less than an abbreviated trip through some advanced psychology courses—even some graduate courses—as well as an intimate look at the practical problems that psychologists face in industry itself.

This book rests on the assumption that most executives can acquire this kind of sophistication about psychology without having to learn the psychologist's esoteric vocabulary and without having to wade through the involved theories and explanations that the psychologist himself has to master. What's more, the book assumes that only an executive who has acquired an informed, critical understanding of applied psychology can help the psychological expert to deliver the best service that he and his profession have to offer.

Psychology has scientific traditions and intentions, but as far as business and other organizations are concerned, it has not yet developed much scientific understanding or many truly scientific techniques. Although psychology may sometimes seem to be full of orthodoxies, it is still in an exploratory, experimental stage. This certainly does not mean that it cannot be useful to the executive; but it does mean that psychology demands mature judgment and cannot be applied in a simple, mechanical way.

Consequently, this book also assumes that the reader can get himself into a very pragmatic state of mind and can

concentrate on ways of effecting small improvements in personnel problems, rather than on coming up with final answers that sweep all problems away. In order to use today's psychology to good effect in industry, we have to be willing to work with imperfect instruments. We have to learn to prefer complicated facts to oversimplified illusions. Last and most important, we have to face the fact that psychology does not reduce the executive's risks but merely clarifies them.

A clearheaded approach to the use of psychology in business requires, I think, recognition of these fundamental points:

- Most of the managerial problems that are brought to psychologists—selection, motivation, communication, etc.—*cannot be solved* in any final sense. The best that can be hoped for are working compromises: methods that will work well enough for a while but will probably have to be revised and re-revised, later on. Psychology cannot, like the Pied Piper, rid management of its problems. It *can* help management to live with its problems more comfortably and even to make a better profit while doing so.

- Psychology does not make executive decision making easier. It makes it harder, because it uncovers many facets of a problem which, because they were unsuspected, had previously been ignored. But the added insights that psychology can provide make it possible for the executive to make more profitable decisions more often.

- Evaluation of individuals for various job assignments is still a very imperfect art. But even if it weren't, evaluation alone would still be an inadequate answer to management's problems of selection, placement and de-

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THE PSYCHOLOGY OF USING PSYCHOLOGY

Like anyone trying to make sense out of a highly specialized field, the executive who wants to take advantage of applied psychology has to shop around to choose the technique or expert that seems to fit his needs best. Quite often the one he settles for is no more comprehensible to him than the ones he doesn't buy, but has the cardinal advantage of being represented by someone whose personality is attractive to him and who "speaks the same language" that he does.

There isn't necessarily anything wrong with this, since clear communication is just as important for a good consulting job as an accurate analysis of the client's problem. Charlatans, of course, are notoriously adroit "communicators"—better than many a respectable psychologist, in fact. But even though the charlatan causes his full share of trouble among businessmen looking for psychological serv-

ices, he is only a minor factor in the confusion and disappointment that often surround the field. Even the sometimes overzealous sellers of useful but inherently limited methods do relatively little to muddy up the waters.

Whether the businessman gets anything constructive out of applied psychology depends in large measure on the real reasons why he turns to it in the first place. The specific techniques he chooses to buy are not nearly so important as his intentions for them. In other words, the executive who turns to psychology for the wrong reasons has to take his place at the head of the list of culprits who keep psychology from making its full contribution to business. If it is any comfort to him, the psychologist who is too wrapped up in theory to acquaint himself with business realities is right behind him, a close second.

Buying a psychological service is like buying anything else: the buyer is seldom aware of all of the motives that help him make up his mind. He may have some compelling logical arguments in favor of doing what he did, but in all likelihood there were some equally persuasive pipe dreams hiding in the background. Unfortunately, psychology appeals to many executives for reasons which, on close examination, turn out to be a little foolish.

Psychology's biggest handicap is the fact that it deals with the kinds of problems that cause more exasperation and woe than any others. It is therefore sought out too often by desperate men who are actually looking for deliverance rather than understanding. They have given rise to the widespread impression that psychology is just a crutch, because they persist in using it that way regardless of whether psychology is a good crutch or a poor one. In

general, those businessmen who turn to psychology in hopes of facile answers are the ones who want it for the wrong reasons.

Eventually, most of these people realize that they aren't getting what they hoped for. Some become disgruntled. Some remain comfortably deluded. Some, fortunately, realize that if this kind of service is going to work at all they will have to change their attitudes toward it. A realistic attitude toward what psychology can and can't do for a business is half the battle of winning its advantages. It permits the businessman to concentrate on matters where improvement is possible. More important, it prevents the unconscious abdication of responsibility that too often occurs when an executive turns his problems over to an expert.

Clearing one's mind of misconceptions is not an easy task, because their likeliest hiding place is among ideas that seem too self-evident to need examination. Therefore it may help to take a hard, unsentimental look at some of the more common "wrong reasons" for applying psychological methods to business. These are not presented as a rogue's gallery of executive errors but rather as a mirror to which the reader can hold up his own ideas about applied psychology and check them for sensibility and realism.

There are, unfortunately, many more bad reasons for using psychology in business than there are good ones. But psychology's saving grace is that it can more than pay its own way when its users recognize what it really is: *a sensitive but necessarily fallible instrument which provides indicative information but not conclusions, and which illuminates one's judgment but cannot substitute for it.*

Why Business Uses Psychology: Bad Reasons

1. *Distaste for the Human Element.* There is a popular legend that because executives have to get their work done through other people, they have to like them. It's true that the mechanics of leadership are considerably simplified if one is predisposed to find out what the other fellow's attitudes toward being led are like. But people with this kind of built-in attraction to other people's thinking are fairly uncommon, and many of them would make poor leaders anyway since they cannot balance their insights with an equally penetrating grasp of managerial objectives.

The plain truth is that many men of executive caliber have no more than a philosophical interest in their fellow man and that much of this is due merely to an uncritical acceptance of the religious and political ideas that are prevalent in our society. Some psychologists have even speculated that the kinds of men who are attracted to professions from which some executives are recruited—engineers and accountants, for example—prefer to minimize their social contacts and concentrate instead on the impersonal facts of their specialties. (This is probably as true as any psychological generalization; that is, examples of it occur too often to be ignored and too rarely to make it a safe rule of thumb.)

Many executives (perhaps most) are faced with this dilemma: they have to acquire at least *some* expertness in social arts in which they have no natural interest and may even dislike. But the victory of the "human relations" viewpoint in management theory has been so complete

that executives who have no real sympathy for it often feel guilty about admitting this—even to themselves. The result is not so much hypocrisy as an empty conformity: a chorus of unfelt and unpracticed slogans.

Paradoxically, the executive who is naturally somewhat unsociable is often among the most enthusiastic converts to applied psychology. This is for two reasons: first, he looks upon it as an accommodating receptacle into which he can safely dump all of the problems about hiring, firing and handling subordinates that he doesn't want to get involved with himself. Second, he tends to assume that psychology develops the same kind of objective, verifiable conclusions that he encounters in his own fields of specialization, so that following the indications of a test score seems to be a more accurate and "scientific" way of finding an answer than trying to work it out by himself.

Unless the executive remains actively involved in the decisions which staff his operating units he will become progressively ignorant of their potentialities, progressively dependent on the mechanisms which actually made the decisions for him. Eventually he becomes a figurehead. To avoid this he must learn to use psychology as a source of data which he will weigh and decide upon himself, rather than as an oracle that tells him what to do.

But where does this leave our executive who prefers to steer clear of "people problems"? It leaves him where we found him, in the middle of an uncomfortable dilemma from which nobody but himself can extricate him. He has to choose between dwindling into ineffectuality or manfully thrusting himself into the endless uncertainties of trying to

understand other people. It is a hard choice, but if there were no hard choices in this world we would have no need of executives, either.

2. *The Lure of Easy Answers.* People are as complicated as they are because the human mind is sensitive to a fantastic number of influences. Minds are swayed by the real and the unreal, the important and the trivial, the obvious and the obscure. Small wonder, then, that many people despair of knowing human nature well enough to predict it. Even psychologists usually limit their probings to a sampling of the mind's contents—enough to develop an over-all view and hopefully to pick up some of the major currents. To catalogue exhaustively the potentialities of even a single normally endowed individual would be an enormously complicated task; perhaps it is impossible.

It is not impossible, however, to find useful answers to the terribly complicated problems of choosing, training and leading people. But it is very hard. The value of the psychologist's answers is usually in rough proportion to the time and trouble taken to find them. Oversimplified, highly approximate answers are available in quantity and can be bought at very attractive prices. Sharply defined, thorough answers can only be arrived at slowly, with great care and at corresponding costs. They are much less popular commercially than the simple answers and are not as well promoted because they offer less of an opportunity for high-volume profits to the sellers.

There are no real bargains in applied psychology, but there is hucksterism. The price tag is not, perhaps, a particularly reliable guide to the quality of a psychological service—except in the sense that the volume which makes

very low prices possible also militates against the detailed individual study on which a good consulting job is based. A more reliable guide is the amount of time that has to be invested in the development of the answer—time spent gathering and analyzing the data, time spent presenting conclusions, explaining them and discussing them with management.

It has always been easy to merchandise a panacea, because people want it badly enough to let their wishes override their good sense. Nothing is more precious to an executive than time, and any economies he can effect in allocating his time are usually welcomed too gratefully for him to wonder about their consequences. This is the back door through which short cuts and bargain-basement psychology usually sneak into management. Whoever sells extra time to executives is likely to be well received, regardless of how vital it is for the executive to spend the time and not save it.

Psychology is also merchandised to executives as if it were an anesthetic: a painless way to get the inside story about people, to get rid of those nagging doubts that are part and parcel of every consciously taken risk. Yet the risk is always there and it is undoubtedly a more perilous one when it is ignored.

A quick, cheap or easy solution to a problem involving human potentialities is probably not as economical as it looks, simply because it is likely to be only half-right—or even dead wrong. When you buy a psychological service, quality and thoroughness are not luxuries but necessities. It not only pays to get the best, but it is usually a waste to get anything less.

This does not mean, of course, that every personnel problem calls for an elaborate psychological analysis or that psychology has to be costly. The time (and therefore the cost) of an effective analysis will naturally vary with the complexity and the importance of each problem. In any case, the executive who buys a service because of its speed or inexpensiveness or because it is so easy to operate and understand would do well to pause long enough to make sure whether it is really “just as good” as more involved services—or indeed whether it is any good at all.

3. *Shifting Responsibility.* Every profession has its pet tale of woe; and psychology's is that, while no layman would think of setting a broken leg by himself or going to court without a lawyer, everyone considers himself to be his own expert on psychology. Somehow or other, being a “good judge of human nature” has become a sort of status symbol among executives, and many of them are quite loath to admit that they don't qualify for it. Making a hiring mistake or failing to anticipate how a subordinate would act can be a very painful experience for an executive if he thinks it must reflect unfavorably on his ability.

If the old saw that “any manager who can't pick men doesn't deserve to be a manager” were true, we would have an excruciating shortage of able managers. Many “good judges of human nature” are self-appointed and differ from their less gifted brethren chiefly in their readiness to trust their own hunches and in their inability to review them candidly.

It should not be necessary to add that psychologists are not necessarily good judges of human nature, either. But they are—or should be—students of human nature who have

learned to study people systematically and to relate what they find to a general body of observations and deductions about many other people. This training gives them a few advantages over the layman in the difficult business of sizing up other people. If the psychologist happens to be blessed with good sense and the restraint to keep from playing God, his advantages can be very potent indeed. Even if he is not so favorably endowed he can be useful, but only to an executive who has enough skepticism and logic to compensate for the psychologist's lack of them.

One would expect that the advocates of the do-it-yourself school of judging people would line up pretty solidly against the application of psychology to business. In fact, however, they contribute their share of devotees to psychology too. It happens this way: an executive who finds the experience of guessing wrong about people too distressing will retain a psychological service and will usually follow it pretty faithfully. When this leads, as it will when enough cases are involved, to an error, the executive no longer feels any humiliation. Instead he has the pleasure of roundly damning the service and wondering aloud whether it's worth all the money he spent on it. But he usually goes on spending his money and seldom bothers to find out whether it's really worth spending, because fundamentally he is buying a scapegoat rather than a consulting service. He no longer makes mistakes; instead he is "misled."

A variation on this theme is the businessman who uses psychology ostensibly as an outside check on his own judgment but actually as a way of confirming his preconceived notions about people. Such men feel that psychology is doing a good job when its techniques produce results that

agree with their own ideas and that psychology is erroneous when the results don't agree. In other words, they use psychology in order to be told that they are right.

Perhaps this is puerile, but it is also quite common. The basic error is the assumption that there is something wrong with an executive who makes a mistake about another person. The psychologist who understands the intricacies of human behavior expects to make his share of mistakes, and the executive can certainly afford to be at least as lenient with himself. The only stigma in misjudging another person is failure to try to learn something from the error. Every mistake has a lesson in it, but this can be obscured and lost by an unnecessary search for somebody else on whom the blame can be pinned.

4. *The "Crystal Ball" Illusion.* Psychology is regarded by some people as being able to develop facts that have a superior validity to experience, common sense and the testimony of mature observers. To them, other people are to be judged not by their actual behavior but by some kind of "higher reality" to which only psychology has the key.

Psychology has, in effect, seduced many people—particularly the kind of intellectuals to whom it has become a sort of cult—into ignoring what their eyes and ears tell them. The same thing happens among executives who credulously believe that a test score has uncovered something about an employee that they have never been able to recognize in years of association.

The difficulty here is primarily that while we are all quite complicated, we like to think about ourselves in simple-minded terms. People are, in fact, bundles of contradictions: they do not necessarily have to "add up." For

example, it can be equally true that a man is scrupulously honest and that he harbors a hatful of larcenous impulses; to ignore either is to be ignorant of the real man. Yet the half of the truth which is obvious is usually less exotic, less appealing to our appetite for mystery, than the half which is revealed by the subtle probings of the psychologist. Small wonder that the mundane half of the truth gets dismissed as mere pretense and that the unexpected half is treated as if it were the whole truth.

Psychologists themselves are faced with a continual struggle against the temptation to reduce the person they have under study to his own lowest common denominator—to seize upon a few fears or desires and then interpret the whole intricate structure of personality as a product of those few elements and nothing else. The most difficult part of their job is not to discover the forces that “make someone tick,” but to find the proper perspective for their discoveries—to see how the obscure parts of the personality mesh with the obvious parts. When this is not done, an apparent conflict between a man’s record, on the one hand, and the findings of the psychologists, on the other, seems to demand that the executive choose which source he will believe in and which he will discard. As a rule this means he will have to throw the baby out with the bath water, because he is going to wind up with an overemphasized half-truth no matter what he does.

The things a psychologist learns about a person through tests or interviews can help to explain what is already known about him through more ordinary means—but we too often try to make them *replace* what is already known. Unfortunately, it is harder to reconcile ideas that don’t fit

neatly together than to simply throw one of them out; so the psychologist's findings often crowd out other kinds of information that actually have their own place in the over-all picture.

In practice, this unwarranted enthronement of psychological findings can lead to a wholesale miscalculation of people's motives and potentialities. The effect is the same whether it is due to a psychologist's bad habit of oversimplifying or to an executive's credulity. A psychological analysis can be worse than useless if it provides only a fragmentary picture—no matter how revealing that fragment may be. A one-sided interpretation—one which makes no effort to fit the "deep" findings of tests together with such "superficial" findings as the testee's past history—accomplishes nothing more than a switching of emphasis from one fragment to another.

Yet many executives persist in believing that by making such a switch they are actually lifting themselves out of the deceptive world of their own senses into the "real" world of psychological sophistication, where people are more easily understood because their emotional plumbing is presumably laid bare. They forget that these mechanisms are hemmed in, channeled and diverted by the very superficialities they are so eager to ignore. Psychology is, in other words, something like a searchlight which can illuminate either a pinpoint or an entire canvas, all according to the good sense and realism of the people who use it.

5. *Credulity Masquerading as "Sophistication."* By now it should be apparent that there is a common thread running through many of the "bad" reasons for applying psychology to personnel problems: a readiness to believe

that psychology can accomplish wondrous things. Just how this came about would make a fascinating study in itself, since psychology is rapidly acquiring a unique place for itself in current folklore—one which seems to have very little connection with its actual accomplishments.

In the few centuries that modern science has been in existence it has made us marvelously sophisticated, at least in comparison to our unenlightened ancestors, whose speculations about nature are now labeled as “superstition.” But while a few centuries may suffice to overhaul people’s ideas, they may not have been enough to effect much of a change in people’s attitudes toward ideas themselves—or toward the handful of people who generate them. Science is revered as much today as superstitions were in their day; too many people wait confidently for science to pass its miracles, and have even grown complacent about the permanence of currently accepted scientific ideas. Psychology belongs in the mainstream of scientific thinking and as such comes in for its full share of the awe-stricken acquiescence with which so many people regard all sciences. But psychology gets an additional boost in prestige from the fact that it has enjoyed a very favorable “press” for a long time: popular literature and drama have given it a reputation of importance and power that few other sciences can match. Psychology has become the darling of the intellectuals: a certain amount of psychological sophistication—at least a working knowledge of its esoteric vocabulary—has become a kind of status symbol in itself.

The executive, whether or not he is an intellectual, is under considerable pressure to be “modern” and to stay abreast of ideas which could improve the process of man-

agement. Particularly among younger executives, to whom the idea of progress is often a kind of grand passion, psychology is eagerly accepted as a very up-to-date, very scientific management tool.

All this public receptivity would presumably make psychology's job much easier, but in fact quite the opposite is often true. Psychology simply isn't ready to do many of the things that its enthusiasts expect of it. The problem is not so much psychology's own limitations—which are real enough—as the tendency of its devotees to assume that it has no real limits at all. One form of applied psychology or another is glibly prescribed as the “solution” to almost every kind of predicament that people create for themselves, as if we had learned how to hasten or reverse psychological processes that take years to unfold.

In other words, psychology works under the handicap of a reputation it cannot hope to live up to, which means that its critics can enjoy a perpetual field day and that its boosters will probably have to have their faith shaken somewhere along the line. The same kind of trusting credulity which once made possible the spread of superstition is still with us; the main difference is that the scientist has replaced the witch doctor as the source of ideas. No doubt this is an improvement as far as the accuracy of the ideas themselves is concerned, but it doesn't represent much progress in the maturity of those who allow themselves to be led by those ideas. In the specific case of psychology, this open-arms welcome to its ideas has led many intelligent men to believe quite seriously that psychology can accomplish just about anything.

Psychology has, in fact, “come of age” prematurely: the

need for what it *might* do is much better recognized than the limitations on what it has actually *learned how* to do. There is a great deal of pressure on psychologists to rush the development of concepts and techniques to a "usable" stage, regardless of whether they have been properly explored. Ideas that are advanced as tentative hypotheses and guesses are converted under this kind of pressure into dogma; tests which are experimental or exploratory become commercialized. Under such conditions the emphasis inevitably tends to swing from research on newer, better techniques to the perpetuation of older, accepted ones.

One might almost wish that business and the public had not discovered psychology quite so soon—that there might have been more time to prepare a firmer foundation for the difficult work that psychology has to do. Since this is not to be, psychology's best hope is in the growth of an informed laity which will demand a greater emphasis on research and development and will be less vociferous in its appetite for ready-made, production-line psychological methods that frequently were not designed for the jobs they are given.

6. *Hucksters.* Not many psychologists are good salesmen, but plenty of good salesmen have learned how to wrap psychology up in a pretty package and peddle it to businessmen as a considerably more perfected instrument than it really is. Some of the techniques that are used to persuade executives to buy a psychological service are quite ingenious—and misleading.

It is not too well known that tests, rating systems, leadership methods and the other paraphernalia of applied psychology can be concocted and sold by anybody. There

are no regulatory bodies in the government or the profession itself that can effectively control the flood of techniques that enter the commercial market. This means that antiquated, unproved or even wholly ineffective applications of psychology can be sold with just as much impunity as those that have much more to offer. The popularity of a test or rating system is, unfortunately, less a matter of its appropriateness to the job at hand than of the skill with which it is merchandised.

There are some obstacles in the way of out-and-out hucksterism, but they are by no means insurmountable. The psychological profession tries to police itself with a code of ethics that is quite strict on the subject of misrepresentation; but the nonpsychologist is of course beyond the reach of the profession's discipline. Some states have certification laws which define the training of persons who may call themselves psychologists or offer services that are described as psychological; but these are easy enough to circumvent by a careful avoidance of "illegal" words and a cultivation of synonyms in the sales pitch. Last, some test publishers restrict the sale of some of their tests to qualified professionals; but there is nothing to stop anyone from simply publishing his own tests. There should be no illusions, therefore, about psychological services carrying anybody's seal of approval simply because they are psychological.

Like any up-to-date salesman, the huckster of psychological wares usually knows which motives to appeal to in his buyer; in this case, the executive who has to make personnel decisions. There are three principal ones: the need to guess right when one has to guess at all, the need to know the

“inside story” about another person, and the need to feel better qualified to make personnel decisions than other people in one’s organization. The huckster’s sales stories are therefore liberally larded with extravagant claims for accuracy, with promises of tempting peeks behind the “front” that other people present to the world, and with the inviting prospect of becoming a sort of do-it-yourself psychologist with one’s own tests and procedures.

Of course, accuracy and insight are perfectly legitimate demands for an executive to make on any psychological procedure, particularly when he knows how difficult it is actually to obtain either to an appreciable degree. Too often, however, the executive is in no position to decide whether the service he buys is as accurate as he thinks it is, because this is a much more difficult thing to determine than it may seem at first glance. It is even harder for most laymen to tell whether “insights” into other people are real or bogus or—as is more likely—fragmentary. The third motive—to feel better qualified than others for the difficult business of making decisions about people—is natural enough, but not quite so legitimate as the first two. Any one whose position makes it inevitable that he disappoint or anger others is liable to feel the need of some extra moral support. But too often this is sought in rationalizations (“I know what’s best because I know how to use this test or that rating system”) rather than simply doing one’s best and trying to learn something from mistakes when they occur. The salesman who sells rationalizations to people who are exposed to constant criticism is in a market which has uncommonly low sales resistance!

Various kinds of claims are made to give the ring of

authenticity to the huckster's psychological merchandise. An aura of professionalism is just as persuasive for the product image of psychology as it is for pills, but instead of a white-jacketed clinician one is likely to encounter some form of "statistics" as the symbol of respectability. The figures presented are usually of the "before and after" variety. They are seldom false, since they can be checked too easily—and besides, true statistics can be just as deceiving as false ones. It is not in the accuracy of the "statistics," but in their logical implications, that the snare is usually hidden. Mark Twain once observed that there are three kinds of lies: little lies, damned lies and statistics. Of course, it is not statistics themselves that lie; it is their apparent conclusiveness which is so disarming.

Figures that seem to "prove" the effectiveness of a particular device may prove nothing at all but one's readiness to jump to conclusions. For example, a hefty percentage of whatever you want (increased sales, decreased turnover or what have you) after the application of some selection system is likely to seem quite impressive. But does that percentage figure tell you how much of the improvement was due to outside factors that were in the picture anyway, such as better training or improved market conditions? Does it give any hint of how much improvement could be expected through the normal fluctuations of chance (which is probably a lot more than you think it is)? Is it based on one study or many studies under differing conditions, so as to eliminate systematically the possibility that something else beside the selection system is doing the trick?

Many of the percentages, differences and totals that are quoted to substantiate claims for psychological methods

are, at best, suggestive rather than conclusive—but a little suggestion can go a long way. Once again the problem boils down to the incredible sensitivity of the human organism—its capacity to react to dozens of influences besides the one you are applying, all of which have to be checked before you can have any degree of assurance that your method is having any impact of its own. Businessmen are traditionally interested in results rather than causes, which leaves them wide open to the blandishments of the result that may never occur again because nobody really knows what caused it. (Statistical “proofs” of psychological methods will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 9.)

Another favorite gambit is the dramatic proposal that the prospective buyer “test” the service by being his own guinea pig. As a rule the executive who agrees to this will find that the system produces a word-picture of his personality which accurately reflects his own favorite ideas about himself, along with a lot of generalities which seem uncannily appropriate to his own case. Of course, one’s own ideas about one’s personality will almost always be more charitable (to say the least!) than would an outside observer’s. The usefulness of generalities (such as “you sometimes postpone things that you really ought to do right away”) to the huckster lies in the fact that many nearly universal human problems are seldom discussed. People do not realize how common their shortcomings are and therefore tend to think that a highly nonspecific statement has “hit the nail right on the head.”

As a general rule, the executive who is in the market for psychological assistance with his personnel problems should approach every system with an attitude of frank skepticism.

He should be particularly wary of methods which are touted as having reduced the many complex problems of this field to a simple, foolproof, easy-to-operate system that can be bought at bargain prices.

7. *Company Politics.* Psychological test reports sometimes make juicy reading, which is why they have to be treated with the utmost confidentiality. Yet the very fact of their being secret gives them an added glamour which makes them seem all the more persuasive when they are revealed. All this means that psychological reports are highly prized by the man who has an ax to grind, because they can be used to damn or praise far more weightily than the testimony of almost any layman.

It is, unfortunately, by no means unheard-of for executives to try to use psychological reports to further their own ends in a company. Sometimes there are attempts to "arrange" the results of an evaluation beforehand. Sometimes one executive will try to get hold of the test and interview reports of another executive, in hopes that he can discover something there that could be used against him. Sometimes there will be pressure to change the wording of a report to make it into a more effective instrument to accomplish some kind of personnel change that some executives want, regardless of its desirability from the over-all company point of view.

There is no point in taking a purely moralistic attitude toward abuses of this kind, because some form of jockeying for position is inevitable in most companies, and the temptation to use the strongest ammunition available will always be present—regardless of whether to do so would be strictly according to Hoyle. There are practical as well as moral

reasons why attempts to subvert the objectivity of psychology should be controlled—and the main one is that, in the long run, such conniving could destroy the usefulness of psychology to business. When psychological findings are suspect, no amount of technical excellence can save them from eventual oblivion.

There can be no airtight controls, however. Psychologists are no more and no less human than anyone else and will probably have about the same batting average in their contests with the devil as any other group of mortals. The fact that they have seen fit to establish a formal code of ethics is reassuring, since it helps the individual psychologist to define the moral issues of his work more clearly than he might have without such a code. On the other hand, there would be no need for a code at all if there were no pressures and temptations or if right and wrong were clearly discernible in every case.

Since neither executives nor psychologists are immune to compromises with their consciences and since many psychological methods are in the hands of equally human non-professionals, we will probably continue to see attempts to turn psychology into an instrument of company politics. The best safeguard is the moral sense that is present in nearly all of us, buttressed when necessary by very stern treatment of those who are caught straying too far from the straight and narrow path.

8. *Morbid Inquisitiveness.* Some businessmen like to learn all they can about potential employees, which seems, on the face of it, like a very sensible practice. But psychology is capable of producing much more information about an individual than the executive is ever likely to use, and

much of this is none of his business. Since there is a bit of the Peeping Tom in most of us, it is all too easy for an executive with a taste for psychopathology to go rummaging around in other people's private affairs. He gets invaluable aid, of course, from the tendency of some psychologists to assume that every little quirk and twist of a man's personality is going to affect his job adjustment (especially if it smacks of fears or inhibitions) and that these should be reported in detail to their clients.

Being a psychologist does not give one a license to go hunting for something rare and spicy in other people's affairs, and being an executive does not give one a license to commission such a hunt. Even in the healthiest personality there is a considerable amount of underlying emotional debris—relics of battles for selfhood long-since fought and won or even of battles never altogether finished. Simply because psychological methods exist which can dredge these up is no excuse for using them indiscriminately. Yet because the executive and the psychologist work together so intimately in the process of evaluation, the executive is sometimes exposed to information which is ordinarily divulged only to the psychotherapist who is actively trying to counteract a neurotic tendency.

A few such brushes with the exotic world of the unconscious will sometimes give an executive an appetite for more and may lead him to initiate evaluations in order to learn things about his employees that could be of no real value to him as a leader—nor indeed to anyone but a trained psychotherapist. The real tragedy in these cases is that the executive is all too likely to lose sight of the pertinent question of how to work with a man from nine to five, because

he has become enthralled by issues that usually lie too deeply hidden to be dealt with by a layman. Such an executive learns very little from psychology that will make him a better executive, although he is likely to be one of psychology's most vociferous champions. Paradoxically, because his curiosity can raise ethical questions about invasions of privacy, he is likely to help to put psychology in a very unfavorable light. In the last analysis, the best safeguard of privacy is discretion, which will be easier for everybody to practice when psychologists and executives alike learn to concentrate on facts they can use and to bypass those which merely titillate but do not instruct.

Why Business Uses Psychology: Good Reasons

By now the reader may wonder whether there are any legitimate uses for psychology in business at all or whether it hasn't simply become a maze of half-truths and naïve longings for the impossible. We have had to devote so much space to the illusions and snares that have become associated with the field precisely because they can deny the real benefits of psychology to those who have fallen for them. Psychology can, of course, be invaluable to the businessman; there would be little point in a book like this if that were not the case.

But the nature of the problems with which psychology deals requires that the consulting relationship between the executive and the psychologist be an *active partnership of equals*. Any tendency by either to usurp from or yield to the other simply hampers the effectiveness of both. This means that both parties have to come into the relationship with a clearheaded awareness of their own special advan-

tages and limitations in contributing to personnel decisions. They must, in other words, know what they can look to each other for and what they will have to supply by themselves. The businessman has to know what the psychologist (or his instruments) can actually accomplish and what he will have to accomplish for himself. Knowing this puts him in a much stronger position for dealing with personnel problems than he would be in if he had allowed himself to be bewitched by the "bad" reasons for using psychology or if he had decided to ignore psychology altogether and attack these problems solely with the tools available to the layman.

The basic point to remember about psychological approaches to business problems is that while they can reveal much more than most laymen can discover for themselves, their findings can never be completely accurate, comprehensive or appropriate. There is a certain error built in to every psychological deduction about a person, simply because people are subject to so many influences that can change their behavior. Therefore, an "accurate" psychological conclusion about a person is simply one which fits his behavior most of the time. Further, it is impractical to attempt to catalogue every facet of anyone's personality, much less the many potential pressures outside his personality that can affect the way he acts. This means that psychology simply cannot anticipate every reaction of each individual it studies and that some of the deeds it "misses" will, by chance alone, be quite out of line with expectations. Last, many of the observations made possible by psychological techniques will have no special bearing on the particular aspects of behavior that are of concern to

the businessman; in fact, some techniques provide so much superfluous data that they require a very selective review to draw out what is essential from a host of side issues.

All this means that the usefulness of psychological data to the executive depends quite heavily on interpretation and judgment. The facts developed by psychological methods are like pieces of a vast jigsaw puzzle that have to be fitted into their proper niches in order to provide the best possible grounds for guessing what the completed picture is like. This "fitting" process calls for realism, perspective and insights into the dynamics of both the individual under study and the organization in which he works. Judgment of this kind cannot be learned in graduate schools of psychology or business administration; training and experience are necessary but not sufficient for it. Common sense—the altogether too uncommon faculty for clear, broad-gauge thinking—is an indispensable element in the process of applying psychology to the solution of practical business problems.

The experience and judgment of *both* the executive and the psychologist have to be brought to bear to achieve the maximum usefulness of psychology—because the perspective of each broadens and complements the other, because each has access to essential facts which the other does not have, and finally, because the executive himself is likely to be a key element in the over-all equation that determines whether any of the decisions available to him can actually work out in practice. The executive who can accept this kind of role—who looks upon the psychologist as an expert partner, rather than a hired soothsayer—can look forward to little or no saving of time, mental effort or emotional pressure when he retains the services of psychology. He can,

however, look forward to a much clearer understanding of what his personnel problems really involve and to far more judicious decisions about them. In the last analysis, he can look forward to more profitable operations and greater efficiency in the use of his company's human resources.

Here are some of the specific reasons why the realistic executive turns to psychology:

1. *Broadening His Perspective with Added Facts and Opinions.* Personnel decisions should be determined by the weight of evidence, rather than by hunches or habits. Evidence comes from many sources: test scores, interview impressions, records of past performance, supervisor's ratings, educational records, samples of work, etc. The more evidence of all kinds that is culled and weighed, the more balanced and realistic is the view of the alternatives that are open to the executive.

Psychological evidence deserves to be weighed in such an over-all analysis in proportion to the importance of what it measures and the accuracy of its measurements. Usually it deals with issues that are fairly central—even crucial—in determining whether a man can succeed in a given job, but it does so with considerably less-than-perfect accuracy. The wise executive accepts psychological facts and opinions as slightly dubious estimates of vitally important forces, and fits them together with the other reports at his disposal as best he can. He is concerned with the light that psychological data can throw on all the other facts he has gathered and with how the psychological element fits into the over-all scheme of things; he never makes the mistake of assuming that the psychological findings *are* the whole picture. In

other words, psychology enriches his understanding of the problem before him and clarifies the choices he can make, but it never determines his choice by itself because it is only one part of a broad picture.

2. *Cues for Handling and Development.* The realistic executive knows that "finding the right man for the right job" is, in practice, no panacea for personnel ills, but rather a matter of deciding which candidate comes closest to meeting his needs. He is therefore concerned with getting the best possible performance from the manpower that is actually available to him. In fact, he is likely to concentrate far more heavily on developing the people in whom he already has an investment than in searching endlessly for the ideal candidate who almost never comes along.

It is here that psychology can make what is perhaps its most valuable contribution to business—and, paradoxically, it is also here that it encounters the least demand. By far the biggest market for psychological services is in the field of selection: many businessmen are content to hire a man and tacitly forget him once he earns some kind of psychological seal of approval. Leadership only begins with selection, however: all that can be accomplished at that stage is to eliminate the poorer risks and narrow the field down to men who are worth developing.

Perhaps one reason for the comparative unpopularity of development (as opposed to selection) is the fact that development is really a never-ending process. (So is life and so is business, but somehow we prefer to undertake only those projects which come to a definite conclusion—and the sooner the better.) For practical reasons, development programs

have to accept certain rough time limits, but they never give the illusion of finality that a hiring decision can and therefore tend to seem like long roads to nowhere.

Development can consist of specialized training in specific skills or in helping the individual to overcome the blind spots and habits of wishful thinking that prevent him from exerting his fullest potentialities. Such blind spots are practically universal and are rarely, if ever, obliterated; they are part and parcel of our imperfect human condition. Advances against them do *not* occur automatically with age or experience; when they come at all it is through a fortunate burst of candor and self-insight. Psychological findings can help pave the way toward such insights by mapping out the needs and expectations that motivate the individual. Specialized counseling methods can help some people to dismantle the self-imposed emotional roadblocks that obstruct their own efficiency.

3. *Insight into Company Operations.* In the course of getting to know key people in a company from his own specialized standpoint, the psychologist sometimes becomes aware of common threads of attitudes which tend to direct the company's actions into certain channels. Such "mental habits" may be either good or bad, but when they are unrecognized by the executives themselves—and this is very often the case—they can in effect become blinders, shutting out the possibility of unaccustomed actions and reducing the company's flexibility.

Unrecognized, company-wide attitudes can take many forms. (Chapter 3 will consider the whole phenomenon in some detail.) For example, in one division of a large company there was a tradition that no major actions were to

be taken if any department heads strongly objected to it. There wasn't actually a rule to this effect, but it was never questioned since no one could remember when the division had been run on a different basis. The tradition actually dated back many years to a divisional vice-president who was reluctant to make a move without unanimous backing from his "team." Long after he and the team were gone the tradition persisted, giving every executive a veto and gradually limiting the thinking of all of them to safe measures that would ruffle nobody's feathers.

While such patterns in a "company personality" may be obvious to outsiders, the people who live with them and adapt themselves to them are often unaware that there is anything unusual about it or even that the "habit" exists at all. Yet the patterns not only mold thinking but also tend to exert a selective influence on the kinds of people who can become executives—so that what seems peculiar or unnecessary to outsiders can seem "perfectly natural" to those within the company.

Because of the intimate connection between the personality patterns of key executives and the traditional attitudes and habits of a company, the psychologist is often in a unique position to recognize the quirks of a "company personality" and to help the executives to evaluate them and decide what (if anything) ought to be done about them.

Morale problems may also become evident to the psychologist in the course of evaluation or development work, *before* they erupt to the surface and create operating difficulties. (Such discoveries need not be incidental, of course: there are specialized survey techniques for measuring group morale and keeping track of its drifting course.) The psy-

chologist who is in regular contact with key individuals in a company obviously has his finger on the pulse of company morale; even if that is not his major purpose he is often able to discern trends and pinpoint little problems that need attention to keep them from becoming big ones.

4. *Reduction of Training Costs.* This is the problem that provided psychology with its first large-scale entry into the business world and is still the most popular service among the many it offers. Psychologists have learned to do a highly creditable job of measuring intelligence and specific aptitudes, and a somewhat less efficient but still useful job of measuring motivation and interest. This puts them in a good position for weeding out probable failures among candidates for a training program. By raising the proportion of successful trainees, such selection methods increase the return on the company's training investment.

Techniques of this kind work best when they are used with fairly large groups and when it is clearly understood that they are designed to reduce, not eliminate, training failures. The reason is the same in both cases: none of the tests are sensitive enough to prevent individual mistakes, but they can and do chalk up a good record of predictive accuracy when many cases are involved. Even a small increase in the proportion of trainees who make the grade can result in substantial savings. Estimates of the cost of training a single salesman in large companies have run as high as \$10,000, and the cost with executive trainees (who do not begin to "pay off" until considerably later than salesmen do) is much higher.

5. *Uncovering Hidden Talent, Detecting Hidden Flaws.* One of the most rewarding experiences for a psychologist,

who too often has the unhappy job of finding out what's wrong with people, is to discover someone with really strong potentialities which no one had recognized in him. The latent genius whose gifts are being wasted in some menial job is a rarity; so finding him can be quite a treat for the psychologist—and quite a windfall for the company. Less rare, but still very valuable, is the misassigned employee who could make a much more effective contribution in another job—one for which he might be more talented, or better suited temperamentally, or even more compatible with the supervisor. Locating wasted or misused talent that is already on the payroll and helping to nurture it, are jobs for which the psychologist is usually quite well equipped.

He is also well equipped for a more melancholy, but equally necessary, assignment: identifying those men who may be unequal to their jobs or who are unable to grow with a job whose responsibilities are slated to expand. Like the surgeon, the psychologist is usually called in only after trouble has already developed, but even so he can sometimes recommend ways of recouping some of the loss and of preventing a botched assignment from turning into a wrecked career and a total loss of the company's investment in a man. Of course, when he is called in *before* the company commits itself and an employee to a potentially difficult arrangement, the psychologist is sometimes able to offer preventive advice—by spotting hidden deficiencies that are likely to show up in the new job or by recommending adjustments in the timetable or the job description itself which could ease the employee's transition into his new assignment. Or the psychologist may even give the man what amounts to a clean bill of health. (Despite all the

emphasis on “warding off disaster” in the psychologists’ promotion of their own services, they actually do reach positive conclusions about people a good deal of the time!) This kind of endorsement provides some extra assurance that a projected transfer of responsibilities is not going to be a mistake—or, at least, not a foreseeable mistake for which management would kick itself after the damage had been done.

Working Intelligently with Psychologists

The executive’s main job in working with a psychologist is to integrate the psychological findings into the over-all pattern of facts and opinions on which he will base his decisions. The psychologist provides some of this data and tries to use it to clarify the meaning of the rest of the data. For example, he will deal with such questions as whether an applicant’s poor school grades were due to a lack of learning capacity, which is permanent, or to emotional immaturity, which can be outgrown. Or he may try to determine whether a man who was highly effective when making \$200 decisions is likely to be equally proficient if he had to make \$20,000 decisions.

The psychologist’s opinions in such matters can be very helpful. However, his findings are never really simple: if they seem that way to the executive, he is probably neglecting something. The wise executive will be more interested in making his understanding of a problem as complete as possible than in trying to get the facts to lean toward one decision or another before all of them are in. The wise psychologist will be more interested in broadening the executive’s understanding of a problem (and his own, as

well) than in championing any particular cause or trying to swing the executive one way or the other.

But we might as well face the fact that relationships between the executive and his psychological consultant seldom exist in quite so ideal a form as this. The psychologist is, after all, an "authority figure"—someone to whom people traditionally turn for answers to very tough, very important problems. He is frequently expected to offer answers where no clear-cut answer is really possible, whether he likes it or not—and as a matter of fact he very often likes it. What is perhaps more important, the executive often likes it, too, and is all too glad to let the psychologist do the integrating of facts for him and make the decisions for him as well. Sometimes—particularly when the psychologist is involved in an executive development program—this kind of dependency can be excused as a transitional stage through which the young executive must move before he is ready for an "active partnership of equals" with an authority figure. But dependency has a way of perpetuating itself when it offers emotional rewards to both sides—a sense of security to one and a sense of power to the other. Neither the executive nor the psychologist should lose sight of the fact that the only justifiable purpose of such a relationship is to make itself unnecessary—to help the executive grow in insight and perspective to the point where the psychologist is no longer an authority figure to him, but an expert adviser and informant. For his part, the psychologist, if he is worth his salt, will keep an eye on his emotional stake in being an authority figure and see to it that the development of the executive's capacities doesn't run aground on the rocks of egotism.

In dealing with a psychologist, or indeed with any expert, the executive should learn to draw a clear line between fact and opinion. Expert judgment is needed only where the facts are too hazy or incomplete to permit a simple conclusion to be drawn; which is why experts frequently disagree with each other. While such judgments usually represent the best-informed guesses as to what the facts really are, they should never be treated quite as confidently as facts that are plain and indisputable. Most of the incontestable facts of psychological appraisals—like test scores or responses to questionnaires—are in themselves trivial and take on significance only when they are interpreted in the light of theory and the psychologist's opinion. This means that the bulk of what the psychologist presents to the executive will be *guesses* at what the observed facts mean about the problem under study.

Some psychologists shy away from guessing as if there were something reprehensible about it, but among those who are attracted to consulting with businessmen quite the opposite is likely to be true. The executive should not be alarmed about dealing with guesses, since good guesses are the only means of getting results in an uncertain field; but he will want to have some indication from the psychologist as to which guesses fit a lot of facts, which fit a few, and which are just plain hunches with little more than intuition to back them up. Being pinned down in this manner helps the psychologist to sharpen and critically evaluate his own thinking. It also helps the executive to put the various interpretations of the psychologist in their proper perspective in the total picture they are both trying to construct.

Still another hazard to be encountered in any relation-

ship between an executive and an expert is semantics. Both psychologists and businessmen have their own jargon. Psychologists are fond of inventing polysyllabic words and of giving twists of their own to words in common usage, while businessmen like to borrow graphic but unprecise expressions from other people's vocabularies (like "self-starter" as a description of a man with initiative) or dry-as-dust clichés that have been bandied about too much to mean anything very exact any more (like "human relations"). Neither has, in fact, a very good way of communicating with each other (or perhaps even with themselves) and neither has shown much fondness for plain, simple English.

The process of making sure that a psychologist means what you think he means (and vice versa) never really ends—and while this may seem tiresome, it is actually a good thing. There is no better way to straighten out zigzag thinking than to keep insisting on definitions. Centuries ago, Socrates employed this tactic to educate young men who were fonder of generalities than of making themselves clear; and it works as well today as it did then. Clearly, the success of any consulting effort is going to hinge on whether the people involved manage to "tune in" on each other's thinking or simply remain isolated from each other in private worlds of vague and obscure meanings.

Finally, there is the all-important question of how a layman uses his own judgment in the presence of an expert. There is a tendency to fear that the expert will be offended if his own judgment is questioned or if the layman decides that the weight of evidence points elsewhere than the direction indicated by the expert's studies. We are brought up to respect scholarship and to show deference to experience;

but there is a point where common courtesy ends and child-like dependency begins. The mature executive must continually define this point for himself and knows that the expert (whether he is a psychologist or any other kind of specialist) can be just as useful to him when their conclusions do not agree as when they arrive at the same point of view.

2

HOW PEOPLE GET THAT WAY

Any executive who has delved very far into psychological theories knows that they can get mighty esoteric. He quickly loses touch with the expressions and mannerisms by which he is accustomed to judging people and finds himself in a strange world dominated by mathematics or by obscure unconscious compulsions. It is as if the science of human nature was somehow determined to get as far away from the everyday lives of people as it could.

But psychology is not so much the culprit in this as is human nature itself. It is so varied, so hard to pin down and define, that the concepts that try to encompass it have to be very inclusive. In aiming for valid generalizations that will cover a fantastic variety of specific facts, the psychologist has no choice but to get very abstract indeed.

The executive who can tolerate all this generality and reads a little further will discover something else about psychological theories that may seem a little alarming. Many

theories conflict with each other, or at least make no attempt to fit together with one another; and all of them have their ardent advocates and equally ardent opponents amongst psychologists themselves. Psychology is not so much a united, coordinated discipline as it is a conglomeration of theorists who seem to be headed in all directions at once.

Strange as it may seem, this kind of chaos is a good thing. Science has always been more of a stumbling, groping, uncertain passage into the unknown than a methodical march forward. This is especially true of a new science whose frontiers are still close to the limits of common knowledge; and psychology is a very new science, still really getting itself organized and launching explorations in all sorts of directions without much of a coordinated plan. Science progresses by generating as many different ideas as it can, by experimenting with them and gradually fitting together the few that manage to stand the test of experience. A theory is only a tool, and it does not really matter whether it is right or wrong, as long as it helps men to understand things a little better than they could have before the theory existed.

Even though the businessman may be pleased that his psychological friends are so busy concocting theories, he may still wonder which of these ideas are useful to him, which he ought to study and which he ought to ignore. He probably ought to heed Alexander Pope's advice that "a little learning is a dangerous thing" and not get too involved with the more advanced aspects of psychology, unless he is prepared to devote more time and effort to its study than most executives have to spare. For better or

worse, the executive—whose job brings him into contact with more specialized fields of knowledge than any one individual could ever hope to master—has to depend on brief summaries that skim the surface. At best these digests can only describe in broad outline the complexity and detail that lie beneath, and usually lead to oversimplified “understandings” on the part of the people who read them. But even an oversimplified explanation can be workable and give the layman a useful orientation to what the specialist is talking about and what he is doing—provided, of course, that the layman never loses sight of the fact that what he learns in this way *is* oversimplified.

The remainder of this chapter is offered in that spirit—as an admittedly sketchy, but hopefully useful, introduction to what psychologists know about the human personality, how it works and why it sometimes fails to work, all with special reference to adults who are trying to earn a living in modern industry. First of all, to get an overview of the many conflicting points of view that divide the psychologists themselves, we will take a quick tour through the strange and wonderful world of theory. After that we can consider the many-sided question of why people think, act and work in the ways that they do.

The psychology of personality has always suffered from a shortage of hard facts and a surplus of theories. Most of the theories that have been advanced to describe and account for human nature could be grouped together under two headings: those that look upon a personality as an object and study it from the “outside” and those that consider a personality to be not an object at all but simply an

organized way of perceiving things, so that it can only be understood from its own standpoint and has to be studied, as it were, from the "inside."

The "Outside" and "Inside" Approaches to Personality

The "outside" approach to personality is usually taken by psychologists who are eager to have their science reach the same level of precision and objectivity that has been attained by physical sciences like physics and chemistry. While they don't ignore the importance of dreams, fears, wishes and other features of the individual's "inner life," they usually feel that these cannot be studied scientifically—because no one but the individual himself has access to them. Instead, they aim for a complete and reliable description of the individual *as others see him*, in which they hope to find the underlying principles that govern his behavior. This leads them to catalogue people's habits and to classify people according to their most frequently seen behavior. For example, when someone is classified as an "entrepreneur" type or a "submissive" type, he is being assigned to a group of people who usually behave the same way that he does.

Because the outside school is concerned with the different ways in which behavior can be *described*, some of its psychologists have culled their way through unabridged dictionaries in order to amass enormous lists of descriptive terms. After quite a bit of pruning, mostly through a mathematical technique known as "factor analysis" which sorts things out into groups that do not overlap each other, these lists have been reduced to a relatively small number of

traits. A "trait" is a general class of descriptive terms that are similar to each other but not to other terms. The trait of "dominance," for example, includes a family of terms like "assertive" and "confident." The stronger a trait is in an individual's personality, the more likely is he to behave in ways that could be described by the terms in that trait's family of words.

Traits derived in this way are sometimes held to represent the basic, irreducible building blocks of personality. (The exact number of possible traits depends on how you do your analysis, but a dozen is a fairly representative figure.) Armed with such lists of traits, the psychologists of the outside school have developed many tests which aim at measuring the strength of each of them in the personalities of various individuals. These tests usually take the form of questionnaires or check lists of descriptive adjectives. When scored, these tests yield a set of numbers which represent a kind of measurement of the importance of each trait in the testee's personality. These numbers can be plotted on a graph, which usually results in a jagged "profile" that can be compared visually with average profiles attained by various groups of testees.

The idea of describing a personality in terms of a set of numbers or a graph is borrowed directly from aptitude testing, which is, in fact, the grandfather of the outside approach to personality. Aptitudes, which are basic capacities to perform various kinds of mental acts, are not the same as personality traits—although many executives continue to use the terms interchangeably. One might say that an aptitude score shows what somebody could do if he would, while a personality trait tells what he would do if

he could! In other words, aptitudes indicate the probable limits of someone's achievement, while personality traits tell us more about the style, mannerisms and peculiarities by which that achievement would be approached.

The fact that outside methods like personality inventories trace their ancestry to aptitude testing is important, because many of the basic ideas that were worked out for aptitudes have been carried over to the personality field. This has provided psychologists with ammunition for a running debate with each other which has been going on for years and which shows no sign of slowing down. The two key concepts of aptitude testing are validity and reliability, which when boiled down to their simplest terms mean that a test measures what it is supposed to measure (validity) and that it does so in pretty much the same way every time you give it (reliability), so that an individual's score will not change very much if he takes the test again. Psychologists usually consider the intellect to be a fairly constant, unchanging thing; so it makes sense to insist that an aptitude test should yield a fairly constant score for each person who takes it. This "reliability" is built in to the test by choosing questions that are not affected very much by momentary or trivial influences like fatigue or distraction. If this is done carefully enough, the test is more or less "zeroed-in" on a single faculty which is, hopefully, the one it is supposed to measure.

Psychologists of the outside school make the same demands of a personality test: they want it to yield essentially the same score for each testee every time he takes it, and they want it to be correlated with some external form of behavior. Of course, they don't really want to test people

over and over again with the same test but merely to be sure that the scores they get from each person tell something lasting and substantial about him, rather than just reflect a lot of temporary whimsies. The debate arises from the fact that people are full of temporary whimsies, and psychologists disagree as to just how important these are for understanding the personality.

On the one hand there are outside psychologists who say that only that fraction of a person's make-up which is so firmly rooted that it will still be here tomorrow, next week and even next year, is worth studying. The rest is all a meaningless jumble of chance, mistakes, and vagrant impulses. Even if the unchanging core of personality accounts for only a small fraction of the person's behavior, even if it gives only a partial insight into what makes him tick, it is still worthwhile to measure it because it is the only part we can be sure of—the only part of a person we can survey without fear of injecting our own personalities into the picture.

Opposing them are the inside psychologists who say that in the innermost self of everyone is a sort of unguided, over-productive impulse machine that grinds out a continual flood of wishful thoughts and half-baked ideas—so many that we are bound to act on some of them at least some of the time. The fleeting, unreliable character of our thoughts and emotions is not a matter of chance at all but springs directly from the naturally chaotic condition of the mind in its most elementary, primitive aspect. Further, this apparent jumble is not really meaningless; in fact, if you know how to translate it into the language of ordinary logic, it brings you face to face with the basic forces that

animate the person and distinguish him from everybody else. The reliable, constant fraction of personality that the outside psychologist expresses in test scores is nothing more than the visible outcroppings of forces that are pitted against each other within.

The inside psychologists say not only that they learn something meaningful about a person by trying, as it were, to get inside his head and seeing what his thoughts are like in their raw, unorganized state but that this is the only way to really understand him. The outside psychologists counter by saying that there is no foolproof way to get into someone else's head, or even into your own, and that most of the attempts to do so are probably only wild guesses that reveal more about the guesser's personality than his subject's. The inside psychologists say that to measure only the constant and regular features of a personality is to ignore its most important aspect; what you end up with may be accurate and reliable but it is also trivial. The outside psychologists say that to try to interpret somebody else's subjective life from your own subjective standpoint is at best a guessing game that cannot lead to scientific truths about people in general.

The most delightful thing about this controversy is that both sides are right, and for the most part, both sides know it. Nobody denies that fantasies, dreams, and the like, are part of each person's normal mental equipment, and regardless of whether it is strictly "scientific" to try to make sense out of them, there is no reason why something important cannot be discovered in this way at least some of the time. For their part, most inside psychologists will admit, if you pin them down, that it is just as one-sided to neglect the

constant, observable aspect of someone's personality as to overlook the inner, changeable forces. Each side is simply trying to learn something about a different feature of human nature, and each uses the best techniques it can get hold of for its purpose.

The gadgetry and folklore of both the inside and outside psychologists have been carried into the business world for the purpose of personnel evaluation. Sometimes, because both have been commercialized or simply because some people don't know any better, the methods of one group are represented as being better than the methods of the other. Sometimes both are used in combination. Actually, each has advantages over the other for different purposes; but what is more important, either kind of approach in the hands of an expert is just as good as the other. The psychologist is still a more vital part of the equation, for better or worse, than his tools.

The techniques that were spawned by the outside school include aptitude and intelligence tests, personality "inventories," questionnaires and check lists. These are usually well suited to making *actuarial predictions of behavior*—that is, for sorting people out into groups that will probably pass or fail in training, or probably get good or bad supervisory ratings on the job, or, indeed, into groups which will probably meet or fail to meet just about any objective standard you are interested in. This kind of sorting is pretty efficient as far as groups are concerned, even though there will be errors on specific individuals who get put into the wrong group. In effect, these methods can be used to get an informed quotation of the odds on whether a given person can measure up to a given standard of

behavior. When these odds are very long or very short, the predictions are highly efficient and can be very helpful in guiding a decision. But when the odds are not so clear-cut—in other words, when the scores are neither high nor low—the picture is murkier and the predictions start to lose their accuracy. This kind of blurry, middle-score picture occurs more often than not, which is one of the reasons for the oft-repeated warning not to make psychological test scores the sole basis for a decision.

Outside techniques tell nothing about an individual except the extent to which he resembles a group of people with whom we want to compare him. They show the probability that he will do this or that but give no indication of *why* he will do whatever he does, or of what elements could change the picture, or of what might be done to help or hinder the probabilities. In other words, outside techniques can classify people fairly accurately but do not help us to understand them as individuals. That is where the inside techniques come in.

The two major products of the inside school for personnel evaluation are the depth interview and projective tests. Both aim to construct a portrait of the individual's inner world—to see things as he sees them and to find out which motives guide his behavior. Inside methods are always less accurate than outside ones, because the raw data that the psychologist works with is different in every case and has to be interpreted—which is another way of saying that the psychologist has to make a guess, but without the benefit of probability tables! These guesses are sometimes dignified with titles like “clinical intuition” or “dynamic formulations,” but no matter what they are called they are nothing

more than the psychologist's best hunch as to what an incomplete and often mysterious set of data probably means about the person who produced it.

But the inside psychologists, even though they have to feel their way along without the reliable charts and instruments of their outside colleagues, are mining in a much richer lode. When their guesses are right, they produce a richer yield of insight and of potentialities for controlling the situation than the outside methods can. Inside techniques make possible a broad overview of the variety of forces that impinge on every individual, and this enlarges the number of possible decisions that can help him to do a better job. While the outside techniques point far more reliably toward yes-or-no decisions, inside techniques illuminate the vast middle ground of "maybe's": they spell out which forces produce the balance of probabilities, so that the executive can see where he would have to swing the weight of his influence to shift the balance in the desired direction.

By themselves, neither the inside nor the outside methods are "better" as far as personnel evaluation is concerned. The method of choice depends on the kind of information you need and the kind of decision you have to make. For dealing with large groups and trying to separate the sheep from the goats, the outside, actuarial approaches are best. Where a high-accuracy decision about one person or a few people is required, a *combination* of inside and outside approaches is probably best. The inside approaches provide the depth and the richness of detail, while the outside scores provide a check against the more radical kinds of shots-in-the-dark to which the inside approaches are prone.

Normal Personality Changes. No matter which of these psychological tools is used, the information derived from them will have an impermanent character. Data on a human personality is highly perishable stuff, simply because personalities keep changing. To the psychologist who has to go to such lengths to discover something important about it, this chameleon-like quality can be quite exasperating; yet this is an unavoidable occupational hazard that he simply has to put up with as best he can.

The attitudes, interests and activity patterns that make up the personality at any given moment are devices through which the individual conducts his daily give-and-take with the environment. As the pressures imposed by the people and events around him change, the normal person adjusts his own emotional stance to meet them better. As the tides of his own instinctual needs rise and fall, he makes similar adjustments in his posture toward life so as to maximize his chances of getting what he wants. The part of someone's personality that we see in our daily contacts with him is usually an *imperfectly coordinated attempt to strike a workable compromise between constantly changing pressures*—some in the world outside his head, and others in the secret, esoteric world inside his head. This never-ending fancy footwork is what gives life its zest and what gives people their characteristic ups and downs, their fallibility and their individuality.

People vary considerably in the agility with which they can let go of an obsolete attitude toward life or toward themselves and acquire a new one which strikes a better balance between the inner and outer circumstances of their lives. For example, people who are neurotic have gotten

partially bogged down in the basic emotional attitudes of childhood; they are unable to shed the internal viewpoint of a child and continue to make a child's demands on an indifferent adult world. At the extremes of maladjustment are psychotic people whose attempts to meet the adult world have been routed and who have fallen back in confusion and disorder to an infantile stance toward life—one which is completely internal and makes little or no allowance for the world outside. Between the psychotic and the neurotic, on the one hand, and the fortunate few who can shift gears effortlessly whenever they have to do so, on the other, is the broad group of moderately well-adjusted people to which most of us belong. For the "normal" person, life is sometimes a struggle, sometimes a breeze, and most often a humdrum matter of getting along as best he can in a world that could stand a lot of improvements.

The changes that life demands of the personality are not entirely capricious. When the emotional "careers" of many people are studied from the perspective of years or decades, certain more or less regular tides and currents become apparent. People tend to go through phases which are characteristic of certain ages and stations in life. This is just as true of adults as of children, except that in adults the phases last longer and blend into each other by slow degrees, rather than by almost overnight transformations.

Long-range planning for people has to take account of these shifts of attitudes, interests and motives. To ignore them by assuming that someone will go on displaying the same traits of temperament indefinitely is simply to invite early obsolescence to one's planning. The executive who

makes personnel decisions has to learn to look upon any evaluation of an individual—no matter how expertly it was made—as simply a cross-sectional view of an ongoing process, taken at a particular point in time and likely to grow progressively less accurate as time goes on. This means that personnel decisions should not be made on the basis of evaluation data that is more than a few years old. It's much more accurate (and less expensive, in the long run) to base all decisions on up-to-date psychological findings. It also means that the executive owes it to himself to acquire a general understanding of the changes that normally occur in people's personalities during the years when he will have to make decisions about them, that is, from early adulthood through later maturity.

Personality Growth and Careers

The process of growing up emotionally does not end suddenly when someone is old enough to vote, or graduates from college, or takes his first adult job. As a matter of fact, it never ends. "Growing up" is a matter of preparing one's self emotionally to meet the demands that life makes upon him, and these demands keep changing. For the typical young American male entering the job market, these demands are that he start supporting himself and do his first serious experimenting with a career. Later on, when he marries, it becomes more urgent that he maximize his earning power and settle into the career that offers him the best opportunities.

Most young men fall into their careers quite by accident. They wind up in the kind of work they will spend their lives doing because they know someone who can get them

started in a job, or because a personnel recruiter seeks them out and sells them on going to work for a certain company, or because an advertisement catches their eye. Some, it is true, know exactly what they want and go straight toward it; others seek vocational counseling from aptitude testers and try to follow their advice. But with a great many young men the début of a career is a strictly hit-or-miss proposition.

It is quite usual for a young man to drift uncertainly from job to job until he finds one that suits him. Eventually, however, outside pressures force him to stay in one place, or at least in one kind of job, whether he has found the "right" one or not. The net result of all this random trial and error is that many men commit themselves to vocations for which they are not especially suited or which don't particularly interest them. Others, who may be reasonably well fitted to the kind of work they do, will blame various personal dissatisfactions on their jobs and try to set things aright by making a switch to another company or even to another kind of work.

The work of the world manages to get done, however, despite the many glaring imperfections of the system; perhaps because a "perfect fit" between a man and his job is not really necessary for the survival of either of them. The main effect of this widespread misfitting is not an economic calamity, but something more subtle: a lack of intense involvement with one's work, a loss of pride in craftsmanship, a tendency to look upon one's job as a necessary evil rather than as one of the principal satisfactions of life. Men who escape this kind of dissatisfaction altogether are as rare as they are fortunate. The other extreme—of men who

are so disenchanted with their work that they become unable to perform it—is rare but by no means unheard-of. In the middle, leading lives of “quiet desperation” with an occasional memorable moment, are the rest of us.

People used to be much more completely identified with their work than they are now. Many family names are nothing more than the job titles of our ancestors, and these used to fix a man's station in society as well as just telling who his relatives were. Today we spend less time at our jobs and have more outside interests than before, and it is possible for a man to derive his dignity, his sense of self-worth and his purpose in life, from something entirely apart from the way he earns his living.

This set of feelings through which we mark ourselves off from each other, as individuals in our own right, is known by psychologists as the “self-concept.” It is seldom more than a hazy, uncertain thing, partly because people seldom confront the ultimate question of “Who am I?” very thoughtfully, but also because most people are not very individualistic and allow their minds to be filled up by other people's ideas. The evolution of a clear self-concept—or “finding one's self,” to use a cliché that means the same thing—is one of the great emotional adventures of life. It is also one of the principal avenues through which maturation and normal changes in adult personality occur.

Finding an appropriate career field and “finding one's self” are closely related: in fact they are part and parcel of the same psychological growth process through which the young man gropes his way toward a satisfactory way of life. We usually think of jobs in terms of the special skills or aptitudes they require, but it is also true that different

jobs offer different kinds of emotional rewards (and pressures). People don't leave their emotions behind them when they go to work, much as it might simplify matters for everybody if they did; instead, they look to their jobs for a sense of importance, for a feeling of security and for opportunities to make their marks upon the world.

No matter how well-fitted a person is for a job in terms of his aptitudes for it, he is not likely to do more than a halfhearted job if he doesn't find some kind of satisfaction for his emotional needs in his work. Therefore, as the young man's self-concept gradually emerges and becomes more clearly defined, he is better able to select the kind of work to which he can give everything he's got. If he is lucky, he reaches this point while he still has a choice—before he gets pigeonholed by the jobs on his résumé or by the stark necessity of making a living in the field he knows best. If he is not so lucky, he will make his discovery too late or not at all. In that case he has to look elsewhere than in his job for his prestige and his feeling of amounting to something. He may look for these things on the golf course or in his home workshop or in front of a television set—or indeed anywhere. But such a person will not feel a commitment to his work and will devote only as much energy and time to it as he feels he must. His efficiency, in other words, dwindles until it hovers indefinitely around the break-even point.

As time goes on, however, men look to their jobs for different kinds of emotional rewards. In the beginning, as a rule, they want variety and stimulation and a chance to do something "interesting." A little later they start getting bitten by the ambition-bug and want opportunities to "get

ahead"—in a job with a "future." Pretty soon, however, the great weeding out begins. While nearly everyone goes on professing his interest in advancement to more important, better-paying jobs, only a few really mean it. When most men talk of ambition they are dreaming of the privileges that go with bigger jobs and are paying only lip service to the responsibilities that go along with them or to the exertion that would be necessary to earn them.

More and more, security enters the picture as the predominant motive that guides their working lives. The job becomes less of an end in itself and more of a means which makes possible the pursuit of other ends—more satisfying ones that are easier to attain. The job becomes an emotional lifeline and is surrounded with safeguards which guarantee that it will not be severed—and which also make it unnecessary to compete, to perfect one's abilities or to reach for the limits of one's own capacity to achieve.

Some men reach this kind of an emotional dead end rather early in their careers, while others reach it later or never at all. It is not necessary to keep being promoted or to make more and more money to preserve a feeling of zest for one's work—although that certainly helps! But what is most important is that the work provides a means for making the individual's favorite ideas about himself come true. In other words, if his job makes his self-concept plausible, so that other people accept him on his own favorite terms, he can go on devoting himself to his work with relish and enthusiasm for a long time. If, on the other hand, he finds it impossible to translate his affectations into reality via the way he earns his living, he is likely to retreat from his job in at least two ways. First, in order to protect

his ego he may convince himself that the job is not particularly important to him, except as a necessary way of keeping the wolf away from the door. Second, he may seek an outside interest—which may be constructive or merely an attitude of bitterness and envy—to which he devotes the “surplus” mental energy that he no longer invests in his job.

Eventually, the young man finds his job-niche or gets crammed into one by fate. He then begins the long, hard process of trying to use his career as a vehicle for his ambitions. Over the years a great attrition takes place, leaving fewer and fewer men still with a full-scale emotional commitment to their work. But the time comes when the “future” is no longer off in the distance but *here* and when potentialities are already about as developed as they ever will be. It becomes increasingly clear that whatever old dreams have not been made to come true already, or at least made to come almost true, will probably never be realized at all. This “point of no return” is approached by almost imperceptible stages until at last it becomes a basic fact of life that can no longer be denied.

The emotional crises that are sometimes touched off by this “loss of a future” have been dramatized in plays and novels and can be quite severe in real life, too. But they are rare, because by this time so many men will have long-since “retired,” at least emotionally, from the arena in which men struggle for money, power and prestige. It is the doers and the leaders, not their passive and uninvolved followers, who suffer most when time starts to run out. To keep their peace of mind they have to undergo a switchover of self-concepts, from thinking of themselves as men who

can anticipate a glorious future, to being men with a glorious past which they can look back upon with pride. This is very hard to do, and sometimes leads to the unhappy spectacle of a topnotch man becoming, at least for a time, irritable, petulant and obstinate. Eventually, these moods clear up and the transition is made in one way or another. And, of course, it is by no means inevitable that this adjustment has to be a stormy one: most men make it gradually, gracefully, without fanfare or complaint.

Throughout their lives, by various routes, people evolve attitudes and habits which fit their self-concepts more closely. They become "more and more like themselves"—gravitating toward an actual role in life which matches their private estimations of their own worth and potentialities. These "private estimates" are not necessarily conscious, or flattering, or realistic. It would be nice if they were, because a fairly good thumbnail definition of a mentally healthy person would be someone who was fully aware of his own basic attitudes toward himself and who thought of himself in a wholesome way without being vain or affected. But it is quite common for people to accept some rather strange notions about themselves, and even though they may not recognize these attitudes, they *act as if they were true*. In other words, many people are unwittingly driven toward a way of life that is consistent with a self-appraisal which may—or may not—do them justice.

Under-Achievers and Over-Achievers. The classical example of this phenomenon is the so-called "under-achiever"—the man of obvious talents and potentialities who chronically disappoints everyone by falling far short of what they

know he can do. Such people usually have a long list of plausible reasons why they have never gotten much accomplished, and may be quite sincerely chagrined about the whole thing. Sometimes they drift from job to job, or else get stuck in some permanent backwater in which they cannot make much use of their talents. Yet even if they are given special "breaks" and opportunities they somehow manage to fall short of expectations every time. Eventually people lose patience with them and ignore them, so that they drift off into obscurity.

What makes an under-achiever? When psychologists try to find out by groping through the lower depths of such a person's personality, they often come upon some extraordinary things—like a stubborn conviction that one is actually stupid and inept, regardless of all evidence to the contrary. The self-concept is under no obligation to make sense, and it very often doesn't. When this is the case, the person's behavior isn't likely to make sense, either. If an intelligent man has become convinced, perhaps even in childhood, that he isn't capable of handling much responsibility on his own, then he may very well turn into a "perennial assistant" who lives forever in the shadow of men with no more real ability than he has. In this way, a thirty-five-year-old executive may retain the awe-struck deference of the "chronic junior."

Under-achievers are not at all uncommon, particularly among underprivileged groups where feelings of shame and futility are widespread. But the phenomenon can also be found at any other level of society. On a national scale, under-achievement must constitute a tremendous waste of potential brain power.

Fortunately, the self-concept usually evolves in the course of time into something more appropriate to one's actual station in life; but it need not be in any hurry to evolve this way, which is why some people are typically "late bloomers"—and why others (the under-achievers) never really catch up with life.

At the other extreme from the under-achiever is the over-achiever—the phenomenal person who manages to get an enormous amount of mileage out of some very ordinary abilities. Such people frequently arouse the envy of brighter but less persistent men. Their exploits are usually credited to luck, ruthlessness, or to smart subordinates. While all three may play a part, the over-achiever gets most of his results by the simple device of working harder and longer than anybody else.

What makes the over-achiever "tick"? Oddly enough, it may often be the same kind of derogatory attitude toward the self that holds back the under-achiever. But there is this important difference: the over-achiever cannot tolerate being condemned to unimportance, and so he erects a rather glorified "counterfeit" image of himself—a bogus self-concept which he knows, in his heart of hearts, is a sham. But he proceeds to insist that this *is* what he is really like and labors mightily to prove it to everybody else. This kind of desperate bending-over-backward to prove something that isn't true has been responsible for many a fortune and many a distinguished career. In other words, counterfeit self-concepts can work just as well as real ones in guiding the behavior of their possessors. Given enough gall and enough implacable determination, an over-achiever can leave plenty of more brilliant men far behind

him. (Some psychologists would doubt whether the over-achievers ever get much satisfaction from the wealth or power they accumulate. But regardless of whether they are happy or miserable, their impact on the business world is often terrific.)

When a man is put into a job that doesn't fit his self-concept, there is bound to be some awkwardness until—and unless—he adjusts by modifying his pet ideas about himself. For example, if a young man who is accustomed to having decisions made for him should suddenly find himself in a position of command—which happens fairly often in industry and the armed services—he is likely to temporize, to search frantically for precedents and to lean on any subordinate who seems to know what he's doing. Regardless of his actual rank, he will behave according to his assumed or unconscious "rank." Or, when someone who has been accustomed to being a big fish in a little pond is suddenly transferred to a big pond, he is likely to swagger at first, and then pout when people ignore him or laugh at him, and finally—if he is adaptable enough to cast aside a useless affectation—he will accept his new status and stop pretending that he is somebody special.

Compatibility

As people go through life they encounter some individuals who help them to make their self-concepts come true and others who make it more difficult. We like people who tacitly accept our favorite notions about ourselves and dislike those who don't accept them. If we meet someone who not only doesn't buy our pet ideas about ourselves but actively undertakes to disprove them, we don't merely

dislike him—we loathe him. He is hitting us where it hurts the most—in our vanity.

Compatibility between two or more people seems to be, at least in part, a matter of willingness to accept each other's self-concepts, or at least not to contest them. It is easy enough to live and let live when the other fellow is not usurping a role you want to play and when you are not interested in taking over his bailiwick, either. But when this is not the case—when two people are each intent on having the same role all to themselves—they may very well decide that the world isn't big enough for both of them. If circumstances compel them to work together anyway, they will tend to snipe at each other, to marshal friends and "allies" into opposing teams and to withhold cooperation from each other when this can be done with impunity—unless, of course, they both have the good fortune of being mature enough to take each other (and themselves) with a grain of salt.

In fact, it is one of the hallmarks of maturity to have a little perspective toward one's self-concept, to know quite candidly how much of it is fact and how much is mere titillating self-deception, and to be able to take one's self no more seriously than the facts themselves would require. But this is a rare quality—so rare, in fact, that it is not even "normal" in a statistical sense, but rather a desirable peculiarity! This means, in effect, that nearly everyone has his share of emotional blind spots and tender sensitivities, which in turn make him vulnerable to feeling "threatened" by anyone who manages to put his finger on these weaknesses. Thus the seeds of a personality clash with *someone* are present in nearly all of us.

It is all very well to pooh-pooh personality clashes by calling them childish or to cry out for more maturity among grownups. Both attitudes are right, but neither contributes very much to the real and often excruciating problem of helping people work together without demoralizing each other. There is no avoiding the fact that in this imperfect world, immaturity will continue to be rampant for a long time, if only because it is the product of an enormous array of social forces that cannot be tinkered with very easily. The immediate problem, then, is not to exorcise immaturity by denouncing it or by launching wholesale surface-scratching "improvement" programs, but rather to make the best of a bad situation. The executive has little choice but to deal with the symptoms of the problem, while the social scientists busy themselves with attempts to find a feasible way to get at the roots of it.

The "symptoms" of emotional incompatibility are well known: bickering, the growth of rival factions, minimal cooperation, sluggish performance. The "cure" depends on the severity of the conflict and the importance of the people involved to the over-all functioning of the company. At one extreme the most practical course of action may be simply to let the conflict go on—to grin and bear it, because there is no way to disengage the incompatible parties without disrupting everybody else's work. Two vital men who grate on each other's nerves may be best off, in other words, by making up their minds to suffer along together as well as they can—if neither can be sacrificed and both can stand the gaff.

Another "solution" is simply to keep such people apart. The most common objection to this is that it is an admis-

sion of defeat—a surrender to the mulishness of grown men who ought to know better. Yet they very often *don't* know better, and it is better to salvage at least something from a hopeless relationship than to wait for it to deteriorate altogether.

It is unfashionable to admit that any situation is hopeless, particularly if it involves human beings with their presumably infinite potentialities for growth. In theory, perhaps, a way can be found to open every man's eyes to truth and reason; but in actual practice this can be very hard to do. Reason can only influence a mind that is open to it; when one's most treasured ideas about one's self are under attack, reason may be unable to find an unguarded, unlocked entryway through which to reach the mind at all. Reason works best with the calm, objective people who need it the least. In other words, when the emotional fever of a personality clash has risen until neither party can retreat without seeming to capitulate, the situation may indeed be hopeless as far as getting continued cooperation is concerned. Some kind of separation, at least temporarily, and quite possibly permanently, is called for. Sometimes, after tempers have cooled a little, it is possible to talk things over and reestablish a working relationship on a more tolerable basis for both parties.

A variation on the "solution" of keeping conflicting people apart is simply to assign potential squabblers to different working groups. To do this successfully would obviously require a lot of insight into what made these particular people tick, as well as a solid grounding in psychology and an oversized quota of luck. Yet a few intrepid psychologists and personnel men are not afraid to

try it, since even a small degree of success in trying to predict compatibility can more than repay the effort. In a gross way, at least, one can study other people's self-concepts and try to estimate how seriously they are taken and how flexibly the person would react to an implied threat to them. For example, if it is very clear that one person fancies himself an authority in his field, enjoys being consulted and becomes annoyed when his ideas are contradicted, then he would be a poor choice for being teamed with a man who takes nothing for granted; yet he might be a good partner for a man who admired the sense of certainty in others that he lacked in himself. But clear-cut compatibility patterns are seldom encountered and are therefore hard to anticipate.

Most people, of course, manage to tolerate most other people at least well enough to be civil and to get things done together. In fact, most "personality clashes" in business are either tolerable to both parties, or more distressing to one than the other. As long as the conflict is not implacable and the people involved are still capable of a detached attitude, one may attempt the best remedy of all, which is to bring both of them back to reality, to patch up bruised egos as well as possible and to redirect them both to the business at hand—which does *not* include fencing with each other to see which is the smartest or most important of the two.

Why People Work

Ultimate questions are sometimes so obvious that they never get asked. The ultimate question faced by the psychologist who studies business problems and tries to help

solve them is: "Why do people work?" The answer seems deceptively self-evident. Yet a little reflection will show that it must be extremely complex; and in fact psychologists are only beginning to approach this question in a systematic way. They have worked out elaborate theories to explain the psychological events of childhood, which (no matter where you draw the line between child and adult) includes only a small fraction of a lifetime. There are also some detailed explanations of how sex lives become wholesome or peculiar, as the case may be; but even in the most exotic people this kind of activity does not take up more than a minor portion of their total lives. (One might not be on such firm ground by trying to make the same assertion about daydreams and fantasies, however.) There are, finally, an abundance of theoretical ideas that have been worked out to help us understand how people get pushed over the fuzzy line that separates the mentally healthy from the mentally ill, although even the most pessimistic estimates would put only about 20 per cent of the population in the latter category and very few of these for more than a small fraction of their lives. Working, which, with the possible exception of sleep, occupies the lion's share of each person's life and which is intimately connected with his morale, his social status and his basic attitudes toward life and toward himself, has been given a mere smattering of scientific attention. There are probably few (if any) psychologists around who could give a detailed answer to the question of "Why do people work?" that would satisfy a majority of their colleagues.

Be that as it may, psychologists, executives and the man-in-the-street have been *assuming* for years that they know

the answer. There is no shortage of simple rules of thumb which purport to "explain" the underlying psychology of working, and many of them have considerable substance. Their main fault is that they present only a fragment of a big, complicated, ever-changing picture.

Some of the more common assumptions are that people work only because they have to in order to survive, or because they want to enjoy the better things in life, or—in a few cases—because they are driven by an inner compulsion to get certain things done. Then there are more sophisticated explanations which revolve around aptitudes and interests, which hold that people work because they are naturally attracted to jobs that they can perform well. Others emphasize motivation and say that when someone is properly fired-up with ambition he will work hard at just about anything, but that when his drive fizzles out there may be no job at all that he will handle in more than a desultory way. There is an element of truth in all of these. But to indicate, even in a rough way, what is involved in the psychology of work requires a very broad canvas. Only a rough sketch will be attempted here—partly because this topic could fill up a book of its own and partly because the author does not have a bookful or even a chapterful of ideas on the subject.

First of all, it is obvious that there must be both outside and inside forces that affect the kind and quality of work a person will do. Everyone faces the necessity of providing a livelihood for himself or of getting someone else to do this by selling his time, knowledge and skill to someone else who uses them to sell things to somebody else, and so on *ad infinitum*. The first element in the equation, and prob-

ably the most important one, is that people work because they must: they have no other choice.

Another outside element is the fact that people are bound together by a system of obligations and expectations. By honoring our promises to one person we obligate him to keep his promises to us, and, by extension, society itself is held together by a cement of such mutual agreements, whether they be written or unwritten. With the exception of a small and troublesome group of people whom psychologists call "psychopaths," who seem to be pretty much immune from the grip that honor and duty clamp on the rest of us, just about everyone is prevailed upon to do certain things because other people expect it of them. For men, and for an increasing number of women, there is a strong social pressure to be gainfully employed whether that happens to be economically necessary or not.

Most people are therefore under two powerful *outside* compulsions to work, which operate regardless of what their *inside* motives are like. Yet there are always inside motives, peculiar to the individual and varying in the extent to which they can influence his outside behavior. In men, and to a lesser degree in women, these personal motives are very likely to select the job-career as one of the principal stages for the enactment of private dramas—in which the individual is his own playwright and director, his own villain and hero, his own audience, critic, and fan. His aspirations contend with his fears and his virtues do battle with his vices, all in the context of a series of jobs through which he tries to make his secret wishes for himself come true. Whether he wants to be a tycoon, a craftsman,

an indispensable specialist or just a "good provider," he can reach for it in his job; and if he happens to be haunted by a neurotic compulsion to suffer the humiliation of failure, he can carry out that tragic need on the stage of his working career too.

In our society people are rated in each other's eyes partly—perhaps largely—on the basis of what they do to earn a living and how successfully they are able to do it; and since most people are conscious of this they tend to commit far more emotion to their careers than they may seem to do. But they commit the emotions of weakness and timidity along with those of determination and strength: their whole complex mixture of desires goes to work with them, so that the final result is strongly affected by whether their need to make something of themselves is greater, balanced or outweighed by their feelings of inadequacy and their secret shames.

It is true, too, that an especially strong talent or gift will tend to find expression in work, because it is more likely to lead to the kinds of results that the individual wants to achieve in his work. The same is true of a skill which has been developed by training to a high degree: the more it is used, the greater are the individual's chances of winning money, fame or the craftsman's satisfaction in a job well done. But very few of us are so extraordinarily talented, or so superbly trained, that we are attracted to our "natural" work as surely as a moth is to light. The work of the world gets done, for the most part, by people of moderate endowments and haphazard training; and the ones who accomplish the most are not necessarily the wisest or the most

thoroughly schooled. Motivation seems to be the key factor which determines how energetically a talent will be used; in fact, it makes very little sense to think about talent and motivation apart from each other. Both affect the nature and quality of work; and if either is lacking the individual is under a terrible handicap.

Leadership also plays a role. Effective leadership provides the ideas and discipline which the individual may lack, enabling him to reach a level of performance of which he might have been incapable by himself, and—ideally—helping him gradually to develop these qualities within himself. Leadership usually plays a fortuitous role, in that the people who need it the most don't necessarily get it. For many young men who emerge into the job market with foggy ideas of what they would like to do and little or no capacity to keep their noses to the grindstone, a skilled supervisor is a great boon who can easily spell the difference between a successful future and a dismal one.

Emotional maturity is also important: it releases the individual from the fetters and blinders of his own emotions and makes it possible for him to focus the full power of his energy and skills on his job, rather than dissipate them in futile cowering and excuse making. As the individual matures emotionally, he becomes more efficient in the use of his strong points, less likely to succumb to his own weaknesses or to outside stresses.

Compatibility is yet another element in the equation. The man who is stimulated by his associates and by the prevailing atmosphere of his company is more likely to be productive than one who is at loggerheads with one or

more of the people he works with or who finds his company depressing or humiliating or simply stodgy. The good man who suddenly goes into inexplicable decline or the lack-luster plodder who suddenly "catches fire" and becomes highly productive may very well have experienced a morale change that is traceable to the arrival of new working associates or the loss of old ones.

The lament that someone could have done so much better "if he'd only had the right opportunity" is frequently a rationalization; yet sometimes it deserves to be taken seriously. Many a potential genius has probably languished for the lack of a chance to show what he could do. And a very ordinary man who gets the right combination of "breaks" has been known to rise to the top, simply because he has the opportunity to do all he can with all he has.

To all these many elements we might as well add luck—or chance, or fate, or whatever you would call the combination of circumstances that sometimes brings all the right elements together at the same time for one person, but visits another person at the wrong times or never at all. This is, of course, just another way of saying that even an elaborate equation, such as we have outlined above, will not explain everything and that there is still a great deal that we need to know about why people work in the ways that they do. And, as if this were not a serious enough confession, we must also add that this rather ponderous set of elements gives only a fleeting insight into the psychological forces that sway a person in his job.

Be that as it may, here is a rough formula which will give little comfort to those who hunger for simplicity and less

still to those who want an exact way of deciding whether or not a particular person is the right one for a particular job. But it does try to take account of the many elements that go into the psychological potpourri that, in the final analysis, is likely to spell the difference between a good job performance and a bad one:

People work in the way that they do because they know that they must work, and because they want to please other people who expect them to work, and because they are driven by a particular set of motives and ideas about themselves which they try to live up to in their jobs, and because of their particular pattern of aptitudes and interests, and because of the kind of leadership they have received and are receiving, and because of their level of emotional maturity, and because of their compatibility with their immediate working companions and their company's over-all emotional atmosphere, and because of the opportunities they have had, and in large measure because of that ineffable quality called luck. All of these reasons impinge on each person simultaneously to affect the way he works—for a while, until one or more of these factors change.

That's quite a mouthful. Yet as any psychologist who has gone deeply into the question can tell you, it only scratches the surface. Even so, there are some important practical messages to businessmen in this big, unwieldy equation. To the executive who keeps looking for the quick, simple test or formula that will tell him who will work hard and who won't, the message is simply: "Stop kidding yourself." To the executive who berates himself for making a poor personnel decision after carefully investigating beforehand,

the message is: "Don't be too hard on yourself—you were up against an enormous problem." And to the executive who has a good "batting average" when it comes to picking people, the message is: "Stay on your toes—the odds are against you."

3

THE COMPANY'S "PERSONALITY"*

One favorite bit of folklore about management is that all of its actions are based on a cold analysis of hard facts. As long as mere flesh-and-blood executives are at the helm, however, their decisions are going to be affected (sometimes a lot and sometimes only a little) by some very human influences that have nothing to do with either facts or logic. Sometimes the facts are too hazy to provide reliable guidelines, or sometimes an executive will trust his hunches more than he trusts the facts. In any case, it's a rare executive who has not had to "fly blind" at some point in his career by putting his faith in his instincts.

Such guesswork probably cannot be eliminated, if only

* Parts of this chapter are taken from an article by the author entitled "The Company Personality," which was published in *The Management Review* in March, 1959. Quotation by permission of the American Management Association, Inc.

because human nature often seems to demand a chance to use intuition, regardless of whether better ways of deciding are available. But the forces that help to mold these guesses *can* be understood, by analyzing the fundamental aims and methods of the company. These are seldom obvious—they are obscured by being so firmly accepted that no one questions or examines them. By knowing its own central motives better, the company can avoid the futility of attempting to work at cross purposes with them.

The kinds of hunches a company will follow in the absence of reliable facts (or, sometimes, in spite of the facts) frequently reflect *a common core of subjective attitudes among key executives toward key business problems*. These hidden attitudes give the company a distinct atmosphere and philosophy of its own, making it a different kind of place to work in than any other company. We can therefore refer to them collectively as the company's "personality."

The "personality" of a company is basically an expression of the collective dispositions of its key men toward its key problems. The analogy with the individual personality holds on several points:

- Each company personality is unique—despite superficial similarities, every company has a different working atmosphere from any other.
- There is a strong *emotional* element to any company personality—that is, it tends to reflect hopes, attitudes, and biases of management to at least as great an extent as its knowledge and reasoning power.
- It is rare for executives of a firm to have much *awareness* of their company's personality as such. Insight—that

is, a realistic self-appraisal—is nearly as difficult to attain about one's company as about one's self.

This personality enters the decision-making process in various ways: many key policies will be repeatedly influenced by attitudes which form a pattern that is more or less unique to that company. A company selects certain goals for itself and is not satisfied with others; it is compatible with certain managerial methods (and people) and not with others. It acquires rule-of-thumb guidelines for action and “unwritten laws” for judging the value and performance of any individual in the company—in a word, it acquires an outlook on business life that is distinctly its own.

Just as management needs an accurate audit of its finances, its productive capacity and its potential markets in order to run its business wisely, it also needs an insight into its own working assumptions and the normal—but hidden—feelings that affect its decisions. The alternative is to be controlled by them. To be more specific:

- A frequent cause of job failure by highly qualified executives is incompatibility with the company personality.
- Costly programs that are subsequently abandoned are often misguided attempts to break away from or alter the company personality.
- Outmoded or inefficient methods may be continued—and even “justified”—when they are too intimately tied to the personality that the company evolved in its earlier days.

Even though its existence is seldom recognized, the company personality has an important bearing on the company's fate. In fact, one might say it is important *because* it is so rarely recognized. In large measure this personality

consists of a body of traditions and assumptions about the nature of the business that are rarely questioned—in fact, rarely even put into words. It therefore tends to contain the company's blind spots as well as its unsuspected assets. An unexamined company personality, like an uninsightful individual, will be likely to keep acting out the same predetermined role, unable to react flexibly to changing conditions.

Even when executives recognize the company's tastes and preferences for what they are, without having to pretend that they are necessarily logical or realistic, it is hard to get a really thorough understanding of the company personality without making a deliberate study of it. When this is done, three factors usually emerge as the main shaping forces of the company personality: the company's economic position, its history and the temperaments of its "pace-setters" or dominant members.

Economic Factors. These are the most obvious of the influences that mold the company personality. One might even assume, at first glance, that the tactics worked out by a company to give it a competitive advantage would spread throughout the company's operations and become habitual, thereby setting the tone for future operations. But the truth is not quite so simple. People of differing temperaments can work out vastly different—and equally successful—tactics to meet the same market conditions.

For example, consider two banks of approximately equal size in the same city. One chose to expand its working funds by aggressively seeking a greater share of the area's depositors. So it built drive-in branches, promoted a save-by-mail program and stressed a public image of helpfulness

and convenience to the small depositor. The other bank mechanized its accounting procedures, deliberately preserved the traditional conservative décor of its downtown branches and promoted its trust and estate planning service. Each grew—attracting, of course, a different segment of the population—and each is convinced that its own method of expansion is the “right way.” Both ways are “right,” of course—right for the tastes, temperament and tolerance for risks of their management. The effectiveness of a company personality has to be measured against the capacities of the people who make it up, as well as against the company’s economic potentialities.

Historical Factors. Particularly among firms which have been established for years or which have been under continuous management by one relatively small group, traditions tend to take on the power of authority. “We’ve always done it that way” becomes a sufficient reason for continuing to do it that way. But in recent years the company that clings steadfastly to the habits that originally got it off the ground has been becoming an exception, rather than a rule. More and more companies have been calling for infusions of new blood and new ideas to meet the challenge of a dynamically expanding economy.

But whether the new blood energizes the old company or merely puts it at cross purposes with itself depends, once again, on the people involved. For example, one family-owned company that made patent medicines decided to expand by calling in a new management team. In short order the new men negotiated the company’s first large-scale, long-term loan, acquired an ethical drug firm as a subsidiary, started building a research staff and launched

an aggressive sales and advertising campaign. Although the company prospered, the owners grew disenchanted with the new president and his team, largely because his flamboyant, extravagant mannerisms seemed to suggest a lack of sound judgment. Gradually, despite the company's continued success, they became convinced that they were courting disaster with such a man in office, and asked for his resignation.

Another firm which had been established for years in the agricultural chemical field also decided to call in a new managerial group. A similar expansion and diversification took place, but in this case the major stockholders developed such strong faith in the new president that they gave him a progressively freer hand to remake the company as he saw fit. He too was an energetic, dramatic sort of person. The difference between the two companies' stories, of course, is one of compatibility—the chemical firm's owners were able to admire the same characteristics in their president that the drug firm's owners couldn't tolerate in theirs.

Dominant Personalities

At times one man or a few men will put their personal stamp so unmistakably on their companies that their ideas and attitudes are perpetuated in company policy even after they are gone. Such men are not necessarily forceful types who carve out a company after their own image; some of them, in fact, do not even have top-level authority. The company takes on their traits without knowing it, both because these traits help the company to survive and because they give its members a sense of belonging, which in turn promotes loyalty, cooperation and morale. Just as

individual personalities can clash, an individual can clash with a "company personality"; and whether we like it or not, the individual will usually be the loser in such a contest, as this case history illustrates:

An electrical components manufacturing firm was founded by a gentle, modest man who happened to be an engineering genius. His wife, as it happened, was something of a business genius, so the firm grew quite rapidly and became nationally recognized in its field.

The wife, by far the more hardheaded and shrewd of the pair, realized from the first that she should stay in the background and let her husband become known as the spokesman for the organization. While she wielded the power behind the throne, he wandered amiably among customers, employees and reporters, listening attentively to anyone who wanted to talk to him and offering occasional gems of homespun wisdom in reply. He had no affectations and was very popular. His employees revered him, his customers trusted him implicitly and the company itself basked in the unusual position of being liked by everybody.

After he died his wife retired from active management of the company. One of her last acts was to select a new general manager. Such a man, she felt, should embody both her late husband's low-pressure charm and her own incisive business judgment. The man she chose was her oldest son, who, as it happened, had a good deal more of his mother's toughness than his father's wistfulness in him. While he was by no means a discourteous person, the contrast between him and his father was striking. While the father had been on first-name terms with nearly all of his employ-

ees, the son preferred to keep his relationships correct and even a little distant. He drove hard but fair bargains with customers and suppliers. He was, in other words, a good businessman who had stepped into the shoes of a good Samaritan. In any other company he would have been respected; in this one, because the stamp of his father's personal magnetism still permeated everything, he was heartily disliked by all.

Interestingly, the employees still thought the company was a fine place to work, and customers still thought it a good firm to do business with. But the general manager became the butt of jokes and was looked upon as a sort of misfit—and a tendency developed to seek out his assistants and subordinates with matters that should ordinarily have been taken directly to him. It was as if everyone were trying, unconsciously, to make the company run without him. His personality could not be incorporated into the company's, nor could he impose his on the company's. Something had to give.

Fortunately, he was able to realize that he could not, as his mother had hoped, be both genial and efficient at the same time. To keep his authority from being undermined altogether, he too would have to retire behind the scenes to make the decisions while his lieutenants did the contact work. The arrangement worked out better than he had dared to hope. Employees grinned cheerily if he happened to walk by; customers sought him out and asked his opinions. They could like him for what he actually was, but while he made the impossible attempt to substitute for his father he could only be regarded as a fraud.

"Types" of Company Personalities

Company personalities, like individual ones, do not fall very readily into neatly ordered categories—each is unique in many ways. Still, there are a number of major managerial issues on which any company must take some kind of a position, and it is possible to describe any company personality partly by its attitudes on these issues. For example, the company's sales policy may be aggressive or, at the other extreme, passive; and its attitudes toward its employees may be paternalistic or, again going to the other extreme, impersonal.

Rating company personalities on these—and other—factors results in only a sketchy description of each of them, but it does make it possible to *compare* them and even to make rough predictions of how they might react to various kinds of business problems. For example, an impersonal, aggressive company is likely to respond much more flexibly to a surplus of personnel than would a paternal, passive company which was committed by tradition to a career program for its employees. A paternal, aggressive company would probably attract men who were more willing to sacrifice extra time and effort than would an impersonal, passive company. While no personality (company or individual) is completely predictable, the more you know about it, the more accurately can you anticipate its behavior.

A Paternal, Passive Company. A metropolitan transit company grew up with its city, and by the time it passed its hundredth birthday it had long since been regarded as an established local institution—more like the public library or a hospital than like a private commercial enter-

prise. The company is ably but conservatively run and has a reputation for lifetime employment of its men.

Since it has already expanded about as much as it can be expected to, the company offers very slow advancement for its employees. Only death, disability or retirement creates vacancies for promotion. There is no mandatory retirement age. While the company has no trouble attracting qualified new employees, it tends to lose a heavy percentage of them before they have completed ten years of service. Unfortunately, the losses include many of the more promising younger men, who leave because they feel that is the only way to advance before they become old. They are easily replaced, but the caliber of seasoned young employees from whom future supervisors will have to be chosen is getting discernibly lower.

Over the years the employees are slowly splitting into two large camps—the older and the younger—with a relatively small group of younger veterans in between. The younger men complain that the “grandfathers” dominate employee committees and look after their own interests first.

A Paternal, Aggressive Company. An established manufacturer of wood-working tools entered the do-it-yourself market and acquired, for the first time in its history, a national sales force. Backed by vigorous leadership and an imaginative sales policy, these men soon captured a substantial share of the hobby-tool market for the company. Management expects a lot of its men, but it also rewards them handsomely: in addition to liberal commissions, it awards surprise gifts and bonuses to salesmen who are doing very well. District, local and national meetings are held

regularly, in which top-level executives join the men in shirtsleeve planning and review sessions.

Each salesman is carefully chosen, and management makes it clear that it considers its salesmen an élite corps—and it treats them accordingly. Men who start to flounder are given immediate help, and if the difficulty isn't cleared up after a reasonable period they are quietly and unceremoniously replaced. Turnover is very low, and sales volume has risen steadily from year to year. "Every man on my team," boasts the national sales manager, "is a pro."

An Impersonal, Aggressive Company. It is interesting to compare the tool company described above with a firm in a closely related field—one that had a similar sales policy, but a crucially different working atmosphere. This company made paints and varnishes, and it also went after the do-it-yourself market in a big way. Salesmen were chosen for their aggressive manner and were schooled in hard-sell tactics. District managers kept close tabs on their men and were instructed to keep the pressure on at all times.

Salesmen could (and did) make a great deal of money; but the personal touch was missing. Bonus checks arrived at their homes by mail without even a note from the home office executives. The men seldom had contact with anyone in the company other than their immediate superior; once the initial training was over, the men who judged their performance did so from afar. Some men became demoralized by the absence of management interest and accepted jobs with other firms (sometimes at a financial loss).

The men who survived were a very hard-boiled breed—independent to a fault. Through them the company earned a reputation for relentless competitive pushing. Turnover

was fairly high, but the company looked upon this as an effective winnowing-out process that corrected their hiring mistakes and gradually filled their ranks with hardy veterans who neither wanted nor needed management to take a personal interest in them.

Despite the similarity of the sales problems these companies faced, it is quite clear that a man who had done well in the tool firm would probably have been a misfit in the paint firm, and vice versa. (There were, in fact, a number of cases on record which substantiated this.) *Compatibility with the company personality is as much a requisite for success for employees as aptitude, experience and other personal qualifications.*

An Impersonal, Passive Company. A large, diversified corporation in the consumer products field had developed so many divisions that each, in effect, had a "personality" of its own. Nevertheless, the corporation exerted a central control over sales, production and financial policy, so that the differences in working atmosphere between divisions were watered-down and tended to revolve around purely local issues. The net effect of this centralized control was not a sameness in the divisions but a common denominator of apathy that underlay the differences.

One division, for example, was widely known for its research and development work, and attracted many brilliant young men to its laboratories. Here they could learn from outstanding scientists and experiment with elaborate equipment. But there was very little room for advancement, and even senior scientists were organized into "task forces" that devoted themselves to assigned problems only, rather than being free to follow the leads and hunches that were gen-

erated by their findings. Each team dealt with a fragment of a major project and did not follow it beyond the point it had been assigned to reach. It became commonplace for the majority of the younger scientists to leave the division after a few years. They were usually able to command high salaries, for the company had a reputation for giving excellent training. In fact, it was running a training program for other companies at its own expense—without knowing it.

Another division produced an item that was generally recognized as the top-quality product in its field. It was priced competitively with other brands. After the war, competing items were brought out which did not match it in quality but were more appealingly packaged and more effectively promoted. The division's management reacted to these challenges rather slowly, in part, because they were lulled by the fact that their reputation for quality was as strong as ever—even though their sales weren't. Among competitors, the word got around that they were "asleep at the switch"—too complacent to move quickly.

Analyzing a Company's Personality

There are a number of methods that can help to define a company's personality, but none of them can lead to a permanent definition—simply because company personalities keep changing. As economic pressures from without and the personal line-up within are altered, the company personality adjusts to them with shifts of attitude. Therefore, if analyses of this kind are to be made at all they should be repeated periodically—every three or four years—lest they become obsolete.

Generally speaking, there are five steps to analyzing company personality: (1) identifying the company's pacesetters—the men whose attitudes count; (2) defining their goals, tactics and blind spots; (3) defining the economic challenges facing the company; (4) reviewing the company's history, particularly in terms of the careers of its leaders; (5) integrating the total picture—which in this case means to extract the common denominators, rather than to add up all the parts to get a sum.

Identifying the Pacesetters. This is not as easy as it sounds, because the real pacesetters are not necessarily in nominal command. A company pacesetter is defined by the reactions of other people to his ideas, rather than by his position in the company.

People seek out pacesetters to ask their opinions. These opinions are seldom questioned—except by other pacesetters. The working habits of a pacesetter are unconsciously copied by others in the company, sometimes to the point where they become standardized. In time, the pacesetters are surrounded by “disciples”—usually rising young men who hitch their personal fortunes in the company to the pacesetter's star. People whose views are incompatible with those of the pacesetters tend to lose influence or to leave the company. The pacesetters are exponents of the points of view that survive.

Even in a large company there are rarely more than a few real pacesetters. Therefore the analysis of a company personality begins with a search for a few men rather than a mass survey of every executive on the payroll.

Goals, Tactics and Blind Spots. This is the most impor-

tant—and most difficult—step in the process. The temperament of the pacesetters should be assayed through both direct observation and a review of their records.

There are two key questions here. The first concerns the pacesetter's self-concept, especially the way he thinks about his role in the company. Does he see himself as a trail blazer, or a juggler with a dozen decisions in the air at any given moment, or a guardian of the stockholder's money—or what? The second important consideration is his underlying motive: what is he after personally? Does he want to ensure his own future security, to become prominent, to accumulate wealth, to wield power or to have people like him? Usually several motives are present, some more strongly than others. The predominant ones can have a powerful influence on the company personality.

The answers to these kinds of questions will usually reveal underlying patterns of consistency. In the last analysis, the way in which the pacesetters think about the company bears a definite, traceable relationship to the way in which they think about themselves.

For example, a chain of television stations was operated by a spirited nonconformist whose chief delight was to match wits with anyone from a chess opponent to a bigger, better-equipped competitor. All of his stations got off to slow starts, largely because they were located in cities where other stations were already established. Some friends of the entrepreneur suspected that he made a deliberate practice of starting out with the cards stacked against him.

But as he gathered a line-up of managerial talent for his stations, they gradually won local favor and prospered. In defining what he looked for in a potential executive, the

owner once said: "I want a disciplined screwball—the kind of guy who was probably thrown out of a college for putting a cow in the dean's office, and who has lost none of his drive since then, but has merely grown up a little."

Economic Challenges. As far as the company personality is concerned, the actual economic problems that it is objectively faced with are not nearly so important as the pacesetter's *perceptions* of these problems. An impartial economist and the company's pacesetters will not necessarily agree on a definition of the company's markets, competition, opportunities or resources. Whether the company's strategies turn out to be realistic or quixotic will depend, of course, on how accurately the pacesetters have estimated the situation.

It is here that a crucial element of the company personality appears—its adaptability or capacity to make realistic choices regardless of its inclination and wishes. A company with a rigid personality will adhere to its habitual ways of operating come hell or high water (and sometimes the water gets *too* high). A company with an adaptable personality will discard a tradition when it becomes untenable or when a more profitable policy is at hand.

Some of the best examples of this can be seen in connection with diversification and new-product development. The old established firms which cherished their reputation for reliability and banked everything on the perpetuation of the public's taste for craftsmanship have, unfortunately, been driven to the brink of bankruptcy fairly often in the last decade. Their pacesetter's self-image of being a guardian of quality was painfully won and even more painfully relinquished. As far as fashions in pacesetters go, this seems to

be the day of the light-footed, far-sighted genius who can smell a shift in consumer tastes before it happens, and jumps from the old bandwagon to a new one in plenty of time to make the most of both.

Company History. To trace the history of a company personality one needs to be more concerned with ideas and people than with production or sales figures.

To begin with we need to know about the *sources* of new (or potential) pacesetters and of new ideas. Nepotism, which is not necessarily an evil but is usually viewed with a jaundiced eye by outsiders, often enters the picture. Since some families are notoriously lacking in harmony while others manage to have its members see eye to eye about nearly everything, no sweeping generalization can be made as to whether nepotism breeds ideas or leaves them to stagnate.

However, the men who are singled out for advancement by the powers that be will usually be in sympathy with prevailing ideas about the company's business. The non-conformist is often weeded out or squelched. Perhaps this is as it should be, and perhaps it isn't, but in any case it creates a danger that the key ideas by which a company is managed will become inbred, uncriticized and obsolete.

Therefore, any source of pacesetters in the company personality has to be considered as part of the company's resources. There is often a tendency to seek new managerial talent among men who share a certain common background. For example, one large Eastern firm regularly chose about 90 per cent of its management trainees from recently discharged infantrymen who had no previous job experience and were graduates of a particular denominational college. Until this was pointed out to them, the company's execu-

tives were unaware that nearly all of their prospective successors were running to a single type!

"Inbreeding," either through families or through similar backgrounds, is not necessarily unwise. It is often unavoidable, and in such cases it is valuable for management to develop some insights into the special advantages and limitations imposed by their "homogenized" background.

Finding Common Denominators. Out of all this data there will usually emerge a fairly consistent set of patterns that reveal the basic attitudes of the pacesetters toward the company's business. The areas of agreement among the pacesetters will set the norms of behavior and thinking to which other members of the company are expected to conform. In some companies the emphasis will be on punctuality, "correctness" and restraint; in others the keynotes will be informality and "togetherness," and so on.

Areas of emphasis and deemphasis will become apparent. In some companies the production department is at the center of everything and other departments seem to exist largely to service and assist the favored few. In others the sales department dominates the scene and can just about dictate the kinds of actions the other departments can take. Even where balance exists there will often be underlying strains pulling in one direction or another.

Some companies will be found to be at cross purposes with themselves. (One is tempted to talk about a "split company personality.") Some symptoms of this are: vacillation between opposed courses of action, too much "study" and analysis of proposed moves before approving or rejecting them, and repeated makeshift "solutions" which fail to strike at the heart of long-standing problems.

For example, the general manager of a division of a large corporation felt that he owed a debt of gratitude to the comptroller, without whose prudent advice the division might easily have foundered during the lean depression years. Nevertheless, as the character of the economy changed it became apparent that the comptroller was no longer equal to his job—he continued to act as if the company were in imminent danger of collapse. The general manager did everything he could to help the comptroller understand the point of view of nearly everyone else in the division. This included several fiascos, such as unofficially replacing the comptroller by “kicking him upstairs”—an arrangement that didn’t work because his replacements found themselves continually harassed by a predecessor who wouldn’t let go of the reins. At last the general manager reluctantly faced the fact that notwithstanding his gratitude, he no longer had confidence in the comptroller, and arranged to help him find a position in another company.

Why Company Personalities Should Be Analyzed —and Why They Shouldn't

Merely because a company presumably has a personality of its own is certainly no reason to attempt to analyze it. The real essence of a company’s human resources is as elusive and easy to misjudge as the real motives of the individual human being. Even when it is caught there is no guarantee that anything constructive will come of it.

But insight into the company personality can, in certain situations, be of far-reaching value and not just an academic exercise. The two prerequisites for a useful analysis of this type are dissatisfaction with the company’s demonstrated

ability to meet its problems and a plausible basis for suspecting that unexamined group attitudes, rather than individuals or policies, are the culprits.

When things go wrong there is an all-too-human tendency, in companies and elsewhere, to "solve" the problems by causing a few heads to roll. Many a sound, valuable executive has been sacrificed this way to pay for mishaps that could not have been avoided under the conditions imposed on them by company-wide blind spots and miscalculations. This is a tragic waste. Finding scapegoats may ease a few consciences but it isn't nearly as effective, in the long run, as finding causes.

The analysis of a company personality should never be undertaken with a commitment to alter or "improve" what is found. There are often practical reasons why changes, however desirable they might be in theory, are out of the question. More important, some companies *cannot* change because of the character of their pacesetters: to induce such a company to alter its basic thinking is merely to court unnecessary stress and eventual disaster.

The analysis should not assume, in other words, that the company personality is "sick," because a "cure" may be impossible and because such an assumption may only obscure hidden strengths. These strengths are as much a target of investigation as weaknesses.

There are five kinds of benefits to be derived from surveys of this kind. The most obvious concerns executive selection and placement. Incompatibility between the individual executive and the company personality is at the bottom of more short-lived placements than many people realize.

Second, an analysis of the company personality should

precede the planning for a management development program. This will help to pinpoint the kinds of thinking and activities that need to be fostered. More important, it will help to throw light on the attitudes—and people—that might hamstring the program by opposing or undercutting its qualities.

Third, the analysis can help spotlight obsolete or inefficient policies which are clung to because everyone assumes that they are immutable or because people have lost sight of the fact that they *are* policies and regard them as inescapable conditions under which the business must operate.

Fourth, learning about the company personality can help to delineate the limit of the company's tolerance for new ideas or new faces. In a market-conscious era that seems to demand an unending process of revamping, many companies commit themselves to costly programs for which they have no real stomach when the full ramifications of the program become apparent.

Fifth, the analysis can help redirect the company toward areas where its own special balance of strengths and weaknesses can be applied to maximum advantage. Some companies try to "be all things to all men" and artificially equalize their emphases despite a natural inequality of talent and interest. For example, the naturally conservative company is probably making a mistake when it starts gambling on costly promotional schemes that may or may not pay off—unless, of course, it has succeeded in changing its basic personality beforehand.

This brings us to the ultimate question of what can be done about a company personality that seems to be out of step with its time. Although it is always possible to change

the company personality, it is not, as we indicated earlier, always feasible to attempt it. Change is brought about by training, by improving internal communications and/or by bringing in new personnel. We should not forget that change is also brought about by time and that it is sometimes less damaging to wait for a natural evolution than to turn the company topsy-turvy all at once.

4

HOW PSYCHOLOGISTS WORK

There are four major psychological approaches to evaluating people that are now in use. These fall rather conveniently into two groups, as follows:

Actuarial Methods

- Aptitude Tests
- Personality Inventories

Clinical Methods

- Interviews
- Projective Tests

All of these methods have been commercialized. This has led to conflicting claims as to which is “best.” Actually, they serve different needs, and none is so well developed that it cannot be buttressed by another. Since any evaluation of a person merely catches a few fragments of a vast, shifting canvas, the more fragments you can catch and fit into the picture, the better will be your understanding of the whole.

Each of these methods studies the individual from a somewhat different perspective, and can therefore contribute its own special piece of the puzzle. Therefore, no evaluation technique should be ignored if qualified practitioners are available and if it is feasible to use them.

As a rule, psychologists tend to specialize in one kind of evaluation approach or another—there are very few triple-threat or even double-threat diagnosticians in the profession. This specialization—which may be due to training, experience, or to purely personal preferences—has sometimes led to an unseemly tendency by some psychologists to disparage the evaluation methods with which they are not familiar themselves. This has occurred on both sides of the actuarial-clinical fence, and is not entirely a matter of competition for the businessman's dollar, since it turns up just as frequently on the campuses as in the markets. It is unfortunately true that psychologists are just as fond of splitting off into doctrinaire groups, each of which claims the only key to its own private heaven, as any other group of human beings. In so doing they sometimes generate more heat than light; but in their less partisan moments most psychologists will tell you that the real problem is not that there are too many evaluation methods competing with each other, but rather that there aren't enough.

A little reflection will show that the actuarial approaches owe their paternity to the outside theorists whose ideas were discussed in Chapter 2 and that the clinical approaches are primarily the offspring of the inside theorists.

Actuarial methods, as their name implies, aim for an objective measurement of the probability that a person will behave in a particular way; in other words, they are pri-

marily intended for *predictive*, rather than *descriptive*, purposes. In effect, the psychologist using these methods is trying to find which course of action the odds seem to favor. He does this by looking for mathematical relationships, that is, tendencies for a quality he can measure (like intelligence) to have some kind of regular relationship to something he is trying to predict (like job performance).

Psychologists have been at work on techniques of this kind longer than on any others and have perfected them to the point where they are starting to run into their limits. These are the facts that the things they are measuring frequently refuse to hold still and that the things they are trying to predict are affected by many outside influences which they cannot measure. This means that no matter how well these actuarial techniques do their jobs, their predictions will inevitably prove to be wrong in a sizable fraction of cases.

Misconceptions about Actuarial Tests

The actuarial tests were never intended to be perfectly accurate, but they suffer from a widespread illusion that they are infallible and that a test score pins an eternal label of one kind or another on the people who take them. As a rule, no one is less impressed by a test score than the psychologists who actually constructed the test, since they realize better than anyone else that the score is just a shorthand way of expressing the result of a long and intricate series of *inferences*, which is usually so full of "ifs" that the layman who follows them from start to finish is likely to be appalled.

The psychologist who constructs actuarial tests realizes

that he is working with a phenomenon (the human mind) which is too complex and changeable to be "measured" in any strict sense. Instead he has to take a sampling of small, strategically placed "sections" of it, in hopes of being able to get the drift of its over-all trends. Like a public-opinion poller, he is conducting a tricky exercise in the difficult art of drawing sweeping conclusions from a relative handful of data. The scores he winds up with represent his best guess as to the general direction of the main currents in the testee's make-up. If the psychologist does his job meticulously, his guess is usually close enough to provide a workable basis for predictions about the testee's inclinations to behave in a particular way.

But in the last analysis, any test score is just that—a score. It is only a number, derived mathematically from a lot of other numbers which represent the psychologist's best guesses about other people who have taken the test in the past. There is nothing final or conclusive about a score. Yet the legend persists that the scores are much more than just a rough sampling of someone's ability to answer questions. They are credited with all kinds of ultimate, or even occult, qualities.

For example, the intelligence quotient, or IQ, is perhaps the most widely misunderstood statistic in existence. It is calculated in a number of ways, but always represents a ratio between two numbers—an attained score and an expected score. Yet this prosaic ratio has been interpreted as a kind of definitive index of mental horsepower, as well as a sort of status symbol for proud parents who manage to find out their children's IQs. At best, IQ scores give a rough idea of how rapidly children could progress through

school *if* they tried. There is nothing more final or exact about them than that.

Personality test scores which rate the testee on a scale of traits, such as introversion and extroversion, are thought of, erroneously, as tying an irrevocable tag around the poor testee's neck, as if his entire individuality could be summed up neatly in one polysyllabic word and then filed away and forgotten. Small wonder that some people get up in arms and consider testing an assault on individualism! Actually, it is only when test scores are interpreted in a very naïve and literal way that they lose their basically actuarial meaning and become instead a sort of bastardized way of describing people.

Much of the confusion about the finality of test scores boils down to semantics—and particularly to our bad habit of cramming complicated facts into neat little theoretical cubbyholes, whether they happen to fit there or not. It's much easier to label someone and ignore every fact about him that doesn't fit that label, than to think about him in a way that makes allowances for his normal human inconsistencies. If test scores can be summarized—however inexactly—by one kind of label or another, the person who attained the score is quite liable to have the label stuck on him. This is not the fault of the tests, but of the mental laziness of the people who see the test scores. Psychologists are trained to know better than to do this, but since the demand for simplifications has always been richer than the one for complexities, test scores will probably continue to undergo their miraculous transformation from mathematical guess to psychological label for some time to come.

Rationale of Actuarial Tests

The people who make up actuarial tests begin with the assumption that while any individual is capable of an almost limitless number of ways of behaving, he will usually follow certain habitual patterns, so that if the basic “common denominators” can be worked out, it will be possible to anticipate most of his behavior most of the time—at least in a general way. Obviously, the more consistent a person is, the more exactly will this approach apply to him; and the more complex he is, the harder will it be to work out enough of his common denominators to get a useful prediction of how he will act.

Further, these psychologists know that any specific act has many “incidental” causes in addition to the basic tendency that links it to similar acts. This is just as true when the “act” is a response to a test question as when it is something more vital in the person’s everyday life. Therefore, in order to keep from being misled by all the incidental factors that affect any particular test response, psychologists have to ask a great many questions. All of them are designed to pick up signs of the basic trait they are looking for, in hopes that the extraneous causes will cancel each other out. This is why tests of this kind tend to be as long and as seemingly repetitive as they are: to shake out the influence of factors that have nothing to do with the trait being measured. It is also why very short tests are usually useless, and why—contrary to popular belief—psychologists do not pay a great deal of attention to individual responses but concentrate instead on the over-all pattern.

In effect, then, an actuarial test is like a long cross-examination which painstakingly eliminates the side issues that would inevitably creep in to color any particular answer. What is more, the cross-examination is carried out in precisely the same way for everybody, which guarantees that nobody's score will be distorted by questions that nobody else was given. The end result, when the tests are carefully constructed and properly administered, is an estimate of how much the testee's behavior tends to be influenced by a particular trait. When estimates of this kind are made on enough different traits for each individual, a rough mathematical prediction is possible of how that person is likely to behave most of the time.

In theory this is fine, but in practice there are plenty of difficulties that get in the way. For one thing, it is very hard to refine a test to the point where it is not subject to being thrown off by "incidental" factors in the testee's make-up—not the least of which is his own intention, conscious or otherwise, to make the results come out in a way he'll like! Further, the number of separate measurements necessary to make a highly accurate set of predictions is often uneconomically large. The upshot of all this is that the main virtue of actuarial tests is in making predictions about large groups of individuals (the more the merrier), rather than in single cases.

Despite all these shortcomings, actuarial tests have an outstanding virtue which makes them an indispensable part of the psychologist's tool kit: they are objective. The element of opinion cannot creep into their scoring. No matter how superficial or fallible they may be, therefore, they provide an invaluable check on the kinds of speculation which

necessarily enter into the deeper-probing techniques of the clinical approaches.

Aptitude Tests

The First World War brought with it the first large-scale development of aptitude tests, which were used to determine whether thousands of draftees were mentally qualified for military service and to help classify those who were inducted in a way that would, hopefully, maximize their usefulness to the service. So many men took the tests that interest and curiosity in them naturally grew, and after the war both industry and the armed services began to look seriously into their possibilities. (The armed services are still the number-one producers, and—on a per capita basis, at least—the number-one consumers of aptitude tests.) By the time the Second World War broke out, special tests were available to the armed services which measured a wide variety of aptitudes; and in the postwar years the use of these tests began a mushroom growth in industry that still shows no sign of abating. Some surveys have indicated that as many as 80 per cent of United States companies are using some form of aptitude test to evaluate and assign potential employees.

Most laymen use the term “aptitude test” to cover all forms of psychological evaluation. Strictly speaking, the term applies only to tests aimed at measuring some specific intellectual function, such as abstract reasoning or mechanical insight. Personality tests of all types are horses of a different color, as we shall see presently.

Most aptitude tests consist of an increasingly difficult series of problems which can be solved *primarily* through

the use of the particular talent the test aims to measure. We have to say "primarily" because there is always a fly in the ointment: mental capacities do not disentangle themselves from each other to suit the convenience of the psychologist, and there is often a sizable measure of *other* aptitudes present that the testee can employ to solve a test problem. The most likely culprit is an ubiquitous mental attribute which psychologists, for the want of a better name, call "g" (which is shorthand for "general intelligence"). This is a pervasive, generalized knack for figuring out problems of all kinds, regardless of their specific complications. This "g" is obviously a very useful thing for people to have, since it enables them to reason their way through problems which they might not be equipped to solve with a quick burst of insight. But to the aptitude-test constructor, "g" is only a headache that makes him work a lot harder to find questions which measure the particular aptitude he's interested in.

The other chief bane of the aptitude tester's existence is emotion. While a little tension will usually key up the testee to a state of heightened mental alertness, too much of it can confuse his mental processes or slow them down. Taking an aptitude test is normally a little upsetting, and if this is not too severe it is easy enough to make allowance for it when interpreting the test. But when the testee is depressed, tired, frightened, uncooperative—or, indeed, in any kind of an emotional state that drops his mental efficiency below par—the score he attains on the test is likely to be deflected so far from its target as to be useless. About all the test constructors can do about this is to prescribe ideal testing conditions, in which the testees are

first put at their ease and then given the tests in quiet, undistracting surroundings. But test makers often cannot enforce these conditions, and they certainly can't stop the naturally apprehensive testee from bringing his worries with him into the testroom.

Despite the intrusions of "g" and emotions, the aptitude testers usually manage to get their work done and wind up with a "raw score"—which is simply the number of points the testee earned by solving problems correctly. This is converted mathematically to a number which indicates how far above or below the average score the testee's score lies. Sometimes, experience will show that the probability of success in a particular job increases as a test score gets higher, so the score can be used to rate the testee's chances in such a job. More often, however, the psychologists will try to draw a "cutoff" line, below which lie the scores of people who usually fail. In other words, with a properly constructed test the psychologist can define the *minimum* degree of aptitude needed for success in a particular assignment. By screening out candidates below that level, the company can be saved a lot of its training expense, and the testee can be spared the humiliation and wasted time of biting off more than he can probably chew.

However, while the people who score below the cutoff line will almost certainly fail, there is no guarantee that people who score above it will actually succeed. This is largely because an aptitude will lie dormant when its possessor is not motivated to use it—and the sad truth seems to be that most people are content to use their mental powers in a halfhearted way a good deal of the time. In all probability there is more than enough unused intelligence lying around

to improve the general condition of mankind to extents we can scarcely begin to estimate; but these enormous human potentialities remain for the most part untapped—simply because it requires some effort to use them.

Because of this, many psychologists feel that aptitude tests are more likely to reveal what a person *can* do than what he *will* do. Some kind of estimate of a person's motivation to think, to learn and to use his head when he encounters a problem is a necessary adjunct to aptitude test scores. Unfortunately, in many personnel evaluations there is no provision for this—sometimes for the sake of what is actually a false economy of time and money and sometimes because of a pedantic refusal by some psychologists to stoop to using techniques which are necessarily less accurate than aptitude tests. Since aptitudes are fairly constant while motivation is not, aptitude tests can obviously be developed to a much higher degree of precision than can measures of emotion; yet some psychologists are perhaps too much in love with precision for its own sake to be willing to get their hands dirty in attempts to find out whether aptitudes are likely to be used at all.

Personality Inventories

As their name implies, tests of this type attempt to measure the strength of different traits by counting the number of times the individual answers test questions in a way that supposedly indicates the presence of each trait. Strictly speaking, they are inventories of *answers to questions*, not of traits themselves. But the questions are carefully chosen after an exhaustive sorting-out process which establishes, mathematically, the fact that each of them does

indeed have a tendency to pick up evidence of the trait it is supposed to detect. Like the aptitude tests, the personality inventory is a sampling, by strategically placed questions, of a pool of human potentialities; but in the case of personality inventories the pool itself is much deeper and harder to define.

These tests rest on the premise that there can be enough evidence in what a person can and will tell about himself to make useful predictions about how he will actually behave. They are geared to what he will voluntarily reveal. The psychologists who make up these tests know that this is a handicap, since many people have a hard enough time just being frank with themselves, much less with a psychologist, when taking a test. In effect, the psychologist has to take a portrayal of what the testee would like other people to think he was like, and from that work out a picture of what he is really like. This is very hard to do, although in the course of learning how to do it psychologists have worked out a few tricks that make the going a little easier.

Every now and then psychological testing comes in for a silly caricature in the popular press. It is particularly susceptible to this since so many of its practitioners are addicted to sweeping generalizations and unguarded assertions that lend themselves readily to lampoon, distortion, and even to hysterical denunciation. The only real menace in the testing movement is the tester himself, who may or may not be a psychologist, who may or may not be endowed with common sense and a sense of ethics, and who may or may not be properly humbled by the enormous difficulty of the task he sets for himself.

Inventories have borne the brunt of the criticism that

has been leveled against psychological testing. This is both because they are better known than other kinds of tests and because they seem deceptively easy to understand—and, therefore, easier to quibble with, as well. The most common criticisms are that they can be faked, that they are helping to create conformity and to stamp out individualism, and that they invade privacy.

To all these charges the psychologist who works with personality inventories would be compelled, in all frankness, to give that most unsatisfactory of answers: it depends. At one time or another there have been incidents in which each of these charges were true, and there will probably continue to be such incidents, because *no test can be insulated against poor judgment on the part of the people who use it*. There is no getting around the fact that some psychologists are more sophisticated than others or that there is a right way and a wrong way to use tests. Most of the abuses of personality inventories are traceable to a mechanical, un-insightful approach to their use, which ignores both the limitations of the tests and the complexities of personality, and which tries to reduce the whole problem of diagnosis to a simple cookbook formula.

Faking of test responses is, however, a special case, since this is a weakness which was truer of the earlier types of inventories (many of which are still in use, apparently because psychologists and their clients are accustomed to them) than of some of the more modern inventories. Faking can be either conscious or unconscious. Although the critical layman tends to get most exercised over *deliberate* slanting of test answers, these are much easier to detect than the *unintentional* self-deception which even the frankest testee

practices upon himself. Psychologists have become fairly artful at catching the conscious faker, but getting around illusion and affectation is a much tougher proposition.

The conscious faker could enjoy a field day with the older type of tests, as long as he was careful and clever enough to keep from tripping himself up. But the more sophisticated tests of recent years are, in effect, booby-trapped. Scattered throughout the test are innocent-looking questions which seem deceptively transparent and easy to figure out. But all of these questions were chosen precisely because they are *flukes*; that is, the group of people whom the faker is trying to emulate do not, in fact, answer the questions in the way it would seem they should. By "figuring out" a few too many of these "easy" questions, the faker unwittingly tips his own hand. It would take a very discerning eye indeed to tell these questions apart from the rest, which is why some commentators have noted that these modern tests are definitely not for amateur fakers to fool around with! In fact, unless he has the presence of mind to check the copyright date of the test he is taking, the faker may have no clue at all as to whether his test is booby-trapped or "safe."

By far the more difficult problem, however, is to detect unintentional slanting toward things the testee would like to believe about himself, even though they aren't necessarily true. For a long time psychologists have known that people will tend to slant their test answers in the direction of social acceptability, and this has led them to develop mathematical ways of scaling the *degree* of acceptability of various traits and acts. The next step is to pair off questions about different traits that are so phrased as to have had *equal*

social acceptability (or unacceptability). When none of the alternatives will make him look any more genteel or less boorish than any other, the testee presumably finds it easier to face the test—and himself—more squarely.

Thus the newer tests have made it harder for the person taking them to make the results come out the way he wants them to. No doubt future tests will make it even harder. Yet there has been no rush on the part of industry to switch from the fakable to the less fakable tests. This is partly a matter of habit on the part of all concerned, partly because the older tests have merits of their own despite their susceptibility to faking and partly because test usage is more a matter of merchandising than merit—and the older tests have simply had more time in which to solidify their market position.

The charge that personality inventories are aiding the spread of conformity is based primarily on the practice of setting up tables of average scores for successful employees in a company and then restricting new hirings to people whose scores come close to these averages. Over a period of years this has the effect of homogenizing the company. Further, the tests are constructed so as to give either a very high or a very low score to people who are unusual. Consequently, restricting hirings to the middle group tends to deprive the company of valuable but rare qualities, such as originality and initiative.

Using patterns of scores in this way is based on two rather naïve assumptions: first, that the people who get the “right” kinds of scores are more likely than any others to succeed (or indeed, as some test enthusiasts would put it, that they are the *only* ones who can succeed); second, that

people who have out-of-the-ordinary characteristics are unlikely to be useful to a company.

As for the first, there are usually as many successful "types" in any company as there are successful employees: people do not fall into neat little groups the way their test scores sometimes do. There are many more styles of working that can get the job done well than the devoted followers of test patterns would like to think. Unfortunately, it takes less mental effort to think about only one style, and it's also easier to sell the idea of a single acceptable type of person to management. The lure of a false "simplicity" can bring out the worst in both executives and psychologists. The net result, too often, is that these tests tend to weed out the very diversity that management needs.

A more sophisticated use of the tests would be to estimate whether the individual had the necessary resources to succeed with his *own* unique style of working, rather than whether his style conformed to the prevalent one. There is no reason, other than mental laziness and a mechanical concept of how tests work and how people live, why personality inventories cannot be used to assess an individual's own special advantages and disadvantages, rather than to see whether he fits in snugly with a predetermined stereotype.

The second assumption, that uncommon people are not likely to be useful, is in part an outgrowth of the idea that getting along with people is paramount to all other virtues on the job. But merely being similar to other people is no guarantee of getting along with them; and what is more important, a working group will tend to stagnate and lose its forward momentum when it does not generate at least

a modicum of dissension among its members. A well-run company needs its gadflies and its visionaries just as much as it needs the congenial conformists who get the work done. It is true that it needs many more of the latter, and that among the former a line must be drawn somewhere between originality and out-and-out screwballism; but neither argument justifies the wholesale weeding out of nonconformists that has often been the result of personality testing.

In other words, personality inventories become the instruments of conformity only when they are used in a simple-minded, "easy" way. It can be ascribed either to slipshod, mass-production work by psychologists themselves or to naïve and misguided longings by executives for a company that is "one big happy family." Conformity itself is neither good nor bad except in terms of whether it gets the job done better or impedes it; and since the work of companies usually calls for a judicious mixture of common and uncommon people, it is clearly an unwise policy to use tests in such an elementary and shortsighted way.

The charge that tests invade privacy is based partly on the character of the questions asked, partly on apprehensions about the kind of conclusions that psychologists can draw from the answers and partly on fears that one's own test answers will be disclosed to someone who has no business knowing them.

Just where one would draw the line between a question that is proper to ask and one which gets too nosy would be almost impossible to say, since it would vary from person to person and even from time to time. The only sensible way to draw the line is not in terms of what is asked, but rather in terms of what is to be done with the answer. We

commonly grant to physicians and attorneys the right of "privileged communication"; that is, we can answer their questions in the strictest confidence, since it is understood that the answers are to be used for our benefit and for no other purpose. The same privilege does not apply to responses to a psychological test, partly because few testees (in industry, at any rate) are convinced that the test will do them any good and partly because there is no well-organized code of ethics to regulate the testers. (Remember that while the American Psychological Association does have an ethics code, there is nothing to prevent a nonmember from buying tests and administering them, or even from inventing tests of his own.) Until there are better legal definitions of psychological practice than there are now, this loophole will remain open, and the danger that tests will be used in unethical ways will still be with us.

Some of the worries about privacy rest on the notion that the test makers have something up their sleeve which exposes a lot more of the testee's emotional innards than he may think he's revealing. There is a certain amount of truth in this, but only in a loose, general way. A shrewd psychologist can pick up signs of a broad personality trend in a set of test responses, but if he knows his business he won't even try to jump from there to the specific thoughts and attitudes that most people are afraid of having found out. He knows it's just too hard to do that, except by shot-in-the-dark speculation that usually reveals more about the psychologist himself than about the testee. What is more important, a good psychologist (or any perceptive person) can find signs of the same kinds of trends as tests reveal in everyday mannerisms that no one tries to conceal—dress,

gestures, ways of speaking. *In other words, it's not the tests themselves that are so penetrating, but the judgment of the trained test interpreter.* Personality inventories are not designed to offer the psychologist a more revealing glimpse of a person than the layman gets (although projective tests *are*); the advantage of the inventory is that it can be given to many people under identical conditions, whether or not the psychologist is there in person to look and listen.

The question of disclosure of test results to unauthorized persons is perhaps the most serious ethical problem facing industrial psychology today, because so many firms and individuals who use tests are not regulated by law or subject to the discipline of a professional society. Between the few but inexcusable cases of bandying test findings about and the much larger number of individuals in our society who have some kind of secret that they desperately want to keep to themselves, we have the makings of a widespread public revulsion at the whole testing movement. This would be tragic, because the potential benefits of testing to everyone, in the form of better job placements and greater opportunities for self-realization, far outweigh their potential abuses.

The professional has his neatly bound code of ethics to read and abide by if he wants to; but the nonprofessional test user has nothing but his own conscience to guide him. The best rule of thumb for him to follow if he wants to preserve the usefulness of testing and stay out of trouble is probably this: test results should be disclosed only to company officials who need that information to help them reach decisions about the testee. The testee has a right to know his test results, but wherever possible these should be

given to him by a trained counselor, and under no circumstances should a layman attempt to discuss matters of an intimate or strongly emotional nature with testees. There is always a strong temptation on the part of the personnel workers who use tests to "play psychologist"; but unless they resist that temptation they may put all testing in jeopardy.

Clinical Methods

The term "clinical" has three important connotations for the psychologist: it is derived from methods originally used in connection with diagnosing and treating disease; it is focused on the individual and his own private dynamics rather than on groups of people and the traits they share in common; and it rests on intuitive attempts to relate what is observed about others to the private experience of the observer, rather than on standardized methods of interrogation and analysis.

In a sense the clinical methods of evaluating people are as old as man, since they are based on the attempt of one human being to understand another one, and involve "tools" that are standard equipment for any intelligent mind and not the invention of a particular group of specialists. Their ultimate aim is to reconstruct the picture that another person has of the world—to see the world as he sees it, so that his actions will make sense to the viewer and so that he can be more readily communicated with. They are primarily used, therefore, with people whose lines of communication with the rest of the world have been jammed and whose perceptions of life have become so distorted by private dreads that they can no longer meet their normal

social responsibilities. Clinical methods were largely developed in the effort to bridge the gap that yawns between emotionally disturbed people and reality.

These methods rest on judgment, presumption, and the faith that people are pretty much alike under their skins; while actuarial methods rest on measurement, deduction, and an almost passionate avoidance of any presumptions whatsoever concerning what lies beneath people's skins. Clinical methods are "soft" and attempt to feel their way into the "inside" of personality; actuarial methods are, by contrast, "hard," and confine themselves to the study of the surface part of personality that everybody else can see.

As clinicians became better acquainted with "abnormal" personality states, they gradually became convinced that a hard and fast line could not be drawn between what was sick and what was healthy—that the difference between normality and abnormality was not one of kind, but of degree. The "abnormal" mental processes which tend to crowd out the normal ones when an emotional disturbance develops are present, at least in latent forms, in all of us. According to this view, the abnormal mind can be considered as a sort of laboratory in which perfectly normal adjustment problems can be studied. This is partly because these processes are laid bare when the mind is disturbed, rather than concealed as they usually are, and partly because they are exaggerated by the disturbance and are therefore easier to detect and to study.

These conclusions have led some clinicians to suggest, with tongue in cheek, that the main difference between "normal" and "abnormal" people is that the former have not been caught yet while the latter have. Contrary to some

popular misconceptions, the clinician is not proposing to judge normal people by "crazy" standards; it would be more accurate to say that they insist that the mechanisms that make some people "crazy" are much more normal than most people realize.

From their premise that mental normality and abnormality are not as different as they seem, clinicians have taken a giant step out of the hospital and into industry—by asserting that the methods used to help understand emotionally sick people are equally valuable for the study of healthy people. The healthy mind also has its motives, its self-concept, its view of reality, its lapses and its alibis—and all of these can be weighed and balanced with great sensitivity by the methods that were spawned in the clinic.

Historically, actuarial methods had the industrial field pretty much to themselves while the clinical methods were still being worked out. When they found themselves trying to do the same job, the proponents of the two kinds of techniques found it hard to speak a common language and so tended to regard each other as being hopelessly naïve and out of step with the times. There is still a good deal of name calling and clannishness on the part of both schools of thought, but there is also a growing recognition that when they are properly used the methods complement each other. As both sides grow more sophisticated, the "clinical invasion" of industry is looked upon more and more as an enrichment of psychology's capacity to solve practical problems and less as competition by johnny-come-latelies.

In general, actuarial methods are best applied to the study of those aspects of the person which are relatively fixed and therefore "measurable" in a comparatively pre-

cise way. Intellectual capacity and broad trends within the personality (such as introversion) are examples of functions which can be measured in this way. On the other hand, clinical methods work best with those aspects of a person which normally ebb and flow, or which are not clearly formulated in the mind, so that attempting to "measure" them results, at best, in a sort of temporary approximation. Some examples of these functions are hopes, fears, and the self-imposed blind spots which the mind creates as a means of protecting itself from emotional dangers. Clearly, neither the fixed nor the changeable aspects of a person's make-up can be ignored if we want to understand him fully, and therefore there is a place for both actuarial and clinical methods in a thorough evaluation of the *entire* person.

It is, of course, rather ambitious for psychologists to talk about evaluating the entire person, in the sense of weighing *all* of the fantastic variety of ideas and acts of which he is capable. Obviously, therefore, they don't use the term literally; rather they use it to imply studying the individual from many perspectives—the fixed and the changeable, the obvious and the hidden, the intellectual and the emotional. The psychologist's insistence on looking at a person from several points of view is not just a case of ivory-tower perfectionism: it is based on the very pragmatic fact that people *are* many-sided and that predictions based on one side or only a few sides are quite liable to be wide of the mark.

The growing awareness of the necessity for studying the "entire person" (in the psychologist's sense of the term) to facilitate effective personnel decisions is having several effects, some good and others not so good. On the one hand, it is breaking down the old and artificial barriers between

psychologists of the actuarial and clinical schools, and it is creating a greater insistence by management on thorough evaluations which do not stint on either time or money—since the only real economy in such matters lies in a well-informed decision. On the other hand, it has also created a lively market for quick, cheap, and deceptively simple “tests” which are eagerly bought by executives who are dismayed at the amount of time and money that a really useful psychological appraisal requires.

Interviews

The interview as practiced by the psychologist differs from the layman’s version largely in terms of their intentions for it: the psychologist is trying to piece together clues about the interviewee’s inner make-up, while the layman is usually trying to establish whether the interviewee’s background, appearance and manner are suitable for the job. Both rely heavily on intuition—that is, their own emotional reactions to the person—but there is usually this difference: the psychologist is trained to be aware of it and to react to his emotions selectively rather than be swayed by all of them; while the layman is perhaps more likely to accept his emotions uncritically, even to the point of confusing them with objective facts. Psychologists have no monopoly on the neat balance of judgment and intuition that makes a good interviewer; but for whatever it’s worth, they usually do have a better idea of what to look for and how to recognize it than does the layman.

The interview has its loyal adherents and its vociferous denouncers, but in either case there is agreement that some interviewers are better than others and that the difference

is usually due to some hard-to-define quality of personality that makes one sensitive to subtle cues in the interviewee's behavior. Interviewers who have "it" are usually unable to articulate in very clear terms just what they do to sense something about the person being interviewed. Perhaps this inability is in itself a useful clue: it may be that good interviewers are not always very precise or logical thinkers, but rather people who can temporarily let down the barriers that we normally erect against our own emotions and the hints of emotions in others. It may be, in other words, that a good interviewer can't explain what he does because to do so would be to shut off the very clues he relies on. Sometimes it seems that there is a certain antipathy between thoughts that are clear enough to be communicated and feelings that are profound enough to reflect something genuine and undisguised about a person.

Interviewing is a notoriously tricky business. There are reams of data showing that in the hands of most people it is a misleading, unpredictable, unreliable tool. It persists for two bad reasons and two good ones. One bad reason is that many businessmen flatter themselves that they can learn all they need to know about somebody by talking to him face to face, and are loath to give it up since it is so cheap and so gratifying to their egos. The second bad reason is ignorance. Many executives don't know that interviewing can be so faulty, or at least they act as if they didn't know it. The good reasons are that when interviewing is properly handled (which is primarily a matter of confining it to the limits within which it is effective) it can make valuable additions to the information on which the psychologist bases his appraisal and also the fact that the "chemistry"

that takes place between two people in an interview is in itself a useful clue when it is properly interpreted.

The limits within which interviewing is effective depends in part on the skill of the interviewer, but in general it can be said that the technique is most accurate as a means of verifying or clarifying objective facts (such as biographical data) and progressively less accurate as it moves toward factors which cannot be observed but must be inferred (such as deep-lying personality patterns). In other words, the interview works best with prosaic data and is pretty inefficient with exotic kinds of data, and it gets its reputation for uselessness largely because too many people can't resist the temptation to poke it into the kinds of problems which are most likely to throw it off. Trying to guess what a person is really like on the basis of an interview is very tough for two main reasons: First, any normally intelligent adult is likely to be an expert at concealing traits he doesn't want to be known and even at pretending to have a few traits which he doesn't really possess. Second, the clues on which interviewing guesses are based are usually so ambiguous that the guesser is, in effect, taking a projective test without knowing it: he is likely to "see" a lot of emotions that are far more important to him than to the person being interviewed.

Despite all these snares, some people manage to get ideas out of interviews that later stand the test of experience. The trick in doing this consistently is apparently more than a matter of merely being "sensitive"; it also requires the forbearance to ignore hunches that have only flimsy clues to support them, and the insight to realize when some of one's own problems are raising their lovely heads in the

guise of intuition. It requires, in other words, an almost, inhuman discrimination amongst those most human of all faculties: the hunch and the deduction. This is why good interviewers are so rare—they have to balance two almost antithetical ways of thinking against each other, without squelching one or diluting the other. Unfortunately, most people who try their hands at interviewing tend to err in one direction or the other—they either allow themselves to be “sold” by their hunches or they stick so closely to incontestable facts that they add nothing to what is already known about the individual.

Clearly, then, the interviewer's own personality is an integral part of the instrument by which he tries to learn something about people. When we try to take his personality out of the picture by making him adhere to a set pattern of interviewing, we wind up with what is in effect a talking questionnaire—an interview so artificially dehumanized that it is difficult to see what good it does to have a live interviewer present at all. Patterned interviews have their place in research studies where the accuracy of the data is sometimes more important than its depth, but for purposes of trying to understand a particular individual it is usually better to accept the risks of spontaneous interview. This provides a wealth of material, much of which may be irrelevant or off base, but some of which is likely to be very useful in rounding out the over-all picture.

In other words, it is better to apply the brakes of selectivity *after* the interviewer has garnered his ideas, and not beforehand. The big danger in interviewing is that the brakes will not be applied at all, or not enough. As a rule, one is on safer grounds to use the interview as a source of

confirmation for trends that were suggested by tests or other sources, rather than as the original source of ideas about a person. The interview is perhaps better adapted to filling in details and showing how separate trends tie in with each other than for sketching the basic outlines of the interviewee's personality. In other words, it is best used as an adjunct to tests, rather than as a substitute for them.

There is, however, one special advantage to the interview that no test can match: it brings the executive face to face with a man with whom he may have to work, and this enables both to get at least a preliminary estimate of whether they like the way the other fellow wears his tie and parts his hair. It has been fashionable to dismiss first impressions as trivial, but sometimes they are much more important than they are usually considered. An adverse emotional reaction on first meeting someone is hard for most people to overcome, regardless of whether the reasons for it are good or bad. Certainly a minimal requirement for any position should be that the applicant is not grossly incompatible with his prospective boss. The intelligent executive will realize that in such interviews he is actually testing himself and not the interviewee—he is consulting his stomach rather than his mind, for the very good reason that his stomach will have to put up with any strains that develop between the two men later on. He will also realize that transitory peevishness should not be allowed to sway his judgment and that rejection at this stage of screening should be reserved for persons in whom he obviously cannot put sufficient faith to ensure that they can work productively together. Incompatibility is sometimes obvious, and it is a valid fact of business life that requires no apology, even

when it is based on shortcomings within the executive's own make-up and not the interviewee's.

Projective Tests

Unlike aptitude tests and inventories, which have statistical grandparents and were raised on a diet of strict objectivity, projective tests trace their ancestry to the psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud and were brought up in an atmosphere of licentious speculation. Psychoanalysis has postulated that the mind is not entirely conscious; in fact, even the normal mind can call up only a small fraction of the ideas and impressions which inhabit it. The "unconscious"—which is not an actual thing, or a part of the brain, but just a collective way of talking about all those ideas which the mind cannot deliberately recapture and examine—is nevertheless supposed to have an important influence on behavior.

The mental "road maps" by which people guide themselves through life are drawn partly by a conscious awareness of what the world is really like and partly by unconscious hopes and fears which are, as a rule, quite unrealistic. Whether the individual is able to meet life squarely or keeps getting tangled up in it depends, therefore, on the extent to which his thinking is free to confront life directly, instead of being frightened or misled by unconscious forces. In fact, a good thumbnail definition of a normal mind in psychoanalytic terms would be one which is largely under conscious (and therefore rational) control; whereas abnormality involves an excessive degree of control by the unconscious forces of the mind.

While psychoanalysis tried to delve into the unconscious

by way of the dream, projective tests make the same attempt by way of the waking imagination. These tests began as rough but ingenious ways of estimating the balance of conscious and unconscious forces in the mind. Hermann Rorschach, the great Swiss psychiatrist whose ink blot test is still the best known and most widely used projective test, found that normal people "saw" things in the blots for different reasons than abnormal people did. Normals stuck pretty close to actual resemblances between real objects and the blots, while people with mental disorders tended to be swayed by arbitrary or highly personal associations between the blots and their own experience. In a rough way, then, the test indicated whether someone lived in a private world of his own or in the public world that most of us share. Or to put it another way, it shows whether or not a person's imagination can get back to reality by itself.

But before long this basic function of estimating the realism of the mind became an almost forgotten mission for projective tests. A tremendous fascination developed among psychologists for the highly personalized answers to the tests—the not-so-realistic ones which even normal people would give to a certain extent and which sick people gave almost exclusively. Since these were products of the "un-realistic" part of the mind, it was reasoned they must bear some relation to the unconscious—and the great hunt was on to find ways to decipher the "meaning" of these answers. Psychoanalysis, which had been studying dreams for the very same reason, seemed to have discovered the key—in the theory that the unconscious expresses itself indirectly, through symbols—and the psychologists who worked with projective tests picked up that key enthusiastically.

Freud himself had warned against trying to interpret every symbol in the same way. He held that in dreams, the meaning of a symbol is always a little bit different from person to person, because every symbol represented not just one, but many, facets of the individual's emotional life. Nevertheless, the psychologists who borrowed his ideas for use with projective tests tended, at first, to adopt a simple "cookbook" approach to interpreting rare or individualized test responses. For example, they held that all elongated objects were male sexual symbols or that any response involving an "oral" function like eating or drinking meant a mother-fixation. This kind of sweeping assertion seemed to make possible a sort of mass-production psychoanalysis, and a great deal of enthusiasm for projective tests was built up among psychologists who, although they should have known better, felt that they had opened a sort of magic window into everybody's unconscious.

Most of these notions have since been exploded by careful psychological research or by the good sense of mature clinicians who realize that the unconscious does not work as simply and as conveniently as some projective enthusiasts would like it to. In fact, unconscious forces express themselves in extraordinarily devious ways that have to be laboriously traced and analyzed for each individual. But there remains a small, zealous corps of unreconstructed symbol interpreters among psychologists who cling to their pet notions about the "universal" meaning of various test responses. More because of their fervor than their scholarship, they become identified with avant-garde intellectual groups in various parts of the country, which is a bit of a

paradox since they are actually in the *arrière-garde* as far as discovering new facts about the unconscious is concerned.

Clinicians, in other words, have their own brand of naïveté and their own ways of trying to reduce the complexity of the mind to simple formulas that require little imagination to comprehend. Simple-mindedness is distributed quite democratically among psychologists: it shows up in both the actuarial and the clinical camp, the only difference being that in one case it tries to represent people with numbers, while in the other case it exchanges numbers for symbols and insists that the unconscious works like a machine.

The idea that a particular test response always has the same meaning has taken hold among laymen, some of whom are disappointed when a psychologist shrugs his shoulders and admits frankly that he doesn't know what a particular dream or a particular way of responding to a projective device "means." Most often the layman concludes that the psychologist either doesn't know his business or else that he is protecting him from some horrendous disclosure. The truth about what any imaginative production means sounds wishy-washy and evasive; it is not nearly as satisfying to the inquisitive as an authoritative dictum from a psychologist who puts his faith in universal symbols. But the truth is simply this: each symbol can only be interpreted in its own context: its meaning will vary from person to person and cannot be understood without examining the history and circumstances of the person to whom it occurred. (In fact, a single imaginative production can compress a great many emotional factors into one deceptively "simple" idea;

which is why some psychoanalysts say that a single dream can explain an entire neurosis and why they have to spend years explaining it!)

Projective tests provide a wealth of clues about both conscious and unconscious forces in the personality. The only trouble is that the clues are devious, subtle and hard to understand. The psychologist's job has only begun when the testee is through looking at ink blots or making up stories or drawing pictures—or doing any of the dozens of the imaginative tasks that can properly be interpreted as a projective test. The psychologist is then faced with the problem of figuring out what all this means, and, particularly if he is working in industry, whether an emotional tendency is likely to show up in overt job behavior at all.

Rationale of Projective Tests

These tests rest on the assumption that if a person does anything at all, he has to do it with every last fragment of his being; he cannot, for example, leave his emotions at home when he goes to work, nor can he leave memories, hopes, fears or any part of himself out of daily doings. The personality, cluttered and jerry-built though it may be, always functions as a whole. This means that in any act or thought there will be traces of *both* the overt facts to which the person is responding and the maze of unconscious forces that color his emotional reaction to those facts. Projective tests are designed to permit the analysis of ideas and acts into their conscious and unconscious components, by minimizing the number of clear-cut *external* indications of what is expected of the testee.

Taking a projective test could be compared to taking a

trip through an unfamiliar country where there were plenty of crossroads but very few signposts. You keep on encountering ambiguous situations where, from what few objective clues are apparent, one choice of direction is about as good or bad as any other. The choice you make therefore must be guided largely by hunch—and this is precisely what the psychologist wants you to do; because he is convinced that a hunch is not capricious at all, but that it comes from the very internal regions of the personality he is trying to study. By removing objective clues as to what is logical and realistic, the psychologist is in effect lowering the normal conscious guard against too much emotional influence on thinking. Facts and deductions are the tools with which the conscious and rational part of the mind works and through which it overcomes the trepidations that arise from the unconscious to mislead it. But when facts are hazy and deductions are little more than shot-in-the-dark guesses, the emotions are less restricted and can show themselves in both thought and action with greater-than-usual clarity.

The whole “trick” of projective tests is to present the individual with an ambiguous, unprecedented, clueless situation which he has to cope with as best he can. Normally, where experience provides no hints or guidelines of what is expected, the individual starts to provide his own in the form of tentative guesses: he imposes his own “order” on a chaotic situation and tries to deal with it on his own terms. Ordinarily he does this by trying to relate the vague clues of the test to something familiar, however farfetched this relationship may be; and after he has done this for a while he tends to feel a certain comfort in the

fictitiously “familiar” surroundings his imagination is creating for him. This lowers his guard still further and enables him to make even more farfetched elaborations, and before long he has created an almost wholly imaginative mental context within which he can handle what is actually a very vague situation with some degree of certainty and decisiveness.

In other words, a projective test is like an invitation to create, for a moment, a sort of shadow world that is entirely of one’s own making. The objection that this seems foolish and unproductive is seldom encountered, except with the kinds of people who find their own emotions rather threatening and must therefore cling to hard facts with the tenacity of a nonswimmer clinging to a life preserver. Most people find it easy enough to go along with the psychologist’s request to suspend their critical judgment for a while and let their imagination have free rein. This is partly because their critical judgment encounters little in a projective test to react to very strongly one way or another but mostly because imagining is fun: there is a certain fascination and pleasure in giving one’s imagination a chance to show its stuff.

However, a completely clueless, unprecedented situation does not really exist—except, perhaps, in reveries or sleep, or in the mind of an infant. The ambiguity of a projective test is relative, not absolute. As a matter of fact, there is an advantage in having tests of varying degrees of cluelessness. Even the most ambiguous of all the tests in common use, the Rorschach Ink Blot Test, contains a few commonly acknowledged resemblances to real objects. But its primary advantage is its power to set people off on a chain of per-

sonal associations which are unique to each of them. The Rorschach is a "deep-probing" test because its ties to everyday reality are too few and far between to keep back a flood of unrestrained imaginings.

But with the Rorschach the psychologist never knows in advance which aspect of the unconscious will choose to show itself. If he should be interested in some highly specific problem about the person (which is more often the case in industry than in general psychological practice), he runs the risk of getting information on just about everything but the problem he wants to study. It would be better, for his purposes, to turn to a "semiprojective" test like the Sentence Completion Test, which contains more "clues" than the Rorschach and which is designed to nudge the testee's mind into the general vicinity of the problem under study, and then leaves him alone to let his imagination do whatever it wants to do. There is no real limit to the number of versions of this test that can be devised—beginnings of sentences can be worked out which lead the person who finishes them to a consideration of just about any topic under the sun.

Because semiprojective tests are subject to so much more control by experience and reason than, say, the Rorschach, they are held in low esteem by some projective purists who consider them to be little more than open-ended questionnaires. It is true that with a semiprojective test the psychologist tips his hand to any intelligent testee and indicates what he is interested in, and that this in turn sacrifices the inscrutability which is the projective's chief deterrent to the deliberate slanting of test results. But there are two good reasons why the psychologist in industry is often

willing to pay this price. First, the semiprojective goes straight to the part of the personality that the psychologist wants to know about. By using it he avoids both the time-wasting exploration of irrelevant areas that a more "classical" projective test might involve and the necessity of making some roundabout inferences in order to bridge the gap between a very general test finding and a very specific prediction about the testee's behavior. Second, the testee lives in a world bounded by the same kind of hints and restrictions that the semiprojective test uses to direct his thoughts onto one topic. The impulses that show up in relatively "pure" form on ordinary projective tests are seldom expressed quite so unguardedly in actual behavior. The semiprojective can therefore give a more balanced, if less deep-probing, picture of how the testee combines his own emotions with the restrictions of his environment in real life.

Whether the test is projective or semiprojective, it leads to a set of responses which are more or less unique to the testee and which reflect the action of his imagination on a more or less ambiguous problem. Imagination, in turn, is heavily laden with emotional forces, conscious and unconscious, which presumably affect behavior in subtle or disguised ways in the normal course of events. Even in projectives, these forces are seldom represented directly; but a judicious reading of the test results can provide useful insights into the hidden factors which explain so much of what had been considered the "inexplicable" inconsistency of human behavior.

As a rule, the psychologist in industry does not have to plunge quite as deeply into the testee's unconscious mind

to find out what he needs to know as does his colleague who works with patients in clinics and hospitals. The job of the industrial consultant is to evaluate the drives and defenses with which the person will come to grips with the problems that arise on a particular job. While it is presumably true that *all* of the individual's emotional equipment is involved in his adjustment to any situation he encounters, some components will be brought into play to a greater extent in each specific situation than will others. Ordinarily many of the forces that affect behavior in jobs will be relatively close to the surface of consciousness (in what some psychologists call the "preconscious" part of the mind). These are attitudes and inclinations which the individual may never have faced or thought out but which may from time to time occur to him in rather vague form. If the person doesn't pursue the insight when it does suggest itself, it is usually because he is not of an introspective turn of mind or because the insight would be a blow to his self-esteem and is therefore easy to "ignore." In any case, the feature that distinguishes the feelings that make up this preconscious part of the personality is that they are not entirely beyond the reach of awareness.

The feelings that are beyond the capacity of the mind to recall deliberately—that is, the unconscious proper—are more likely to be expressed in overt behavior when they are not penned in by normal controls than when the mind is in full command of itself. Or, to put it another way, deep, unconscious material is more likely to affect the actions of people who have emotional disorders than the actions of people who are in good emotional balance. The psychologist in the clinic digs into the unconscious for the

very good reason that the forces that made his patient a patient make their home there. Since people with such maladies are less often encountered in industry, it is usually more pertinent for a psychologist doing personnel consulting to address himself to levels of personality which are less deeply buried.

Pitfalls of Projective Tests

Projective tests can be just as projective for the psychologist as for the testee, which is why they are so hard to interpret; that is, there is seldom a clear-cut meaning to a test response, just as the test itself is deliberately built without a clear-cut meaning. This means that the psychologist has to make a guess at what the testee is “telling” about himself when he takes the test. But this guess can be a mere figment of the psychologist’s imagination—in other words, a projective response in itself—or a valid portrait of the emotional forces that formed the response, all according to whether the guess was a pure hunch or an informed estimate.

There are some psychologists who claim (sometimes with impressive evidence to back them up) that they can “tune in” intuitively on the hidden messages in projective-test responses—that their own unguarded associations to what the testee has said provide the best clues as to what goes on in the testee’s unconscious. Often these claims are sheer bunk; after all, the projective test provides a happy hunting ground for people with an exaggerated need to play the prophet to an amazed and credulous audience.

But some psychologists can and do make good their claims for intuitive accuracy. These seem to be the ones who avoid

doctrinaire ideas about projectives, but concentrate instead on the actual test responses. They look for consistencies and build their ideas about the testee on what the testee himself has actually done with the test. They do not, in other words, ignore the logical process of classifying facts and integrating those that fit together into a general pattern; but they are able to run through this process with extreme rapidity, which gives the illusion that they can jump directly to the answer without bothering with the intermediate steps.

Most psychologists who are competent with projectives do not have this gift of split-second integration and have to go through the same process in a lengthier and more laborious manner. They pick up each piece of the jigsaw puzzle and see where, if anywhere, it will fit. Eventually a pattern becomes clear. This is why projective-test interpretation usually takes a long while. If it doesn't, there is a good chance that you are dealing with either a genius or an incompetent. Unfortunately it is often difficult to tell the two apart.

When projective tests were first introduced into industry they brought their clinical baggage along with them. After all, the tests had been born and raised in a hospital environment, and for many years they had an unrelieved diet of sex, hostility, guilt, fear and the many "taboo" subjects that are very pertinent to the question of what makes a person emotionally ill. Industry is not without its quota of mental illness, nor are its "normal" majority without their unconscious emotional conflicts; but after a while it began to be apparent that projectives were scooping up a lot of fascinating but useless data. What went on in a normal

person's unconscious and what went on in his career did not seem to have the direct, pertinent relationship that the projective enthusiasts had hoped to find.

At first the clinical psychologists who worked in industry expressed amazement that there was so much emotional pathology in what was presumably a "healthy" part of the population and wondered how a lot of apparently troubled but successful men managed to keep going at all. This kind of amazement is still heard among newcomers to the field, as well as among some "perpetual newcomers" whose ideas do not seem to be dented by their own experience. But among the more sophisticated psychologists the realization grew that their basic assumptions had been too simple—that they had been ignoring or at least underemphasizing the various mechanisms by which the mind tries to reconcile its impulses with reality. Most of these involve making the impulse itself give way, by shunting it over toward a different goal, by postponing it or even by squelching it altogether.

If you want to put a very broad interpretation on the term "neurotic," these devices by which the mind sacrifices some of its emotional needs in order to keep peace with reality are neurotic. Sometimes they involve suffering and personal inefficiency and sometimes they don't. But the important point that was brought home to clinical psychologists in industry is that these emotional sacrifices are often necessary, unavoidable, and even—in the end—enormously productive. It makes little sense to pin a medical label on them and assume that there is something sick about them that requires a cure, unless the *degree* of sacrifice becomes so great as to involve unnecessary emotional pain.

The other class of devices by which the mind tries to arbitrate between reality and emotion requires that reality itself make the sacrifice—that is, the mind erects a fictitious “reality” of its own and guides itself according to this fiction. Strictly speaking, this kind of mechanism is “psychotic,” but once again, it makes little sense to apply the label indiscriminately. Little distortions of reality are actually quite common—they are a source of comfort to the hopeful, a source of terror to the fearful, and sometimes they are a source of inspiration and insight to the creative. It is only when the *degree* of distortion becomes so great that the individual cannot care for himself or becomes a menace to society that it requires the intervention of a psychiatrist.

Projective tests reveal both kinds of mechanisms, along with the emotional cravings they are designed to control. The psychologist’s problem is to weigh them *all* in balance; his earlier mistake was to weigh the impulses only and to expect some kind of direct translation of desire into overt behavior. By gauging the strength of the various emotional needs, the weight which the mind gives to reality and the particular mechanisms by which it customarily bridges the gap between the two, a good psychologist can come up with a remarkably detailed and accurate portrayal of how the testee is likely to react under varying circumstances. In fact, it is this very capacity to take circumstances into account that gives projectives (when properly interpreted) one of their principal advantages over inventories.

However, there still is and probably always will be a widespread failure to use projectives as the complex and multifaceted instruments that they are. The chief limita-

tion on the projective test is, in fact, the tolerance of the psychologist's mind for complexity. Using the test in a simple, mechanical fashion is easier than using it the right way. It is also more fun for some psychologists, since it enables them to exercise their pity for the testee, while giving them a comforting sense of superiority over him. This is because they normally find that nearly everybody's unconscious is full of frustrations and insecurities.

All of this leads to the commonest failing of projective-test users in industry—the negative bias. There is a fairly consistent underestimation of people's capacity to adjust successfully and an overestimation of the effects of fears and insecurity on behavior. In other words, projective tests are likely to show a more or less constant error in the negative direction; just as inventories, which are more easily slanted by the testee to suit his own purposes, are likely to err in the direction of overestimating the testee's potential. Both kinds of errors can be minimized by sophisticated interpretation, but the likelihood is that one or both will always be present to some degree. This is why it is a good idea to include both kinds of tests in a personality evaluation whenever possible.

There are a number of ways to minimize the weaknesses inherent in projective testing without sacrificing its advantages. The first and most obvious of these is to get a good psychologist. We will have more to say about this important topic in a moment. But it is also wise to insist that wherever possible, several projective tests be used instead of just one. Another good idea is to have several psychologists interpret the tests, each independently of the others and preferably by means of a "blind analysis"; that

is, the psychologists work strictly from the test data itself, and not from personal impressions of the testee. In a blind analysis the psychologist neither sees the testee nor knows very much about him; he develops his interpretations from the test responses alone and is not subject to the normal and often unavoidable biases that a face-to-face meeting can cause. (Laymen are inclined to be incredulous that the psychologist can actually be more objective if he doesn't see the person whose tests he is interpreting; yet this is often the only way he can insulate himself from the kind of half-baked impressions that so often throw the interview off course.)

How to Tell a Good Psychologist from a Not-so-good-One

This is a crucial issue for any executive who consults with psychologists; yet the author has no choice but to present an unabashed statement of his own prejudices on the subject. These may or may not be shared by other psychologists and may or may not be useful to the reader. The only generally recognized standards of psychological competence concern training, which is a necessary, but by itself a wholly inconclusive, yardstick. Most psychologists are agreed that the members of their fraternity should earn a Ph.D. at an accredited graduate school; but there is also considerable agreement that the degree by itself proves little beside an exposure to an organized body of knowledge, a certain degree of persistence, and above all a perverse willingness to endure long impecunious years as a graduate student while everyone else is making money and having fun.

A more satisfactory criterion, at least as far as the author is concerned, is the psychologist's attitude toward his work. Far more than his scholarship or even his experience, the psychologist's appreciation of the difficulties of his job and of his obligations to both his client and the testee make the difference between a useful consulting job and a superficial or misleading one.

Here, for what it's worth, is a check list of the characteristics of a good psychological consultant in industry. Of course, there would be little point in using it as a questionnaire and asking a psychologist point-blank whether he subscribes to it—he has a right to his own opinions, whether these agree with the author's or not. The executive will have to judge for himself on the basis of the way the psychologist conducts himself whether he fits these standards. For that matter, he will also have to decide whether these standards apply at all to the specific problems the psychologist has to handle.

1. He expects to make his quota of mistakes and he makes no bones about it. He does not promise things he can't deliver. He doesn't undertake to evaluate people with unerring or even with "almost unerring" accuracy. Nor does he purport to be able to straighten out everyone who is demoralized or inefficient, or to steer his client in the right direction every time.

2. He does not want to be the power behind anybody's throne. He does not try to make the executive's decisions for him. He resists any efforts by executives to get him to do this. He does not leave a truly agonized or nonplused client in the lurch, but he always strives to minimize emotional dependence on him by the executive.

3. He is open-minded about theories and techniques to which he doesn't happen to subscribe. He doesn't disparage tests that he doesn't happen to be expert with himself. He realizes that he can learn something from psychologists whose ideas are different from his and that very often his own consulting efforts can be strengthened by working together in harness with them.

4. He recognizes the enormous complexity of the human mind, is humbled by it, and makes no attempt to oversimplify it or to minimize the difficulties of trying to analyze it and predict its behavior. He knows that to do his job properly he has to invest a lot of time, concentration and sweat, and that he cannot expect to handle every problem in the same way and still do an acceptable job.

5. He knows how to keep his mouth shut. He realizes that his work brings him into contact with information that is nobody's business but the testee's, and he guards the privacy of such information as jealously as if it related to his own private affairs. He has no need to impress people with the profoundness of his insight by bandying about what he can learn with it. He is awed by the versatility of the human personality, reveres its essential inviolacy, and does not cheapen it or his science by tattling or bragging or using them for glorified parlor games.

6. He realizes that every individual is unique. He does not try to label people in facile ways that ignore this uniqueness. He is not misled into thinking that people who do not fit neatly into preconceived patterns cannot work out successful job adjustments on their own terms.

7. He never forgets that his own personality is part of the mental instrument with which he examines other

people's. He therefore tries to learn as much as he can about himself, regardless of whether what he might find out is flattering or disappointing, and tries to make allowances for his own foibles when they are likely to color his understanding of another person.

In connection with the last point, we ought to examine a prevalent bit of folklore that is not entirely without foundation; namely, that many psychologists are a trifle odd themselves. It's hard to say whether, on the average, psychologists are any more or less stable than other occupational groups; but there is little reason to doubt that the psychological profession attracts at least its full share of unstable, immature and eccentric people. But having emotional problems of their own does not necessarily mean that they cannot do their work properly—any more than being a compulsive perfectionist would disqualify a man from being a capable accountant. As a matter of fact there are some branches of psychology, particularly those that involve attempts to reestablish contact with mental patients who live in worlds of their own, where the principle that "it takes one to know one" may almost be said to apply. In general, however, a knowledge of the laws of human behavior does not exempt one from them, and psychologists are certainly no exception to that rule.

Since many psychologists spend the bulk of their working lives in contact with severely disturbed people or in the working out of abstruse theories, some of them develop attitudes and a jargon that are difficult for laymen to understand. Sometimes psychologists form close little "in-groups" which confine their social relationships to each other, more or less in isolation from other people, which makes under-

standing harder in both directions. However, preoccupation and insularity are by no means confined to psychologists—they occur with just about any occupational group that shares a difficult-to-come-by expertise. And let it be said to their credit that there are many psychologists whose interests and accomplishments cover as broad a range of topics as psychology itself.

Psychologists suffer from a difficulty in communicating—with patients, with each other and especially with businessmen. This is understandable since they are so often dealing with vague, emotionally tinged intangibles which mere words cannot convey very adequately. Many psychologists have found it difficult to get their ideas across to businessmen in ways that are not pedantic, incomprehensible or just plain irrelevant. The “solution” to this problem will have to come from many sources: better training of psychologists, better training of executives—and most of all, better preselection of both.

At present, the psychologist who is both properly trained and able to adapt his training to the specific needs of business is something of a rarity. There is still a lamentable tendency to try to make the businessman adapt his thinking to the needs and idiom of the campus, rather than vice versa. When more psychologists come into industry to learn than to teach, we will be on the threshold of a far more productive and rewarding era in consulting psychology.

5

EVERYONE BUT ME AND THEE

Many jobs in our complicated, competitive economy demand kinds of adjustments that "normal" people cannot manage very well. The person who cherishes his peace of mind is not likely to endure for long the cruel pace and tensions that have become, for better or worse, an integral part of many jobs. Particularly where frequent, rapid changes of course must be made, as in the fashion industries, or where business can appear or disappear overnight, as in advertising, there tends to be a continually high level of tension. The people who tolerate tension the best are more likely to do well in such fields than those who break under the strain or who are unwilling to sacrifice their personal tranquillity for the sake of uncertain business success.

It is much too facile to assume that "well-adjusted" people, who are relatively free of complexes and inner imbalances, can stand up under the strain of business better

than anyone else. Yet this assumption is at the bottom of many mass-testing techniques which are aimed at screening out job applicants who have neurotic tendencies. Whether or not this is a realistic procedure depends entirely on the kinds of tensions the jobs involve: where the pressure is strong and relatively unrelenting, a neurotic may very well endure it longer, and more productively, than a "normal." This is because the neurotic person is accustomed to tension, has built up habitual ways of coping with it, and indeed is apt to be lost without it. Many neurotic people are, in effect, "tension seekers": they are drawn toward stressful situations because their neurosis makes them feel guilty when life goes along too swimmingly for them.

On the other hand, the person who is relatively free of neurosis is not likely to expose himself, knowingly, to an indefinite period of tension at work. He may do so willingly enough when it is temporary or unavoidable, or when the prospective rewards make a brief period of heavy going worthwhile; but if it is apparent that the tension is going to be endless he is likely to look for a job that doesn't take so much of the fun out of his life. Sometimes, however, "normal" people are subjected to severe long-term pressures from which they cannot escape—this happened in war-time prison camps, for example. There is some reason to believe that people who are neurotic to begin with can preserve their morale and mental efficiency better under such conditions than can people to whom continuous anxiety is an unfamiliar experience.

Whether neurotic traits are an advantage or disadvantage for employment depends on the characteristic tensions of the job itself. Very often it is a mistake to screen out candi-

dates with such tendencies, since they can do some jobs as well as or better than people with more stable emotions. Not only do neurotic people have compensating mechanisms which help them to minimize the inroads of their more turbulent emotions on their working efficiency, but what is more important, a neurosis can provide an effective way of adapting to certain kinds of job pressures.

There has been entirely too much scary emphasis on keeping neurotics out of key jobs. It is true that some neurotics are close to the end of their ropes and that to expose them to heavy responsibilities may only hasten an emotional collapse; but this is by no means true of *all*, or even most, neurotics. It does not take a great deal of clinical acumen to discover some neurotic tendencies in someone who is being considered for an important job, especially if projective tests are being used. Repressed wishes, unconscious fears and inhibitions and the other paraphernalia of neurosis are ubiquitous—just about everyone has them to some degree. The important question the psychologist has to consider in such cases is not simply whether some kind of neurotic tendency can be found (it almost definitely *can* be found if he looks hard enough), but rather whether it is likely help or hinder the individual in getting his work done.

A good deal of emphasis is often given to the emotional “price” that a person would have to pay in order to live up to the demands of a job. There is little doubt that some neurotic people in positions of heavy responsibility suffer with their tensions in ways that a more fortunate person could hardly understand. But there are two important

points about such suffering which are too often overlooked, thereby giving the layman a distorted view of the problem. First, many neurotics are going to suffer with tensions regardless of the particular circumstances they are in, since that is the way their personalities are made; second, personal unhappiness will not necessarily interfere with efficiency unless it is developed to severe proportions.

As a matter of fact, it is not at all uncommon to find someone whose personal life is miserable throwing himself into his work with almost unnatural vigor and concentration, hoping in a rather tragic way that the satisfactions of his job can somehow repay him for the frustrations he endures elsewhere. Such people rarely find an adequate substitute for personal contentment in their work, but they can get enough out of it to keep going, and in the process they can frequently accomplish a great deal. The driven, inwardly tortured person who keeps himself working at a man-killing pace may deserve our pity, since he is so obviously unhappy; but he may also deserve our gratitude and respect, since his accomplishments will frequently create jobs and security and opportunities for the rest of us. It is true, therefore, that such men pay a fearful "price" for maintaining their working efficiency; yet it is also true that the rest of us may reap the profit of their sacrifice. This is not exploitation, but rather an unfortunate fact of life that has to be faced squarely, without any one-sided viewpoints or misdirected sympathies. The neurotic who is impelled to pour his emotional energy into his work does not need sympathy; he needs a job that will provide him with an adequate outlet. He may also need the analyst's couch,

but this is a decision he will have to make for himself, since the results of analysis are more likely to affect his inner tranquillity than his working effectiveness.

Telling People to See a Psychiatrist

Sometimes executives who have been advised by psychologists of some kind of neurotic aberration in the personality of another person will recommend to that person that he seek psychotherapy. This is almost always done with the best of intentions; yet it is dangerous and extremely unwise. This is not, first of all, the kind of recommendation that a layman, and particularly a comparative stranger, can make without overstepping his bounds and arousing resentment and suspicion. This is especially true when the recommendation was not asked for, which is nearly always the case. Second, psychologists themselves do not recommend psychotherapy indiscriminately: many people who could profit from such treatments are emotionally unprepared for it, or even antagonistic to it, and with such people a recommendation of this kind from out of the blue is likely to do more harm than good. Third, it seems to be an unfortunate truth that certain kinds of neurotic disorders cannot be helped by existing forms of psychotherapy, or at least, they are very difficult to treat with any degree of success. Finally, at the other extreme, there are many conditions which may seem, to the layman, to require some form of psychiatric attention, but which are actually likely to clear up satisfactorily by themselves. For all these reasons the executive who suspects an emotional disorder in another person or who learns of it through a personality evaluation would be well advised to keep his altruistic im-

pulses in check and leave recommendations for psychotherapy to the professionals.

Of course one may wonder why the executive would come into possession of this kind of information in the first place. It would seem that whether another person had neurotic conflicts or hadn't should be, properly speaking, none of the executive's business. It is very hard, however, to draw a hard and fast line between what is the executive's business and what isn't: most psychologists try to give the executive as much understanding as possible of the people he has to work with, and they sometimes err in the direction of being more thorough than they need to be. More often it is not the psychologist's report, but the inferences the executive draws from it, that lead to the impression that it would be a kindness to direct a man to a psychiatrist. But this may not be indicated by the psychological data at all. This is one reason why it is so important that the psychologist *interpret* his findings to the executive, rather than simply report them; it is only through discussion that each can be sure that he understands the other's thinking. In particular, psychologists will have to pay more attention to making sure that what they report is germane to the decisions executives must make and that executives have a balanced and realistic grasp of the implications of their findings.

Normality and Neurosis

Psychologists have known for some time that mental normality and abnormality are harder to distinguish from each other in actual cases than in theory. There are sick elements in the minds of most normal people, just as there are healthy

elements in the minds of most people with mental or emotional disturbances. Instead of labeling people as neurotics or normals or with any other fact-obscuring catchall, it makes more sense to regard each person as a unique individual with his own particular problems and his own ways of trying to cope with them. Whether the problems or the coping tactics get the upper hand will depend on their relative strength, on the kind of environment the individual has to live in, and on luck—but not on whether he belongs to the lucky tribe we call “normal” or the unlucky tribe we call “neurotic.”

A neurosis is the *result* of an unfavorable balance of both inside and outside forces in the individual's life—it is not their cause. A way of life that masters the problems of one set of circumstances may lead to whimpering ineffectuality in another. In other words, the people we ordinarily call normal are those who are fortunate enough to have encountered no situations in life which their emotions could not tolerate and which their minds could not deal with more or less successfully. Sometimes a normal person runs into a problem that he cannot handle, and while that problem exists he may be considered temporarily “neurotic.” Of course, there are some people whose emotional systems are geared to master very few of the circumstances they are likely to encounter; these people are more or less permanently neurotic. But for most people, it is more realistic to consider the question of how well they can manage to handle the pressures of a particular situation than to presume that they are always going to be normal or always neurotic.

All this means that we ought to be less glib than we have

been about putting people into one kind of a cubbyhole or another as a result of a psychological examination. Normals are not always normal, neurotics are not always neurotic, extroverts are not always extroverts, and so on. With the exception of some extreme disturbances that are likely to wind up in institutions before the executive lays eyes on them, the same statement could be made about just about every one of the psychological labels we are so fond of pinning on each other. In industry, we ought to outgrow the notion that someone who is well suited for a particular job will necessarily do well in a similar job, or even do well indefinitely in the original one. It is equally naïve to assume that someone who isn't a good bet for a particular job can't make a go of it in a similar job if the circumstances are sufficiently different. People change and the circumstances of their lives change; in fact, it sometimes seems that the only thing that doesn't change is the psychological label we pin on a person at a particular point in his lifetime.

Sometimes life provides a fortuitous "crutch" which will sustain an individual in what might otherwise have been a difficult situation for him. For example, he may have the good fortune to be working in the presence of people who provide him with a good deal of moral support or who take the more onerous burdens of his job off his shoulders. Or he may be roused out of his lethargy by an ambitious wife or by the example of an inspired leader. Of course, these environmental forces can work both ways—associates can be demoralizing, wives can snuff out ambition, and leaders can leave a man cold. The important point is that a man's behavior on the job is not entirely determined by his own personality.

The Adaptive Value of Personality "Disorders"

Sometimes, being neurotic or immature or even a little bit daft can have its compensations, especially in connection with work. Some jobs, for example, demand frenetic outpourings of energy and a forced-draft way of life that could only be managed by someone who lives in a constant state of emergency anyway. Psychiatrists are familiar with the keyed-up, eminently successful entrepreneur who keeps a big enterprise going almost by the force of his own will power, who handles an inhuman volume of work day in and day out, and who complains bitterly that his job is a treadmill that he dares not quit. Yet very often it is futile to try to coax such a person off his treadmill, because he needs it as a release for tensions that would tear him apart if he couldn't pour them into his work. Unless an ulcer or a coronary brings him to his knees, he is likely to go on making money and complaining about it almost indefinitely. Perhaps the money doesn't repay him for his fatigue and drudgery and his continually taut nerves; but he does give business a tremendous shot-in-the-arm. Even today commercial empires are being built by driven, restless men to whom work is a sort of religion and money a kind of a god.

It is easy to profess to feel sorry for such hapless men who never get to enjoy the simpler pleasures of life. But pity can be a mask for envy, and these men have more than just money and position to make the rest of us jealous of them. They have their wholehearted commitment to a way of life, their head-on clash with fate and their mastery of it. For all their unhappiness they are perhaps more alive,

more intimately engaged with the world, than the rest of us. If their lives are too exciting, too strained, too exasperating, perhaps the lives of some of the rest of us are too dull.

Ulcers

One of the popular myths that surround modern business is that an ulcer is the price of success. When executives aren't busy making more money they are supposed to be popping pills into their mouths, living on mushy diets or gloomily downing a glass of milk instead of the martini they'd rather have. Some successful businessmen get ulcers, but so do unsuccessful ones, as well as successful and unsuccessful cowboys, plumbers, and deep-sea divers. Whether the business world has more or less than its fair share of ulcer patients would be hard to prove. However, enough is known about ulcers to explode the myth to this extent: whether you get one or not depends less on whether you're a success, or a failure, or on whether you're in business at all, than on the kind of personality you have.

Ulcer-prone people have a tendency to bend over backward to be self-reliant and to accumulate tangible evidence of this in the form of money. Self-reliance is fine in itself, but the man who is on his way to an ulcer is usually "protesting too much"—he is driven by the determination of one part of his personality to put another part out of business. He does not want to achieve self-reliance for its own sake, but rather as a sort of tombstone under which he can bury his secret wishes to be sheltered and looked after by somebody else.

Practically everybody has feelings of this sort from time to time and some people have them nearly all the time; but

the ulcer-prone person acts as if it were a life-or-death matter to get rid of them and is willing to make great sacrifices to do so. This is where he gets his energy and his unrelenting drive—from a desire to stamp out any vestiges of dependency in his mind. But the wish to be protected doesn't let itself get stamped out: it keeps turning up in different disguises. The result is very much like the greyhounds chasing the mechanical rabbit around the track: the person works himself up into a lather but can neither stop running nor catch what he pursues. The constant tension keeps the glands of his body busy preparing him for a daily round of crises—which can result, eventually, in his stomach secreting more acid than it needs for digestion and gradually digesting a little hole in itself. We call that hole an ulcer.

People with this kind of emotional make-up don't necessarily gravitate into the business world—many of them have neither the talent, training, nor interest for it. They go into all kinds of vocations, and if the circumstances of their lives are such as to keep their conflicts boiling, they stand a good chance of winding up with a painful physical souvenir of their emotional battles with themselves. When we see this happening to a businessman it is more memorable than when it hits someone else, for the same reason that we notice a woman driver making a wrong turn but quickly forget the male driver who nearly collides with us: it fits our preconceived notions.

The overflowing emotional tension that can lead to an ulcer can also be the fuel that powers an aggressive drive for success. In this sense both the ulcer and the success are by-products of the same set of forces. But success doesn't

cause ulcers any more than ulcers cause success. What's more, the need to obliterate feelings of dependency is not the only source of a drive for accomplishment in the business world. There are so many more people who acquiesce to wishes for dependency than there are people who fight against them, that one has to wonder whether the "ulcers and success" myth isn't a colossal case of sour grapes.

Some men throw themselves into their work to prove that they are as good as or better than their fathers or someone else against whom they feel they are being measured. Some men are driven by a need to vindicate themselves in the eyes of people who have sacrificed for them. Some men work to please their wives, others to be able to stay away from their wives, others to maintain a sense of power over wives who might try to dominate them. Some men feel that they owe an unpayable debt to the world for the mere privilege of being born and work furiously to be even a little worthy of that privilege. And so on; the list of reasons for consuming drives that impel men toward business success could fill pages and perhaps even volumes. Many of these hidden reasons may not seem so worthy when they are looked at frankly; yet they are no less human, and in their own way, no less justifiable than the motives that lead other men to achieve much less spectacular results in their careers.

Perfectionists

The advance of technology has put a premium on men with a passion for accuracy and the patience to deal with an endless series of small facts which have to be sorted, recorded and remembered. Perfectionism is a hard trait to

instill in someone with a casual attitude toward details; therefore many jobs that demand such habits are often filled from the ranks of those people for whom there is no greater delight than to do a job exactly as it should be done. Dotting the last *i* and crossing the last *t* is a point of honor with them and not just a boring, almost unnecessary chore as it would be to most other people.

Surgeons, accountants, draftsmen, bankers and laboratory scientists, to name a few examples out of many, all could profit from a healthy dose of compulsive neurosis. The compulsive person is often at an advantage in jobs calling for sustained attention to minute details. This is so for several reasons: perhaps the most important is the fact that they are uncommonly free of distracting emotions, since these are almost automatically swept under the rug into the unconscious part of their minds. This makes it easier for them to concentrate on what they are doing. (It also tends to give them an austere, somewhat colorless personality.) Second, many compulsives have the attitude that to make a mistake of any kind is to court a catastrophe. They may know that this is unrealistic, or they may never stop to question it at all; but in either case the feeling haunts them and keeps them on their toes. Third, they fall into automatic habit patterns rather easily and do not become impatient with themselves when they repeat these patterns time and time again. A habit is often soothing to a compulsive person and gives him a sense of well-being. All this means that people with this kind of personality can work in efficient, well-organized ways, particularly when there are a lot of minute details to be dealt with repetitively.

It is not true that compulsive individuals are necessarily drawn toward any of the career fields mentioned above; although when one of them turns up in, say, accountancy, the "fit" between his personality and his job is often so striking as to set up a stereotype in the mind of the outsider. The noncompulsive accountants—and there are plenty of them—don't fit neatly into these stereotypes and are therefore easier to ignore.

One would be going very far out on a limb to say that the compulsive accountants (or surgeons, or what have you) are better at their callings than their noncompulsive colleagues. The quality of their performance depends, after all, on many other things beside their way of dealing with their emotions! But all these "other things" being equal, the compulsive is probably off to a good head start in work of this kind. He is likely to thrive on the pressures that are peculiar to these jobs, rather than succumb to them, and he is likely to use his talents and training efficiently because he finds it pleasurable to do so.

The "Creative Screwball"

At the opposite extreme from the highly organized compulsive is the person whose mind flits haphazardly from idea to idea, without much regard for facts, logic or precedent. These people are not especially addicted to doing things in traditional ways: their mental life is a long, disconnected series of semiaimless ramblings. They often develop a surface acquaintance with a remarkably broad range of topics, which means that they can sometimes bring together some widely divergent ideas into a combination that is fresh and original—and perhaps clever. Just as often, however, their

ideas will be just plain incongruous. They seem to enjoy both kinds equally well.

In other words, the “normal” mental state for these people is very much like what a reverie is for others. Their thinking is under no particular discipline, and therefore it is frequently vague and impractical, or even grossly unrealistic. But they do stay out of mental ruts, which is why they sometimes hit upon useful or attractive ideas that nobody else has thought of before. They therefore have a certain advantage over people who cannot untie themselves from mental habits, at least as far as developing new ideas is concerned. If they happen to make their living in a field where there is a constant demand for new ideas—such as advertising, merchandising or the theater—their loosely knit way of thinking can be a decided asset.

If someone wanders around in a mild but perpetual daze and never happens to stumble onto a useful combination of ideas, we are likely to call him a daydreamer, or an ineffectual, or—if we happen to have a penchant for psychological labels—a schizoid personality. But if that same person had the good fortune to hit upon a humorous twist to a familiar phrase or a catchy slogan for selling soap, we would probably call him creative. And if—as would probably be the case—he had some attitudes and mannerisms that struck us as being rather odd, we would probably add that he was a creative screwball.

Creative people, who aren’t all screwballs, are often viewed with some disdain by noncreative people. This feeling is frequently mutual, because they don’t share the same values. Noncreative people derive much comfort from sharing a common core of widely accepted ideas. But many

creative people cannot get a good enough hold on conventional ideas to derive much comfort from them and therefore tend to flout the things that other people consider sacrosanct. If a creative person cannot manage to feel at home among ordinary people, he may gravitate toward a colony of emotional exiles and become a Bohemian. Here, among the avant-garde or lunatic fringe (depending on your point of view) he will find other people with original minds, as well as a lot of hangers-on who aren't creative at all but are merely affected. Or, if he doesn't really care whether people like his ideas or not, he may turn into an absent-minded professor or a tinkerer in a basement workshop.

It would be hard to say whether most creative people lead nonconformist lives. At any rate, many of them do, largely because their thinking is too fluid to stay in the well-worn grooves of conformity. On the other hand, it is almost certainly true that most nonconformists aren't creative, except, perhaps, in the roundabout sense of being devoted to new ideas because they are new. But there is enough truth in the old saw about genius being next to madness to equate the two in the popular mind. And this should be enough to make us wonder whether a touch of "madness" is really such a bad thing after all and whether it makes much sense to ferret it out with psychological tests or to launch wholesale human relations programs in hopes of stamping it out.

The Real Culprit: Dependency

By far the biggest psychological problem facing industry today does not involve neurosis at all, but rather a state of

mind: the assumption that someone else will always be ~~a~~ hand to pull one's chestnuts out of the fire and that if one waits patiently things will always turn out all right. This attitude, which psychologists call "dependency" because it is based on a tendency to lean on others for support and protection, is so common that it is perhaps more "normal" in a statistical sense than self-reliance. People who have this attitude toward life are not necessarily sick or unhappy; they are usually quite agreeable and contented and would probably be considered well-adjusted by most laymen—even by some psychologists. They are not emotionally independent because they have never had to be and because they were raised in a society which encouraged the development of dependent attitudes. In other words, dependent people have more or less incomplete personalities: their growth has been lulled to a halt before they could acquire the habit of standing on their own two feet.

Dependency can show up in many different ways. Most often, it affects what people *don't* do: it makes them unwilling to take chances, to exert extra effort, to use their imaginations or to display initiative. Dependent people are usually very well satisfied with the *status quo*, or to be more precise, they are not likely to do much about it whether they like it or not. The net effect of most dependency is to slow up progress, to put a drag on working efficiency and to place an inordinate amount of power in the hands of those who aren't dependent.

Dependency is also the single most important cause of the widespread trend to conformity in behavior and opinion that is being lamented so loudly nowadays. Dependent people are likely to feel more secure when they conduct

themselves in the way everybody else does than when they follow any inclinations of their own. If people are losing their variety and becoming carbon copies of each other, it is probably due more to weakness within themselves than to any external plots to cram them all into the same mold.

We still like to talk about rugged individualism, but genuine instances of it are hard to come by. Our cultural standards of what kinds of behavior are decent and likable are getting further and further removed from the qualities that enable a man to accomplish something extraordinary in a competitive economy. Increasingly the emphasis is on cooperation, geniality, loyalty—while people with the guts to put an unpopular idea into practice are suspected and sometimes ostracized. By a simple process of freezing them out, what few rugged individualists we still have among us are in danger of becoming pariahs. Perhaps this has always been true, and perhaps the real individualist wouldn't be affected one way or another by what other people think of him. But the young men who are still uncommitted to a set of attitudes and who look to older people for models of behavior after which to pattern their own are very likely to get the idea that just being themselves would be psychologically unhealthy, morally indefensible and economically precarious. The nineteenth-century style of individualist is thus becoming the victim of our twentieth-century style of folklore.

There is no way of establishing whether there are more dependent people around now than there were formerly or whether we are merely becoming aware of how widespread the leaning-psychology has always been. Perhaps the ratio of lambs to lions in the human race is still what it

always was. In any case, there are a number of forces at large in our culture which have a molding effect on men's ideas and which, if they do not create dependency, at least help to sustain it in the minds of many people.

First of all, there is the grand sweep of history itself—a force so huge that it is often taken for granted by students of the mind. Even in the most advanced countries, we are still reaping the psychological side effects of the industrial revolution: life is full of roles for which there are no precedents, and most people who find themselves in such roles look about a little nervously to see what other people are doing, rather than risk setting standards for themselves. Today men who are the sons of laborers or tradesmen are going into prestigious professions that didn't exist until a few years ago—and many of them find the lack of tradition in their lives a little disturbing. In other words, the freedom to get ahead imposes a sort of tax on the people who want to take advantage of it—namely, the necessity of making choices—and many people prefer to pay this tax the easy way by following the herd. Dependency may be, in part, a by-product of the glut of opportunities for “getting ahead.” It is almost as if the horizons that technology has opened up were a little bit *too* limitless to suit the tastes of modern man.

Economic forces also play a role. Ever since the Great Depression of the 1930s there have been attempts to put a harness on the economy, at least to the extent of building into it what amounts to an insurance system against the ravages of unemployment and the collapse of purchasing power. How well this insurance will work over the years remains to be seen; but in the minds of many people the

very existence of legal protection against economic duress is a source of deep emotional comfort. It is almost as if the government had stepped into the shoes of the father who, in his child's eyes, is a living guarantee that the necessities of life will always be forthcoming. The same attitude tends to get affixed to corporations which set up pension plans and other security benefits—many individuals will tend to shift the responsibility for caring for their own welfare onto a big impersonal institution. Since providing emotional and financial security is a big business in itself, the institutions which absorb personal responsibility tend to compete with each other. This means that the individual who feels uncomfortable with the emotional burden of providing for his own security has no trouble getting rid of it: he *sells* it, to an employer, to an insurance company or investment fund, or even to the government. Thus dependency gets another lift.

There has been a lot of speculation as to whether child-rearing and educational practices have helped to make people more dependent. On the face of it, it might seem that by being protected from too many collisions with the seamy side of life, children would develop many comfortable illusions about the world and that if these should be shattered later on they would leave a void in their emotional lives—a yearning for the old illusory safety. This need could be met by putting all of one's faith in some institution that supposedly guarantees that all would be well. There is some reason, perhaps, to believe that a child can have too much security for his own good—since emotional independence may not develop at all when there is no necessity for it.

Industry probably pays a much higher price for the inefficiency produced by dependency than it does for the tensions produced by neurotics. But dependency takes its toll in bites that are small enough to get accustomed to, while the problems of getting along with a neurotic are often too obvious to ignore. Dependency is not only harder to recognize (since it is so widespread as to seem "normal") but it is also easier to rationalize than neurosis: religion, ethics and a good deal of psychological lore can be called upon to make a flaccid lack of ambition sound like a virtue. Consequently there is little likelihood that dependency is going to be eradicated or even diminished very much in the foreseeable future.

Unfortunately, the most effective "cures" for excessive emotional dependency are usually neither feasible nor justifiable as a deliberate training device. There is nothing like grim necessity for compelling a capable but languid person to start relying on his own resources. (This is why many men may properly be said to have "grown up" emotionally while serving in the armed forces, especially in wartime.) The big danger in handling people on a sink-or-swim basis is that some of them would probably sink—either because their capacity to fend for themselves is weak or because they have become too confirmed in habits of relying on others to break the pattern.

To eliminate the psychological roadblocks to individual productivity, industry will have to place more emphasis on identifying those persons whose reluctance to use the full measure of their talents can be overcome through effective leadership. There will also have to be a corresponding de-emphasis on weeding out those who may not fit the cultural

norm for being wholesome and well balanced. This means that we're going to have to learn a lot more about the ways in which dependency develops in normal people, as well as about the kinds of supervision that can lessen the effects of dependency on job performance.

6

FACE-TO-FACE MANAGEMENT

There was once a time when managers would treat their subordinates pretty much as they pleased, and thought no worse of themselves for it. On the other hand, the enlightened manager of today is likely to be very conscientious about following what he conceives of as good supervisory principles, and when he lapses from these he probably feels guilty about it. In fact, the most impressive victory of the human relations point of view in industry thus far is not so much an improvement in employee morale as a feeling by many executives that it is *their* job to keep employees happy. Where managers resist that responsibility, unions are likely to thrust it upon them.

This shift in managerial philosophy reflects a larger historical change. In the last generation, the character of most corporations has changed from impersonal purchasers of labor to colossal dispensers of benevolent paternalism. On the whole, this has undoubtedly been a good thing.

The larger goals of our society involve the creation of human happiness; and in the last analysis efficient production and profitable management are only means to that end, rather than ends in themselves. Working should be more than just a way of earning a living: it should be a way of earning self-respect and of perfecting one's abilities—and, ideally, it should also be fun. Work that is sheer drudgery or humiliation is not worthy of free men. In a sense, the upsurge of human relations ideas in industry in the last few decades was a belated correction of what had been a lopsided materialism in industrial thinking. Or to put it another way, it has taken this long for the democratic ideals of the eighteenth century to catch up with the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century.

Inevitably, psychology has been brought into industry's attempts to deal with its responsibilities toward its people. Sometimes psychology came in through the front door, with solid research findings and penetrating insights; and sometimes it was dragged in through the back door, with wishful interpretations of theories that were not intended to apply to industry or with half-baked guesses that have the doubtful merit of being couched in psychological language. The welcome has usually been equally enthusiastic at both doors.

Various reasons have been advanced as to why management should concentrate on making employees happy. One is that contented workers are more efficient, so that good human relations mean better profits. This idea is no longer as widely accepted as it once was: the weight of evidence seems to indicate that it is, at best, a gross oversimplification. A more sweeping reason that is advanced is that

management has a responsibility to society at large to maintain a working climate that promotes the emotional health of employees. Some executives endorse this idea as an illustration of good corporate citizenship, while others object irately that they are in business to make a profit and not to run an oversized mental-hygiene clinic.

Despite all the fuss, there is no fundamental incompatibility between sound human relations and making money. It seems obvious that neither goal can be pursued very far without making some kind of allowance for the other. People and profits have to meet each other halfway or neither will survive. The problem is that many human relations programs tend to deteriorate into an endless series of concessions in which management assumes more and more responsibilities toward its employees and the community and sees few if any obligations assumed toward the company in return. This has happened for a variety of political and economic reasons; but to the psychologist the most fascinating reason of all for the spread of paternalism in management is a hidden one: the guilt feelings of managers.

Most executives have more power over other people than they ever dare to use. In many cases they have come up through the ranks themselves and know what it's like to be on the other side of the desk; they may have experienced at first hand the resentment and jealousy that is often directed against the people who have the power to frustrate other people's hopes. Executives have the same need to be liked that everyone else has; so it's natural enough for them to recoil at the idea of being hated on a massive scale. This makes them reluctant to wield their power; but on

the other hand, they have to wield it in order to get their jobs done properly. They are, in other words, caught between duty and the wish to be "one of the boys"; they are damned if they make a decision and equally damned if they postpone it. If their obligations to their company don't make them feel guilty, their compassion for their fellow man will.

The net effect of this is that a good many executives feel guilty for being executives, and—at least unconsciously—feel that they have to justify their position to their subordinates. This is not necessarily a bad thing—it is probably the best single guarantee against the abuse of executive power. It becomes a serious weakness, however, when the executive has such a need to preserve the affection of other people for him that he barter away his control of the situation he is supposed to manage. Since the current intellectual climate in industry cuts a lot of ground out from under the executive who insists on a *quid pro quo* for every concession he makes, this kind of emotional "sellout" occurs fairly often.

The "human relations" tradition fits into this pattern in two ways. First, it tends to be interpreted as a form of scientific evidence that any form of nonpaternal conduct toward employees is wrong. This simply isn't true, but it is easy to believe since so much of human relations theory is directed against the bare-knuckle methods of handling people that characterized the old school of supervision. What's more, it makes a handy rationalization for managers who are afraid *not* to be paternal. Second, human relations precepts are sought out by managers who want to create a climate in which their employees will be anesthetized with

happiness and therefore won't demand anything more. Such managers are naturally more attracted to the benevolent aspect of human relations than toward the side that notes the values of discipline and pressure. Yet even if employees could be so easily duped by benevolence, which isn't likely to happen, the larger goals of management would not be met. People who are too serene to want anything are not likely to be productive.

In other words, when "good human relations" becomes an excuse for pandering to the dependency needs of employees, it is usually a case of following the right principles for the wrong reasons. Just as many parents have turned to psychology books for "rules" to follow in raising their children, so has industry turned to psychology in hopes of finding pat formulas to use in dealing with subordinates. When the formulas were not pat but complicated, they have been made artificially simple by stressing the parts that were easiest to apply. But just as the child sees through the sham of parental rule following to the real attitude that lies beneath it, so can subordinates sense the actual feeling of superiors. The manager who is really trying to buy submission by making a few concessions will find that he cannot pay a high enough price to get what he wants. Obscuring the real goals of management by adhering to a policy of continual giving merely hinders understanding and makes for distrust in both directions.

Leadership by Cookbook

In some quarters in industry there seems to be a naive faith that if you treat everybody decently you can make a

silk purse out of a sow's ear. Human potentialities are supposed to be limitless when exposed to the sun of tolerance and encouragement. Most people, it is true, thrive in a climate that gives them a chance to be themselves (although there are plenty of exceptions to this rule in the form of people who are afraid to be themselves). But the main difficulty arises from attempts to make kindness work miracles. Too often human nature imposes inescapable limitations on people—there are fears and compulsions against which some people dare not transgress. There are some changes, in other words, which no form of supervisory artistry is going to bring about in people: the deepest roots of a person's nature will usually be impervious to external "handling."

Good supervisory habits are not the same for all supervisors and all subordinates. Some people need discipline more than they need understanding, some need recognition more than they need instruction, some need merely to be left alone and others need desperately to have someone pay attention to them. To use the same set of habits for leading every subordinate, no matter how humane those habits may be, is not likely to improve either morale or efficiency to any great extent. This is for two reasons: first, the treatment will be inappropriate for a lot of people; second, nothing is quite so obviously insincere as treating everyone to the same automatic, stylized benevolence. An honestly gruff supervisor will probably be more effective in the long run than a dishonestly sympathetic one. The indifference to individuals implied by an artificially adopted attitude is more cutting, more humiliating in the long run, than toughness that comes straight from the shoulder.

Good supervision is based on the best efforts of one person to understand another. This means that it cannot involve any preconceived notions or standardized tactics. The supervisor who memorizes a list of rules for leadership and goes around applying them indiscriminately to everyone is telling his subordinates, in a subtle but unmistakable way, that he doesn't care about them—and that he merely hopes to get them to do his bidding quietly by applying a bit of hocus-pocus that he has learned for that purpose. He may succeed in getting cooperation for the time being, but he is not likely to win the respect that makes for lasting cooperation or to create the morale that makes for sustained efficiency. On the other hand, an unsophisticated supervisor who is obviously trying to get to know his men as well as he can and to meet their desires for satisfaction from their work at least halfway, is likely to have most of his men actively trying to help *him* to accomplish what he wants to have done. He may do this without being able to explain it, and some of his tactics may seem pretty crude in the light of theory, but he will probably get results.

Motivating People to Work

The less control a person has over his own emotions, the more susceptible he is to “manipulation” by someone else. People who want to believe can be duped, people who are fearful can be herded and people who are hostile can be inflamed, all without a great deal of effort or subtlety. This has been going on for centuries and is by no means a product of modern psychology—in fact, most psychologists are

not nearly as adroit at manipulating people as are many politicians, editors and salesmen.

But regardless of who is doing the manipulating, the sad truth seems to be that many people are more susceptible to having their emotions played upon than to any other method of leadership. Management, which has the responsibility of coordinating the actions of many people to produce products and profits, has no recourse but to manipulate the feelings of some of its people in order to get things done. This always involves a moral problem, and no manager who is worth his salt ever loses sight of it: how to motivate people without misleading or exploiting them. There can be no hard and fast solutions to this—certainly not one that will satisfy everybody. As a result, a tender conscience is one of the occupational diseases of a good executive; and it is also his surest safeguard against “using people.”

Most of the manipulation of employees' emotions that goes on in business is not only subtle—it is unintentional, as well. There are very few Svengalis in gray flannel suits, but there are a lot of terribly earnest men who are quite willing to bend over backwards to keep from looking like one. Many executives have a horror of looking like anything but a nice guy in the eyes of the rank and file—they want very much to establish themselves as a class of professional managers, something entirely different from the nineteenth-century “robber barons.” This is likely to put them in a much more paternal frame of mind than they realize: many executives, for example, would rather go on carrying incompetent or ineffectual “deadwood” on the

payroll than face the unpleasant task of dismissing them. They therefore create—without intending it, and usually without realizing it, either—a lulling, protective atmosphere in which mediocrity flourishes and initiative quietly goes to sleep. By providing a surfeit of security, many executives bring out the complacency in their subordinates while diluting their drive and conscientiousness. This is “hidden persuasion” of the worst kind: it seduces people into not caring whether they are delivering the best performance that their talents and training can produce. It is clearly in nobody’s interests for this to happen, but once it is started it is hard to stop.

But the chief difficulty with paternalism is not that it nourishes mediocrity, but that it is applied indiscriminately to people who don’t need it. True, there are plenty of people for whom security is an indispensable condition for effective work; toward such people paternalism is not merely a humane gesture but a sound business policy as well. But there are also a lot of others who merely stagnate when they are not under some kind of pressure or when they find that precisely the same pay check awaits them after a week of loafing as after a week of hard work.

It might be argued that you cannot have a separate tailor-made policy to fit the needs of every employee and that each person will have to make his peace with the policy that fits the needs of the majority. Perhaps so—but this is likely, ultimately, to water down the spirit of the organization to the level of its least adventurous members. It is tantamount to saying that a big organization has to be ponderous and inefficient. Of course, a lot of them are. But there are enough exceptions to prove that big organizations

do not have to motivate all of their employees in precisely the same way and that when they apply incentives *selectively* rather than collectively, they can be very efficient indeed.

A flexible policy can defer the rewards of some men until the future if that will help them to work more effectively in the present, while it also provides a fat bonus check for those who would rather let the future take care of itself. It can provide detailed regulations for those who would be lost without them and wide-open latitude for those who cannot stand them. It can do all this without creating chaos, *if* the company has taken a few pains to find out what its men are like—which makes at least as much sense as finding out what its market, reputation and “product image” are like.

This is neither unfair nor undemocratic, unless the doctrine that all men are created equal is stretched to mean that they have no individuality and are driven by precisely the same emotional needs—which is demonstrably untrue. Equality before the law is one thing; equality of incentives and ambitions is quite another. As a matter of fact, the chief difficulty with treating different people differently is not that it would be undemocratic, but that it would require so much individual attention to so many people. It is much easier to lump people together, measure group tendencies and fit policies to the averages. In a sense, then, the deterioration of the individual into a statistic and the resultant pressures for conformity in big organizations are, fundamentally, a product of mental laziness on the part of managers.

Supervision

Supervisors, like policemen, judges and psychologists, would be unnecessary if everybody knew precisely what he was supposed to do in every circumstance and could be relied upon to do it. The supervisor's basic job is to supply the difference between the skill and motivation that a subordinate has and what he needs for an optimal job performance. Some subordinates know more than others, learn faster than others or are better motivated than others—and some are just the opposite. In effect, every subordinate presents a different supervisory problem and usually a constantly changing one, as well. This means that there are very few “rules” of good supervision that won't have plenty of exceptions in actual practice.

Over the years, the people who work out theories about supervision have divided themselves into two more or less opposing camps: one favoring democratic methods and the other favoring authoritarian methods. At first, the democratic school of thought was the only one with an articulate group of supporters and some scientific respectability in the form of research studies. The authoritarian school, on the other hand, consisted largely of supervisors themselves—mostly the old-fashioned, hardfisted variety who neither knew anything nor cared a damn about theories, but were interested only in getting the work done. They often did so by throwing their weight around. For years, these supervisors were bewildered to find themselves in the position of pagans who were set upon by swarms of democratic missionaries, seeking to educate them in more humane ways of doing their jobs.

Since the democratic school has had the field pretty much to itself, at least as far as theorizing was concerned, their ideas spread very rapidly and inevitably overextended themselves. It is by no means uncommon, for example, for foremen to be stripped of all authority and left to do their jobs by wheedling, cajoling and appeals to sweet reason. But there are signs that the pendulum is beginning to swing in the other direction: the authoritarian school is beginning to get a voice, some scholarly advocates, and even a little scientific respectability of its own. As long as this movement does not simply take us right back to where we started from, it will undoubtedly be a good thing; ideas (even democratic ones) that are not criticized have a way of getting too big to fit the facts and of turning into dogma.

There is still some tendency for psychologists to be identified with the democratic school of supervision. This is partly because some of the early research on the subject seemed to support it and partly because of the spread of Freudian ideas with their emphasis on permissiveness toward others. However, there is now a growing body of psychological opinion which holds that supervision can become too "democratic" for anybody's good and that some kind of artful blending of both approaches is most likely to get the work done in the best way. The precise mixture will vary with the maturity of the people involved: when the subordinate is in good enough command of his emotions to concentrate on his work no matter how he is feeling, he can and should be given plenty of leeway by his supervisor. On the other hand, when the subordinate is likely to let petty jealousies or sheer laziness prevent him from doing his job the way he should do it, his supervisor

may have to apply some pressure to keep this from happening. Democracy works best, in other words, with people who are emotionally grown-up.

Ideally, the supervision that a man receives at work should help him to become more mature emotionally. As time goes on he should not only require less firsthand direction but should also start to pick up new skills and perhaps to contribute some new ideas by himself. In a word, supervision should tend to make itself less necessary by helping people to grow more self-reliant, more productive, more creative.

But this seldom happens—and the fault is not entirely a matter of supervisors not knowing how to supervise. There are many people who don't want to grow, either because they are afraid to or because they don't put much value on being independent or creative. Such people are likely to go on being more or less permanent supervisory headaches. All the enthusiasm and leadership in the world is not going to transform people whose basic motives are to stay exactly as they are.

The most serious problem that these people present, however, is not how to develop them but how to identify them. It is entirely too easy to write off a difficult person as incorrigible and simply to stop trying to understand him. It would certainly ease a supervisor's job to have a simple way of telling whether he is making this kind of mistake. But there isn't a simple way, and even the complex ways that a psychologist would employ are far from foolproof. Probably the wisest procedure for a supervisor to follow is to keep giving each man the benefit of the doubt until everything possible has been done to help him. Even then

the decision should never be final—some people have discovered the motivation to improve themselves after years of lethargy.

Some Tactics

For those who can grow, there are many different kinds of tactics the supervisor can employ to help them. But he must always remember that he cannot make every one of his subordinates fit his own favorite supervisory habits; instead his job is to diagnose the motives of each of his men as well as he can and then try to deal with them individually. People are so varied in the rewards they seek from a job and in the kinds of incentives they will respond to, that to treat them all alike is simply to miss many of them altogether. This is true even when the supervisor is taking pains to be tolerant, courteous and just—or is using any other noble and enlightened tactic. There are always enough exceptions to the rule, where people are concerned, to make most rules pretty useless when they are applied indiscriminately.

One of the most potent (and least recognized) leadership tools the supervisor has is his own example. Whether knowingly or not, he is always serving as a model on which some of his men will tend to fashion their own attitudes toward the job. This will seldom be a matter of simple imitation, but rather a subtle shift of feelings about the importance of the work toward an approximation of the supervisor's own attitudes. For example, a foreman who loves his job and wouldn't trade it for all the tea in China is likely to communicate at least some of his enthusiasm to some of the men who work under him, while a foreman who con-

siders his work to be a matter of cut and dried routine is not likely to stir up much excitement among his men. This will probably be true regardless of the objective nature of the work itself; however, the effects of the supervisor's attitudes on employee morale may sometimes be hard to detect since they are, after all, only one element in a complex equation. But it is not an element that management can safely ignore.

Another technique that can be useful under certain circumstances is to challenge the employee's abilities by giving him an assignment that is a little bit harder than he thinks he can handle. There would, of course, be little point in doing this if he happened to be right in his feelings about what he could do. But when a supervisor becomes convinced that one of his men is selling his own abilities short, it may be possible to jar him out of his timidity in this way. There is always a calculated risk in using this tactic, since it is tantamount to pushing someone into deep water and telling him to start swimming. If it turns out that he really can't swim, you have to pull him out of the water; and the resultant damage to his confidence can be quite severe. But this danger should not deter the supervisor from running a risk when he is reasonably sure of his man and when continued timidity seems to be stalling his development. People don't necessarily "grow out" of an emotional block all by themselves: sometimes a patient supervisor who waits for this to happen is merely giving the subordinate more time in which to solidify his feelings that he can't go any farther.

There are times, too, when an employee has to be "weaned" of his supervisor. This is particularly true of

trainees. Some of them are too content to remain at the feet of their instructors indefinitely, and this may actually weaken their capacity for standing on their own two feet later on. Timing is all-important here: if a supervisor starts to pull away before a subordinate is really ready for it, this may be interpreted as a rejection or as disinterest, either of which could make the subordinate lose faith in himself. On the other hand, if the supervisor waits too long before starting to leave a man to his own devices, he may find himself cutting away the very emotional props on which the subordinate has learned to lean. This could lead to anything from mild bewilderment to open panic, depending on how abruptly the supervisor pulls away his support.

The best way to avoid this dilemma is not to let too much dependency develop in the first place. The amount of moral support and assistance that the subordinate gets should never be more than he needs to feel comfortable enough to do his job as well as he can. This quantity may fluctuate considerably—even from day to day, where younger employees or chronically unstable ones are concerned—and even the most sensitive supervisor cannot hope to pinpoint the exact dosage of paternalism and pressure that a subordinate needs at various times. But pinpointing isn't really necessary. As long as the supervisor is constantly doing his best to keep "tuned in" on his subordinates' feelings, they will probably manage to progress even when their powers of endurance are sometimes misjudged.

Supervisors Are People, Too

Supervisory tactics cannot be worked out solely to meet the subordinate's needs: they must fit the supervisor's

needs, as well. The supervisor is not, after all, a mechanical dispenser of leadership, but an ordinary mortal with needs and emotions of his own. It would be preposterous, for example, to ask a naturally protective supervisor to use sink-or-swim development tactics with his men and expect him to bring it off successfully. His heart wouldn't be in it, and even if he managed to restrain himself from surreptitiously helping his subordinates along, many of them would probably sense that they were part of a sham play and would act accordingly. It would be equally senseless to ask an impersonal, emotionally cool supervisor to affect a sympathetic interest in his men: he would probably botch the job. Even when a tactic would be very much in the subordinate's best interests, it is less likely to be effective when the supervisor is temperamentally unsuited to apply it.

Despite all the preaching and theorizing about the attitudes that a "good" supervisor should adopt, we cannot reasonably expect many of them to obligingly change their stripes—being human, they have a right to a few. Rather than expect every supervisor to be a virtuoso in all of the various leadership methods, it makes more sense to let him specialize in the ones he inclines toward temperamentally. Regardless of whether these happen to fit the contemporary supervisory fads, there will always be some subordinates who could profit from an exposure to one of them. Matching the subordinate's needs to the supervisor's inclinations—while it is a difficult and inexact business at best—is more likely to bring out the best in both of them than assigning them to each other indiscriminately.

We may be in danger of losing sight of the limits of the supervisory arts. Plenty of problems arise between people

to which there can be no facile or feasible solution. There are times when the wisest course of action for a supervisor to follow is to leave well enough—or even bad enough—alone. This means that the broad goal of enhancing personal growth among subordinates cannot be applied to all people at all times. Deciding when it would actually be best to leave the *status quo* undisturbed and learning to distinguish such a decision from a rationalization for stalling are perhaps the most difficult and important of all the tasks a supervisor faces.

In fact, when we stop to think about it, the requirements of a supervisor's job are rather heroic—too much for most men, however earnest and talented, to live up to all of the time. The realistic supervisor should expect to be disliked, envied, complained about, undercut and misunderstood. He is the natural target for all of the gripes which his men bring to the job, for vendettas that may date back to childhood, for grumblings at decisions he didn't make, and for the annoyance of superiors whose ideas he is supposed to enforce. Ideally, he should accept his inevitable unpopularity as philosophically as he can: it is the price of leadership, and if he is worth his salt he is willing enough to pay it. He ought not to apologize for his role by being too lenient, any more than he should defend it by being too harsh. He should be prepared to help his subordinates to grow and to do a better job—if necessary, in spite of themselves and without their appreciation. Most of all, since he will probably never attain all of these ideal goals, he should be prepared to forgive himself for his failures.

7

HUMAN RELATIONS WITH REAL HUMAN BEINGS

In its original form, the human relations doctrine held that people work, not only out of economic necessity, but to satisfy certain psychological needs, as well. Therefore, greater efficiency would presumably result when management permitted those needs to be satisfied. Happy workers were supposed to be productive ones, so that business had a dollars-and-cents stake in keeping everybody as contented as possible.

Experience has shown that this is a gross oversimplification, and that even the valid elements in these ideas can be so perverted in actual practice as to lose much of their meaning. Good human relations are harder to come by than many people have been led to believe, and they are not necessarily an unmixed blessing. But even so, the trend of history makes it increasingly imperative for organizations to pay attention to the temper of their people.

First of all, we might as well face the fact that many people work to satisfy needs that are incompatible with those of management. For example, there are people who are out to get something for nothing: the accomplished "goldbrick" who devotes more time and ingenuity to not getting caught than to working is a fairly familiar figure in most organizations. He often fancies himself to be a very clever fellow indeed, and since getting away with his shenanigans is one of the few ways he has to prove this cleverness to himself and the rest of the world, he is usually pretty loath to give them up. Unless circumstances compel him to grow up, he will get entirely too much emotional gratification out of being a loafer to be at all responsive to management's attempts to make him see the light.

There are also "empire builders"—people who enhance their own feelings of importance by selling management on the need for more personnel, money and equipment than their department had to begin with. Such people will usually have a list of reasons as long as your arm as to why it is imperative that their particular bailiwick be expanded. If, as is often the case, they are specialists in some technical field, they may use one of the most effective ways of disarming a critic that our overspecialized era has spawned: they will simply note with mild condescension that no mere layman could be expected to understand the intricacies of what they are doing but should accept on faith their need for a bigger department. The layman (and just about everyone is a layman where the specialist is concerned) has little choice but to let the specialist have his way, unless he wants to run the risk of holding back progress—and who would have the courage to do *that* nowadays?

There would be little point in extending this rogues' gallery of people whose basic motives do not jibe with those of management—anyone who has been in a large organization for any length of time is familiar with the opportunist, the flatterer, the conniver and many others. The basic point is that there is a sizable group of people for whom the satisfaction of basic motives would lead to a managerial disaster. Most of these people can make a valuable contribution to the company when they are properly led—which in their case means being controlled, not inspired or “understood,” by management. It would be just as futile to appeal to their better instincts as to launch “witch hunts” to weed them out. They are, for the most part, a valuable personnel resource when dealt with sensibly and are only doomed to become a liability when management treats them in the same way as persons whose goals coincide with the organization's.

The indiscriminate use of “sound human relations techniques,” such as taking a nonpunitive attitude toward everything an employee does, is likely to strengthen the employee's basic motives without regard to whether they are compatible with management's. Being nice to someone will not necessarily swing him around to a better appreciation of management's goals. In effect, being tolerant and patient with everybody is like patting them all on the head and telling them they're doing exactly what they ought to do—or at least, that is the way they are likely to interpret the way they are treated, regardless of what management really intends to accomplish by being beneficent. Sweetness and light can do more harm than good when applied to the wrong people. Adults, like children, can be spoiled;

they can be led to develop a perfectly sincere conviction that they are satisfying their employers when this is not the case at all. It can be done simply by failing to make disapproval clear to them and by a naive faith that people who are treated decently will wake up to their errors spontaneously and correct them all by themselves.

There are often cases where a certain amount of frustration can have a salutary effect on morale as well as on efficiency. Overcoming obstacles is, for some people, a more rewarding experience than having them conveniently swept out of the way. It is also true that people who *don't* have everything they want will tend to work harder than those whose only goal is to maintain their blissful abundance exactly as it is. Management will not necessarily be courting "bad human relations" by keeping some people under pressure, as long as they are careful about picking those with whom this shall be done.

Despite all the current emphasis on the needs for security, status and "belonging," there are plenty of people who are actuated primarily by a desire to achieve things for achievement's own sake. They are the most frustrated and least understood of all the people in an organization that rewards everyone with uniform kindness. Perhaps, by the standards of the easily contented majority, these people are gluttons for punishment; or perhaps they are just people who cannot fool themselves into believing that they have earned their daily bread when so much has been done to make their work as simple and undemanding as possible. Giving them a difficult problem to sink their teeth into and the added spur of a deadline or of competition to add zest to the challenge can be the best way of keeping them happy

and productive. As a matter of fact, most of the paternalism and permissiveness that is bandied about as "good human relations" will either leave such people cold or gradually demoralize them altogether.

In the last analysis, good human relations exist where each individual is treated as such: where the organization does all that it can, within practical limits, to create conditions in which each person can make the fullest use of his own resources. The major fault of most corporate attempts to come to grips with the problems of human relations has been the tendency to deal with human beings in the mass rather than as individuals. But masses are only abstractions—they do not breathe or feel, they cannot be hurt or inspired. Only the individual human being can respond to what management does—or doesn't do—for its people. When he gets lost in the shuffle and becomes merely one of many anonymous components in a huge impersonal system, no possible amount of sloganeering or fringe benefits can give him back what he has lost thereby: the feeling of being somebody, counting for something, having an identity and an importance in life that is all his own.

It is even questionable whether unions can fill the void that the wholesale neglect of individuality leaves in people's lives. Most unions are, after all, big, impersonal organizations, too—the individual can vanish just as thoroughly into the ranks of the union as into the punched-card machines of the company personnel office. The union may provide a sense of strength and even a vicarious form of revenge against the real or imagined wrongs of the company, but it cannot give back the sense of having a *special* importance of one's own. As a matter of fact, it tends to

exert heavy social pressures against members who still affect a feeling of uniqueness. Despite this, unions can provide psychological havens (as well as the more obvious economic and political ones) for men whom society takes for granted. After all, if a man must be a statistic, he might as well be the kind of statistic that can cause the people who have made him that way to squirm.

The Crucial Role of Supervisors

It is impossible, of course, for a man who has hundreds or even thousands of people under his authority to know them all well enough to see to it that each one is dealt with according to his own needs and aspirations. *But it is not impossible for first-line supervisors to do this.* As a matter of fact, it is essential that they do so, for it is only at this level that human relations can have any practical meaning at all to the rank and file. In a sense, the issue of whether someone who works in a big organization can preserve a sense of dignity or must resign himself to being an insignificant nobody is being decided by the kind of job that foremen and other first-line supervisors are doing. No one else can study people at work as closely or as continuously as they can, and no one else can communicate quite so directly management's interest—or disinterest—in helping its people to achieve their goals in life. If management and labor are ever permanently estranged from each other it will probably not happen suddenly at the bargaining table, but bit by bit in the little everyday mistakes that supervisors make in dealing with their subordinates.

The first-line supervisor who merely sees to it that management's policies are carried out by the men in his depart-

ment is doing only half a job: he is, in effect, little more than a messenger boy who carries the "word" from one part of the organization to another. By far the difficult and important part of his job is to create a working atmosphere in which his men will freely (or at least as freely as possible) carry out those policies. If he is to win their fullest cooperation, he must do more than merely explain and enforce management's wishes. His actions and attitudes must reflect enough awareness of what the individual worker wishes to get out of his job and enough willingness to try to help him get it, to convince the worker that he is on his side as much as on management's. In fact, he has to *want* to be on both sides, at least to the extent that it is possible to bridge the gap between the two.

The great dilemma that many supervisors find themselves in today is the question of how to divide their loyalties—whether to be a company man, or one of the boys or a little bit of both. The two most usual reactions are to take one side or the other—which in either case prevents the supervisor from becoming a catalyst through which management and employees can discover a common interest—or to take a "plague on both your houses" attitude and carry out orders in a perfunctory way which really satisfies nobody. The only solution that enables the supervisor to do his job in the best possible way is for him to take *both* sides—and that calls for a big man, big enough to be more concerned with the goals of both management and his men than either of them may be with the other. He cannot serve either well if his need to "belong" to one of them is greater than his desire to bring them together in a common purpose.

Being on his subordinates' side need not mean that a

supervisor has to share their grudges against management or that he must tolerate their failures to perform in the way management expects them to. It does mean getting to know each man as well as he will let himself be known, showing an interest in each of them, hearing them out when they want to be heard and leaving them alone when they don't want to be bothered. It means pressuring them as quietly as possible to mend their ways when they get too far out of line. It means, in other words, making it obvious that the individual worker counts for something as far as the supervisor is concerned. Nobody else in the organization can give a worker that feeling as well as his own immediate supervisor—and nobody else can deprive him of it as easily, either.

The way that a company and its employees feel about each other is too complex to boil down to a simple formula. But the attitudes of supervisors and subordinates toward each other certainly enters the picture to a considerable extent—and what is more important, this is one element of the complex formula that something can be done about. What has been outlined in the preceding paragraphs is obviously a rather idealized relationship that exists all too rarely in actual practice and probably can never exist on a very wide scale—since it calls for a degree of maturity, training and diligence among supervisors that will be very difficult for most men to achieve. But if it is not achieved to at least the extent that human fallibility permits, we are very likely to see employment in a large organization turn into an increasingly empty and unrewarding experience, regardless of wholesale salving with “fringe benefits.” If that should happen to a much greater extent than it already

has, work would gradually cease to be an opportunity to discover one's own potentialities and would turn instead into a breeding ground for grievances, frustrations, and the demagogues who play upon them.

Perversions of Human Relations Concepts

When the ideas underlying the "humane use of human resources" are reduced to pat formulas and rules, they are often seized upon as a sort of sure-fire mechanical procedure by which men of little insight or empathy can finally get other men to do their bidding. It is almost as if knowing which buttons to push could dissolve antagonisms or blind people to the indignities they had been resisting. Somehow or other the human relations concept, which sprang from the purest of motives, has acquired a reputation for holding an arcane magic by which people could be made to *want* to do as they were told. It is as if management's best interests could be served by doing a sort of superselling job on a spellbound working force.

This is obviously a case of wishful thinking gone rampant. Yet a lot of avid human relations practitioners are really thinking in terms of mass hypnosis, which they delude themselves that they can perform, and not in terms of setting up honest and uncluttered relationships between individuals. The only "secret" in human relations theory is an idea that has already had eloquent statements in the Sermon on the Mount and many other passages of devotional literature. Unfortunately, its rephrasing in modern industrial terminology has not saved its message from being lost in hackneyed slogans. Human relations boils down to treating people as decently as possible, which they will

probably tend to reciprocate. It is, in other words, the theory that people will get more done if compulsion and neglect are removed from their relationships with each other, so that they can cooperate freely.

But people have a way of reading their own hopes into a message—even one as old and venerated as this one. To many of the managers in industry who are not particularly “people-minded,” the message of human relations was too often seen as a rather slick way of keeping people in line. All you had to do was mouth a few oily phrases and follow some easy-to-remember rules (such as always prefacing a criticism with a compliment) and everyone would presumably be eating out of your hand. This naive misinterpretation is far more widespread than it deserves to be. It is one of the reasons why much of what passes for “sophisticated” human relations practices is little more than the profligate use of transparent flattery.

There are, in fact, many men in the business world who pride themselves on being shrewd handlers of people, yet do not realize that their tactics are seen through and resented because they *are* tactics. What blinds them to the obvious fictitiousness in their dealings with others is their strong need for a reliable way of managing people without getting involved with them. But this cannot be done to any great extent in firsthand relationships, where people have an opportunity to size up a leader and to respond to him emotionally. A few may be taken in, but most people will eventually sense the shallowness of the attitudes that such a manager professes. As Lincoln observed, you can’t fool all of the people all of the time.

Even when people are not entirely conscious of what

they have sensed about a supervisor's sincerity (and this is perhaps more common than a clear awareness of it), those who have been treated in this way are likely to show resentment in various subtle ways. Ironically, the manager who follows the right rules for the wrong reasons is not at all likely to realize that in the last analysis, it is he and not his subordinates who has been "had." In other words, the main difficulty with following sound human relations practices without altering attitudes is not that it is insincere but that in the long run it doesn't work.

Attitudes

The tactics by which people deal with each other are not particularly important in themselves; what is far more important in determining the fate of their relationships are the attitudes underlying the tactics. The things that people say and do are only clues—sometimes reliable and sometimes misleading—to the way they feel about each other. We respond primarily to the other fellow's attitudes—or to what we think his attitudes toward us are—partly because we know that he can falsify his feelings easily enough in his actions and partly because his feelings are usually a better indication of his intentions toward us than his overt manner.

Some people make us wary, others soothe us and some leave us with no discernible feeling at all. In each case we feel our way toward the other person's own emotional estimate of us. The less secure we are, the less likely are we to take the other person's actions at face value—the more likely are we to doubt our senses and to read our worst fears into his actions, no matter what they are. In other

words, people's perceptions of each other are partly a matter of their own hopes and fears, partly a matter of picking up subtle hints that betray underlying attitudes, and only in small measure a matter of the particular things that each person overtly says or does.

Some people, it is true, are more sensitive or perceptive than others; but when we say that someone is sensitive we usually mean that he can get more or less conscious impressions of the way another person feels. Many other people with no special claim to sensitivity can respond to the same little clues without realizing that they are doing it. Here we have what might be called "unconscious sensitivity"—a more common way of responding to others than is generally realized. When we "instinctively" like or dislike someone or when someone makes us uneasy and "gives us the creeps," we are usually reacting to unconscious emotions within ourselves that were triggered by slight cues in that person's manner or appearance. As a matter of fact, it is very doubtful whether there are any significant human relationships that are entirely factual and have no unconscious emotional overtones.

The really important part of a relationship between people flows over, under, around and through their overt behavior toward each other. Trying to improve human relations by concentrating on surface tactics and neglecting the underlying attitudes is like trying to dam a river with a few small stones. As a matter of fact, good human relations are not affected very much by the particular *habits* that supervisors are taught to follow: there are artful managers who never make a "wrong" move and yet do not have their men's respect, and there are blunt, plain-spoken man-

agers who can break every rule in the book and still be idolized by their men. The difference usually lies in whether the supervisor *wants* to know his men, in whether he *accepts* them regardless of whether he likes them and in whether he makes an honest effort to treat them as they would like to be treated.

And so we come at last to the ultimate question about human relations in business, which is whether it is realistic to expect executives and supervisors to develop a genuine interest in their subordinates. The answer depends on whether you accept the view that people can be changed and helped to improve, or that people are pretty well fixed in their ways and immune to outside influences, or something in between. It is the opinion of the author that most people fall somewhere "in between," and that accordingly it is realistic to expect many supervisors to adapt themselves to this requirement at least to some extent. It means, in other words, an emotional commitment to their subordinates, in addition to just an intellectual commitment to the technical and administrative aspect of their jobs.

In a sense, you cannot "train" a man for human relations effectiveness, at least not until he wants to be effective and realizes what this must involve within himself. Neither can you exhort him to adopt the "proper" attitudes. Wanting to know one's subordinates and to help them grow will happen rather naturally of itself when a supervisor has matured to the point of no longer needing to protect himself against the pressures of his job. Objectivity comes only to those who can lower their guard and to whom a job presents problems but not threats. To the extent that a supervisor is emotionally grown-up, he will probably tend

to develop the "right" habits and attitudes toward each subordinate even if he has little or no formal training to guide him.

So the problem boils down to the emotional maturity of the people who lead. Personal growth is, in the last analysis, the only effective avenue to human relations skill. There are no principles so profound that they cannot be botched when applied by a supervisor who is on the defensive against his subordinates, and there are no handling tactics that will make a worker want to please a supervisor whose interest in him is hypocritical. But a supervisor who erects no artificial barriers between himself and other people and instead likes to help other people to lower the barriers they erect against him can guide his men without ignoring their individuality. He can lead without having to appeal only to their lowest common denominator. He can know each one of them because—to put it plainly—he is not afraid of any of them.

Obviously, men who are so at home with themselves and with life itself are rare. The work of supervision must be done, in the main, by men with problems of their own which often take precedence over worrying about the problems of subordinates. Overcoming this will not be easy for any of them and may be impossible for some of them. But there is one essential step that all of them can take, and keep on taking, to know their subordinates better and to clear out the emotional barriers that stand between them. *They can try.* As supervisors, the initiative for growth must come from them.

8

LEARNING BY MAKING MISTAKES

Just as supervisors can follow too many rules for their own good, they can also give their men too many rules to follow. Judgment cannot be developed by giving people prefabricated decisions that cover every eventuality they are likely to encounter. The object of training is to make it possible for the individual to do his job without having to rely any more than necessary on his supervisor's advice; but by requiring him to memorize too many instructions he is in effect forced to depend on his supervisor in all situations that the instructions do not specifically cover. Trainees are not likely to think for themselves when so much of the thinking has already been done for them.

A realistic training program gives trainees plenty of opportunities to do things the wrong way. There are two important reasons why this should be so: first, doing something the wrong way gives the trainee an opportunity to

see at first hand *why* it is wrong. He is more likely to avoid a mistake in the future if he has had to face its consequences in the past. Second, making mistakes and discovering that the world doesn't come to an end because of them helps to overcome the rule-following, unadventurous frame of mind that blights so many intelligent young trainees in industry today. People with good heads on their shoulders should not be afraid to use them; but when they are trained to mimic one standardized way of doing things and to be afraid of "looking stupid" by questioning that way or by trying another one, they are likely to become mere carbon copies of their instructor. Worse still, they are likely to lose the habit of inquiring and the willingness to experiment, on which all real progress is based.

Executives sometimes complain that schools and colleges teach young people to memorize the "right" answers and to pass examinations, but not to think. This is not an entirely fair accusation, since college degrees have turned into status symbols in the eyes of a great many people—and this attitude has swollen the enrollments of a great many colleges with students who are there primarily to establish their social importance (or that of their parents). They do this by putting in the necessary time and getting the necessary passing grades. The pressure of their numbers has forced colleges to examine them in ways that favor the rote memorizer, and that give no advantage at all to the student who is more interested in understanding principles than in demonstrating feats of memory. When young men emerge from four years of this kind of preparation, many of them are more or less "preshrunk," mentally, to fit the

kind of industrial training program in which a thorough knowledge of precedents becomes a substitute for judgment.

But training does not have to be a matter of encouraging mimicry and discouraging experimentation. (This is probably just as true of colleges as of industry; but it would be beyond the scope of both this book and the author's competence to get into a discussion of college education.) The goal of training in industry is to enable people to apply policies to circumstances in a sensible way. This requires an understanding of why the policy was made and what it is intended to accomplish; in other words, it requires a critical look at ideas that are often considered too sacrosanct for trainees to question. It also requires a willingness to tamper with tradition when none of the old ways of doing things seem to fit very well. The daring to be practical instead of being doctrinaire and the judgment to know when old ways won't work are best developed by letting trainees blunder their way through problems until they hit upon the right answers by themselves. As much as possible, the trainer should offer critiques but not answers—not even hints, if he can help it.

There will always be some trainees who find it unnerving to have to solve problems without being told how to do it beforehand. There would, of course, be little point in exposing them to a more Spartan regime than they can tolerate. Trainers will always have to be prepared to provide a lot of people with standard procedures to memorize and to lead them through routines that they can follow faithfully forever after. But the important point is that rote training of this kind should be held to a minimum:

there should be no more of it than is made inescapable by the shortcomings of the trainee's mind and guts. Trainees should learn *not* to rely on their teachers—and on the disembodied rules that represent the judgment of their teachers—any more than they can possibly avoid. This is the greatest virtue of “learning by doing” and of not being prevented from doing things the wrong way while in training: it teaches people to look for feasible solutions to problems instead of taking refuge in a bureaucratic repetition of routines.

However, it is probably true that the character of the man who does the training is more important in determining the way in which his students will ultimately perform than the methods he uses to teach them. His job is not so much to transmit information—since even a machine can do that as well or better than he can—as to open the trainee's mind and make him *want* to learn. In a sense he has to sell the idea of learning. There are many ways of doing this, none of which work equally well for all trainers and trainees. But in general, it is well to remember that trainees are responding to their instructor's *attitudes* as well as to what they have to say. An instructor who thinks his subject is unimportant or who feels that it's over the head of his trainees will have to be a very good actor to keep from losing the interest of his students. After all, they don't want to bother with a trivial subject any more than he does; and if he seems to feel that he has to “talk down” to them to make his subject clear at all, they are likely to feel that it's pretty futile to try to understand it. On the other hand, if the instructor feels that he is teaching something worth knowing and manages to convey this enthu-

siasm to his students, they are far more likely to want to learn about it. For this reason, the best trainer is not necessarily the one who knows his subject best but the one who can excite the most interest in it.

Development Programs

These are attempts to unlock the potentialities of younger men before inertia and habit encase them too tightly to be set free. Very few men manage to bring the best that is in them to fruition all by themselves—not enough, in fact, to fill all of the really big jobs that an increasingly complex society requires. By selecting the most promising younger men and exposing them to a richer cross section of experience than most employees get, management hopes to develop men whose perspective is wider and whose imagination is bolder than they otherwise might have been.

These programs sometimes get off to what seems like a flying start, only to settle back after a while to a much less spectacular pace. This often proves very discouraging for managers who had been counting on dramatic, almost overnight transformations in the caliber of their trainees. The psychologists who design and guide these programs frequently find themselves having to point out that the traits which a junior executive has built up over a period of twenty-five years are not going to be changed very much in twenty-five days—or even twenty-five weeks. All that a development program can do is to provide a favorable setting for personal growth to occur in: if that growth takes place at all it has to be at its own natural pace, which is usually rather slow.

The transient spurts of enthusiasm which often occur at the outset of such programs are usually due to what psychologists call a "placebo effect." A placebo is a harmless, inactive drug that physicians sometimes give merely to please a patient who wants some kind of "medicine." Its effect, in other words, is purely psychological. The mere fact of being singled out for special attention can affect trainees in much the same way: the honor and implied promise in being so selected can lift morale to remarkable heights, regardless of what actually happens in the courses themselves. After a while this momentary pleasure with one's self dissipates, and the chosen few settle into a more humdrum attitude. This is not an entirely bad thing, since in the first heady rush of enthusiasm most people are likely to be much too excited to concentrate very well anyway.

As men are rotated through the various departments of an organization they may begin to develop an overview of the entire operation, in the light of which some commonly accepted practices may seem inefficient or even silly. Real personal development sows the seeds of critical thinking, which in turn raises the possibility of change—sometimes in unexpected places. This is why some organizations that embark on a management development program find that they get more than they bargained for—that instead of developing a corps of agreeable young yes-men they are spawning a group of young Turks who are likely to question the organization's most cherished assumptions. This is, as a matter of fact, precisely what a good development program ought to produce at an early stage of the game; but many managements find it so disconcerting that they are tempted to chuck the whole program out the window.

The first prerequisite of any personal development program is a thorough understanding of what management's *real* goals for the program are. It is fashionable nowadays for executives to talk about wanting their organizations to be progressive, dynamic, modern—which is fine, except that these terms tend to be bandied about so much that they have become mere symbols of corporate respectability and seldom carry their dictionary meaning along with them any longer. Wanting a company to be progressive is like loving mother's blueberry pie—it's expected, and what's more it's very proper. The actual motives behind a desire to "develop" executives and other personnel are seldom quite so pristine: they may often include, for example, a desire to bend the thinking of younger men to fit the ideas of the powers that be, or at the opposite extreme, a desire to revolutionize the way the company does its business. People have a way of putting their own private construction on words that have taken on a great deal of popularity, so that "progressive" can mean perpetuating old ways to one company and flirting with anything that is new to another—and both can be perfectly straight-faced about it, too.

Many development programs are really indoctrination programs—attempts to spread the point of view of top management (be it conservative, liberal or what have you) to the next generation of managers. They succeed or fail in accordance with how well the trainees can accommodate themselves to the ideas they are supposed to accept. On the other hand, when development is based on exposing people to each of the several aspects of an operation and encouraging them to question what is being done, the point of view that emerges is more likely to reflect the

potentialities of the trainees than the biases of their chiefs. This means that developing the abilities of young men to observe, analyze and decide can lead to dissension. The point that is too seldom grasped is that this is precisely what development is for: not to turn out carbon copies of present managers but to train men to manage according to their own best lights when their turn comes to do so.

If the managers of a company are hoping to ensure a steady flow of executives who think like themselves, they may very well be making a mistake by launching a development program. Developing people can be as fraught with surprises as developing new products—probably more so. There is no telling where it will lead. The only thing that is fairly certain is that, if you pick people who are flexible and open-minded and give them a chance to think constructively about your organization, they are not likely to be content to leave well enough alone.

To be “unprogressive”—in the sense of deliberately steering clear of an executive development program—may be unfashionable, but under certain circumstances it may be wise. It is not at all common for such programs to be undercut by squelching the graduates when they try to introduce their ideas or even by abandoning the program altogether when its consequences become apparent. It is surely no sin to want to avoid change, and there are undoubtedly many instances where a change in the company's basic ways of doing business would be foolish. Before embarking on a costly and potentially disruptive program to bring out the latent capacities of its employees, therefore, an organization should make sure it knows what it wants and what it is likely to get from such a program.

Teaching People to Think

It is not too difficult to teach people the most commonly accepted answer to a problem, and it is only a little harder to teach them where to look up the answer if they should fail to remember it; but it is not so easy to teach people to figure out an answer for themselves. Yet this is the fundamental goal of management training. If all of the “right” answers to managerial problems were already in the books, it would be a simple enough matter to program a computing machine to run an organization as well or better than any executive could. Creative solutions that meet old problems in their new contexts do not come from formula followers, nor do they necessarily come from geniuses, either: they come from intelligent people who know how to use their heads.

There are a number of methods for getting people into the proper frame of mind for finding their own answers to questions. All of them are a little Spartan in that they provide no crutches—no “right” and “wrong” ways, no help from instructors, no texts to memorize. This means, of course, that the people who are selected for this kind of training must be chosen for their guts as well as for their brains. The brilliant student who cannot operate beyond the limits of his books would not get very far in this kind of program.

One of the oldest and best ways is the debate. Having to defend a viewpoint with which one may not agree or even care about can accomplish many things: it teaches one to dig for facts, to recognize the several lights in which the

same facts can be interpreted, to probe for soft spots in one's own thinking. Above all, it makes it clear that there is always an "other side" to every argument.

Another good technique is the critique—a highly constructive form of "negative thinking" in which the object is to find as much as possible that is *wrong* with a particular policy or method. The main lesson to be learned from such exercises in fault finding is that there are plenty of flaws in just about any way of doing things and that the first step in doing something about them is to look for them.

Of course, the main goal is not merely to learn to criticize but to be able to correct the faults that are found. A highly useful exercise for this purpose is improvisation—developing stopgap plans for keeping an operation running under adverse conditions or when one of its key props is suddenly removed from the scene. In addition to teaching people to rely on their wits instead of on memorized systems, this can have an even more important benefit: it highlights the frivolity of not doing anything when an ideal way or even a routine way is not readily at hand. It can also help to develop a rare and invaluable habit: looking for exceptions to the rule. People who have learned to do this are free to use traditions as guides rather than as strait jackets and to explore without fear in the fruitful regions into which tradition does not yet extend.

People who have learned to think for themselves are free to confront facts with intelligence, instead of having to meet misty generalizations with habits. This kind of development gives the nimbler and more adventurous minds in an organization a chance to show their stuff. Big organ-

izations too often seem to be trying to fit the satirical definition of the armed forces given in *The Caine Mutiny*: a system devised by geniuses for execution by morons.

The proliferation of manuals and standard operating procedures that have been issued to prevent chaos in industry may be having an insidious side effect: it sometimes seems to make judgment unnecessary, to reduce the agonizing process of decision making to a matter of rote obedience to printed rules. The overabundance of guidelines may therefore bring out the worst in people. It provides an excuse for not using their heads, a comforting alibi for fiascos that result from following rules and a soothing respite from the hard and sometimes frightening business of making up one's mind.

The ultimate goal of singling out a few people in an organization and trying to unleash their creative power is simply to prevent this kind of ossified thinking from occurring in key posts. Alert, realistic management can only be accomplished by men whose eyes are wide open to problems and whose minds have access to a wide range of theories about ways of solving them.

USING STATISTICS IN PSYCHOLOGY

Statistics are numbers, and as such tend to be greeted or shunned according to whether people feel that nothing is scientific until it has been reduced to a number or that numbers are what's left after the facts have been stripped clean of everything that's interesting. If you are one of the former, you may feel that what follows in this chapter is rather sketchy (it is); and if you are one of the latter you may feel that in some places this chapter is rather heavy going (it is). In either case it is important that you wade through it anyway, since modern industrial psychology is so heavily dependent on statistics that you need more than just a nodding acquaintance with them to understand what the psychologists are doing.

The term "statistics" has two meanings. The layman usually thinks of it as a number like a sum or an average—something you find at the bottom of a column of figures.

To psychologists and other scientists, the term refers more generally to the various operations they perform to find the meaning of numbers—operations like adding, squaring, deriving square roots, and most important of all, making a logical decision as to what the result of all this figuring probably means. Therefore, when psychologists talk about statistics they usually have a more complex concept in mind than does the executive. What the psychologist is really talking about are some highly specialized rituals for arriving at conclusions about what numbers mean.

The executive is likely to encounter only a small part of the extensive efforts that psychologists devote to statistics. This is largely because the great bulk of it goes into theoretical work that is of no immediate interest to business. However, most of the tests that find their way into industry have already undergone a long, arduous shaking down at the hands of the statistician before the executive hears of them at all. There is an enormous pile of mathematical detail that must be gotten out of the way to get a test into proper working order. It is an exhaustive process that often takes years.

While statistics are basically an analytical tool, the executive is just as likely to encounter them as a form of persuasion—as the clinching arguments of an attempt to sell (or unsell) him on the value of a particular selection technique. Or he may run into them as a descriptive device, when he has commissioned a study of his personnel and is trying to figure out what the results mean. Either way he is likely to find them cryptic and a little too terse to be easily understood. It may help, therefore, to take a close look at some of the fundamental statistical concepts one is likely

to encounter in dealing with psychologists. Not much will be said here about the mechanics of calculating statistics, since some excellent texts are available for the reader who wants to go into the subject deeply (and it would take a full-length text to do justice to the subject at all). Suffice it to say that the reader who supposes that all statistical operations are about as simple as figuring out an average is in for one huge surprise.

Even the most elaborately derived statistic is, in the last analysis, subject to interpretation (although there has been some attempt to get around this by adopting certain standard rules of thumb). From the first choice of which formula to follow to the final decision as to what the figures mean, statistics are never really free of human judgment. Statistics are a tool of extraordinary power and subtlety, but like every tool they can be used either skillfully or foolishly.

Unfortunately, it is only a short step from forgetting that statistics are dependent on human judgment to assuming that they are also superior to it—that the only reliable answer is the one that waits at the end of the formula. The order and precision of statistics has a seductive lure for the unwary. It is easy to wind up with a long, neatly arranged list of perfectly useless numbers if you forget for an instant that it is your own judgment, and not the statistical formula, that counts.

The fact that statistics are open to interpretation has led to the widespread acceptance of the old saw that you can prove anything you want to prove with statistics. This isn't entirely true. It depends, more than anything else, on the gullibility of the person you're trying to prove something to. Strictly speaking, statistics never "prove" anything—at best,

they indicate how likely or unlikely a particular interpretation of a set of data may be. Whatever "proof" there may be in statistics lies entirely in people's eagerness to believe or to latch onto something with the smell of science about it that seems to settle something once and for all. The executive who has neither the time nor the inclination to cultivate real statistical sophistication will find that the best way to keep from being bamboozled by statistics is to view them as he should view any other tool of psychology: conservatively, cautiously and with a jaundiced eye.

Common Fallacies: I. Large Samples

The early days of statistical research in psychology has produced some hoary old myths which, even though they have long since been antiquated by newer developments, cling stubbornly in the minds of most executives who have had anything to do with psychology. They constitute a sort of unwritten law unto themselves and are seldom violated because of the tremendous weight of tradition behind them. Perhaps their main appeal is that they all seem, on first blush, to have the ring of common sense. The reasons why they are not really so sensible after all are a little hard to explain and therefore have not become nearly as well known.

The first of these is that a psychological study must necessarily involve a large number of persons if the results are to be trustworthy. It is by no means unheard of for the number of people included in an industrial psychological study to run into four and even five figures, which is many more subjects than are used in the "pure" research of the university laboratories. These enormous collections of data

would certainly seem to offer solid assurance that the facts are well represented and that no mere hearsay has crept in to make the picture misleading. Yet very often, surveying large numbers of people in a psychological study adds nothing to the results but a lot of needless repetition. Not only are mass surveys often uneconomical, but they can even be misleading—because their numbers seem so convincing in themselves that we sometimes don't bother to ask what they really mean.

It is true that when you are interested in individuals as such, you might as well resign yourself to studying every last one of them—no matter how many. They will all differ from each other in some way, and it is this difference, rather than their similarities to each other, that you are interested in learning about. But when you are more concerned with people in general than with individuals (which would be the case in an opinion survey, for example), it is possible to get a comparatively small fraction of the total group that will tell you all you need to know.

The main reason for using large groups is to make it more likely that “flukes” and unusual cases will tend to cancel themselves out and to give the main currents in the group a chance to show themselves more clearly. When you choose your subjects at random—that is, when every person has as good a chance of being included in the study as anyone else—your sample will probably look more and more like the total group as it gets bigger and bigger. If you were studying something that tends to come in an enormous number of varieties (like personalities), you would need to draw a very big sample indeed to make sure you hadn't left out something important.

But suppose you already knew some of the characteristics of the total group and that these probably had some relationship to whatever it was you were trying to measure. In an opinion survey, for example, you might have age, sex and income data at hand which would probably have some bearing on the group's opinions. With this kind of advance information you'd be in a position to save yourself a lot of needless work through a technique known as "stratified random sampling."

It works like this: you hand-pick your sample to a certain extent, just enough to ensure that it fits what you already know about the total group. Instead of leaving the selection of each individual entirely to chance, you *specify* a few of the characteristics he has to have; and then you select him *at random* from all those people available who have the required set of characteristics. In other words, you partially stack the deck to make sure that it accurately represents some features which you feel pretty sure are closely tied to the aspect of the group you're trying to measure.

The only other way of being fairly sure of picking up the influences that probably count is to draw a very large sample, hoping that the influences that don't count will not show up in greater numbers than they deserve. Theoretically, your hopes will eventually be justified when your sample gets big enough—if your selection is truly random. But in practice there is no guarantee that big samples will accurately portray their parent group in miniature. In other words, stratified random sampling not only involves less drudgery in terms of numbers of people surveyed, but it is also likely to be more accurate than random sampling

when it is done properly. Stratified sampling can deliver these results with much smaller samples, because there are fewer “unknown” influences that have to be randomized by increasing the numbers of persons in the study.

There are, of course, many situations in which this technique cannot be used, since we often don’t know enough about a group to determine which features should be built into the sample, or the proper proportions in which to do this. In such cases, drawing a large sample at random is the only safe way to survey the group. But there’s no reason to be afraid of studies conducted with a relatively small number of subjects, provided that the conditions for stratification exist and that this was done carefully.

Common Fallacies: II. Validity

The second myth is that a test must have a high degree of measurable validity to be useful. The validity of a test is usually measured by a statistic called a “validity coefficient” which tells, in effect, the extent to which you can predict something about a person by using his test score as a guideline. In this case, “something” is an acceptable index of the thing you’re trying to measure—such as average number of errors per day as an index of clerical aptitude. If a test of this kind had high validity, you could usually predict a person’s tendency to make clerical errors fairly closely; while if the test’s validity was low it would probably come close to predicting actual errors only a small part of the time—if at all.

It is important to note that the psychologist uses the term “validity” in a special way—a mathematical way that refers to predictive power and not to the truth or falseness

of the test in any abstract sense. A test of low validity, like a telescope with a blurred lens, does not necessarily lack respectability—or even usefulness.

It is, of course, necessary that a test have at least some degree of validity to be useful at all for predictive purposes. But there are many circumstances in which even a small degree of validity can go a long way. Before considering some of them, we ought to note that *prediction* as such is not the only use we have for tests. Many tests which by themselves predict nothing at all can be valuable sources of descriptive information—or even of educated guesses—either of which can lead to a more penetrating understanding of the testee and make possible wiser decisions about him. A test can, in other words, illuminate without predicting, provided the necessary experience and judgment are at hand to interpret its meaning.

Most of the tests that are used in industry have lower validity ratings than the layman would probably suppose. That is, these tests can predict actual performance “on the nose” or close to it only rarely. But this does not mean that they are not useful—far from it. This is for two reasons.

First there is the question of where you set your cutoff score. In practice you can do this in different ways according to the needs of the situation. If you are going to test a large number of people and can tolerate a moderate number of them who will fail in spite of a high test score, you can still use a test of relatively low validity to “skim the cream” of the group for you—*provided* the cutoff score is set high enough. What the test actually does in this case is to select people whose potentialities *as a group* are generally somewhat richer than the average of the larger group

from which they are taken. In other words, a test of low validity can provide a modest improvement over random selection when the cutoff score is high enough and enough people are involved. It would be foolish to look down our noses at even a "modest" improvement, since it can lead to sizable economies in training costs, reduced failures, etc.

The majority of tests in general use today work on the same principle: they eliminate part, but by no means most, of the errors that would occur if people were selected for jobs at random. In this highly imperfect way they can more than pay their own way, if they are used intelligently.

Of course, if a test had an invariably high degree of validity, we could lower the cutoff score or use a smaller group of testees and still produce people who are, on the whole, likely to succeed. But this is not likely to happen very often. This is because the very fact of being valid tends to confine a test to measuring a rather narrow range of the many factors that can contribute to success on the job. An actuarial test that is doing its job properly will usually be of a fairly low degree of validity, simply because the thing it measures is only part of the complex picture that makes for success.

This brings us to the second reason why tests of low validity can be valuable. It is plainly foolish to rely exclusively on one such test when others are available—particularly if they measure fairly separate and distinct qualities. In other words, combining several tests of low validity will usually result in a better prediction than could be made with any one of them if used individually. This is because they can each cover a different aspect of the factors that make for success, and—in effect—leave fewer stones un-

turned. Of course, this improvement will not occur if any of the tests overlap each other to any great degree by using similar kinds of questions. In that case, using a battery of tests simply produces repetition without increasing coverage.

Recently there has been a trend to develop tests which simultaneously measure several different factors or aptitudes. These are called "multifactor" tests. They do not necessarily benefit from the combined validity principle, since many of them are designed to inventory a wide range of aptitudes regardless of whether they all affect a particular kind of performance equally. In other words, they provide an across-the-board summary of what the testee has to offer, and much of this may be unrelated to the particular kind of behavior you are interested in predicting. Other tests of the multifactor type may be almost tailor-made to predict performance on a certain kind of job by approaching it simultaneously from several angles. The best way to tell whether a multifactor test fits your particular needs is, of course, to ask your psychologist. If you try to figure this out for yourself by wading through a statement of the test's technical virtues, you are very likely to wind up either befuddled or misled.

Common Fallacies: III. Reliability

The third myth is that all types of tests have to be reliable in order to be useful. By "reliability" the psychologist means the tendency of a test to yield substantially the same score each time a person takes it. If a test is known to be reliable the psychologist can usually relax and not worry a great deal over whether the scores he sees are just momen-

tary flukes. Reliable tests make the psychologist's difficult job a little bit easier and are understandably popular for that reason.

Once again, the psychologist's usage of this term differs from the layman's. The reliability of a test refers to the repeatability of its scores and ultimately to its freedom from irrelevancies—but not to whether it is trustworthy or useful. Whether or not a test needs to be reliable in order to be trusted depends, as we shall see, on a number of factors.

There are two broad kinds of limitations on how reliable a test can be. The first is the technology of test construction itself, which is a complicated process about which little needs to be said here—except that if it is properly done the test should be at least fairly resistant to being thrown off by outside influences.

The second limitation is the nature of what the test is measuring. Some features of the human mental apparatus don't seem to change very much, and barring some catastrophe they will remain substantially the same throughout adult life. This is true, for example, of certain aptitude and intellectual features. Other features show gradual shifts of emphasis over the years, usually retaining a fairly steady basic "core" but changing in external details—interests and attitudes are examples of these. Still others can be quite erratic, changing from week to week or even from moment to moment. This kind of restless instability is seen in dreams, fantasies, and the responses to certain projective tests. In general, it occurs wherever conscious control of thinking tends to be weak.

Strictly speaking, the basic core of the unconscious part

of the personality does not vary a great deal over the years; but the *overt* expressions of these basic forces are subject to extreme variation. This is because they have to filter through the maze of baffles and disguises with which the unconscious usually shrouds itself and because they usually seize upon some convenient recent experience as a sort of vehicle to carry them into consciousness. Projective-test responses from one person can, therefore, differ from each other in an enormous variety of ways, even though their fundamental sources do not change.

In general, personality tests (whether of the inventory or projective variety) are considerably less reliable than tests of aptitude. In fact, quite a few psychologists have thrown up their hands and renounced all hope of being able to measure personality reliably. Other psychologists—and here the reader will recognize the viewpoint of the inside school—doubt that a reliable measure of personality would be particularly useful even if it could be developed—since it would have to be insensitive to many of the richest, most essentially human aspects of the personality.

It certainly makes good sense to insist that a test be at least as reliable—that is, as free from shifts and fluctuations—as the thing it measures. Anything less than this would be, in effect, like a rubber yardstick that is used to measure a piece of metal. But it does not seem to make much sense to require a test to be *more* reliable than the thing it measures! Yet this is probably what happens when we turn up our noses at personality tests that cannot match the reliability of aptitude tests. To turn our analogy upside down, this would be like insisting on using a metal yardstick to

measure a piece of rubber that is stretched between several poles, all of them vibrating at varying rates!

However, a word of caution is important here. It is very easy to adopt a wholly uncritical attitude toward personality tests, with a cheerful rationalization that "they're not supposed to be reliable, anyway." Perhaps they aren't, but it must be remembered that the less reliable a test is, the more its meaning becomes dependent on the judgment of the interpreter, rather than on facts and figures. This means that only caution, experience and discernment can make up for what is lost when a test cannot be very reliable. Whether a relatively unreliable test is valuable or not depends, in other words, on the wisdom of the particular psychologist who uses them.

"Proofs" that Don't Prove Anything

Even the most sophisticated statistical techniques cannot prove with any finality that a psychological test is really doing the job it is supposed to do. The performance criteria against which the test is measured are almost always disputable; a myriad of potent but irrelevant forces are nearly always present to cloud the picture of cause and effect; and the practical obstacles in the way of a truly rigorous test of a test's power are generally insurmountable. You can, in other words, usually find sufficient grounds for quibbling with almost any of the correlations or other statistics that are developed to demonstrate a test's value. The argument for the best of tests is never airtight: there is a point beyond which logic will not take you and where you have to put your faith in probabilities rather than certainties.

There is a variety of ways in which a test's values can be demonstrated. Some of these methods are considerably more flimsy than others as far as their logic is concerned. Unfortunately, they have a disarming simplicity which has the effect of making them more convincing to the layman than they deserve to be. It will repay us to dissect three of the more common ways of showing how well a test works.

One widely used method is to set up a chart that compares "predictions" based on the test with supervisors' ratings of the testees' actual performance on the job. This is usually a grid-shaped affair in which the rows are labeled according to the kind or quality of performance that the various test scores are supposed to indicate, and the columns are labeled with the ratings given by supervisors. Each testee is tallied in the cell of the grid corresponding to his test score and performance rating. In effect the grid seems to become a sort of simplified correlation chart, in which the percentage of accurate predictions and near misses can be calculated quite easily.

The main fallacy here is that test scores do not predict the *quality* of a person's performance; for example, a middle score does not necessarily mean that a mediocre performance is in the offing. What the test scores predict is the likelihood of the testee's reaching a specified standard of performance. This can be a minimum standard, such as not being dropped from a training program, or a maximum standard, such as standing in the top 10 per cent of a class. A person with a high score is more likely to reach the particular standard of performance at which the test is aimed than is someone with a low score. (Most industrial tests, in fact, are designed to predict "survival" in a job

or in a training program, rather than any particular level of excellence among those who do survive.)

When the tables are turned by a person with a low score who does better on the job than someone with a high score, it does not necessarily mean that the test was “wrong.” The test works on an actuarial principle and is “wrong” only when the *percentage* of people with a given score who meet the minimum performance standard is higher or lower than predicted.

In other words, a test is never right or wrong in an individual case. All it really does is to quote odds on whether a *group* of people with a particular range of scores is going to make the grade. To say that a test predicts a good performance with a high score and a poor performance with a low score is nonsensical. A test is always predicting the *same* kind of performance with every score—it is the *likelihood* of that kind of performance that changes as the scores go up or down.

For this reason, the accuracy of a test in predicting supervisors’ ratings should not be measured by the percentage of cases that the test “hits on the nose.” All appearances notwithstanding, the test wasn’t aiming at them in the first place. Each row in the chart is really predicting that the people whose scores belong in that row will turn out differently, as a group, than the people whose scores belong in the other rows. The best way to rate the test’s accuracy in a chart of this kind is to compare the over-all performance of the rows and see whether there is a sizable increase in the percentage of people who make the grade as we go from the lowest to the highest rows. If so, the test is doing its job well. If the increases are small or nonexistent, we

may wonder whether the test has much predictive value at all.

A second common, but spurious, way of demonstrating how well a test works is to present test results for a particular group of individuals without comparing them with the results obtained by other groups. For example, the scores obtained by company presidents can be presented, showing certain features that seem to be common to most of them. These shared features can then be combined into a "president's profile" which presumably identifies men who have the characteristics of a president. The same technique can be used to put together test findings that are common to any other group into a "profile" for that group. This has a strong appeal for those who like to classify people (themselves included) into one kind of a "type" or another.

The fly in this particular ointment is that what is common to a group is not necessarily exclusive to it. A pattern of scores which is often found among presidents but also occurs frequently among office boys would be of little value in identifying either presidents or office boys. Similarly, you couldn't expect to learn very much about your top salesmen if you neglected to compare them with your middle and lower salesmen. To do so would simply leave the door open to a flood of "false positives," that is, people with the right scores but the wrong behavior characteristics. Any pattern that is based on one group alone, without trying it out on similar groups that should not be confused with the first one, is based on pretty flimsy evidence.

The possibility that some or all of the pattern will show up in other groups of people is not at all farfetched. As a matter of fact, the odds favor it, since most tests that are

geared to large-scale use are aimed at factors that are common to most people, rather than unique to a few. Also, most groups that are defined by occupation or status tend to run the gamut of personality types (and, to a lesser extent, of aptitudes and skills, as well). This means that a factor that is common to the people in any such group is likely to be so widespread that plenty of other groups have the same feature. In other words, a test that really can isolate some factors that are peculiar to a particular occupational group is likely to be quite rare—and of rather limited usefulness when applied to *other* occupational groups, as well.

Even if a test did pick up tendencies which occurred primarily in one classification of employees, it would still be of comparatively little value if it couldn't distinguish those who were competent from those who weren't. The world is, after all, full of people who don't really belong in the jobs they hold; and even their ability to survive in it for a few years is no criterion of their excellence or lack of it. Incompetence in all degrees is tolerated, overlooked, or even unsuspected in a great many organizations. A test is worth using when it helps to pinpoint people who can handle a particular job well when measured against a sharply defined standard of what constitutes a "good" performance. Merely because a test can find the features that are shared by many people who are holding down a particular kind of job is not, in itself, particularly good evidence that the test can be useful.

A third "proof" that doesn't hold water is using the statistics obtained when a test was used with one group of people as a basis for arguing that since your group is

similar, essentially the same results would be found if you used the test. A test which worked out successfully in an industry similar to your own, or in the plant down the street, or in your brother-in-law's company, may look like exactly what you need to straighten out your own organization. The fact that such a test has already been tried under fire and proved its usefulness is likely to be taken as a very persuasive argument in its favor.

But it isn't. A test can be quite cantankerous, and this is never more evident than when it has finally had the bugs taken out of it with one group of workers and you decide to start using it with other groups, as well. The workers in the plant down the street probably aren't as similar to your own as you think they are—not because your people are necessarily unique but simply because they are individuals in their own right who are operating in an atmosphere which another management (*you*) have helped to create. Also, the standards by which men are judged in your organization are probably less like the ones that prevail in the outfit down the street than you would guess. Since the validity figures for the test are ultimately based on these standards, the odds are usually against the test's earning comparably good marks in your firm—unless it is first revised to meet your specific needs.

What's more, the fine edge of accuracy that the test developed in the other organization was probably due, in large measure, to its having been made sensitive to local peculiarities—to the more or less distinctive features that help to make that organization different from yours and every other organization, too. There will, of course, be some shared traits that the test will pick up in both groups of workers

and every similar group. But these are not likely to lead, in themselves, to nearly as high a validity figure as when the test is being hand-fitted to the special requirements of one particular group.

All of this means that a test that has shown up well elsewhere bears no guarantee at all that it will do equally well, or even well at all, for you. On the other hand, a good record elsewhere is hopeful evidence that a test can be *adapted* to your organization's needs. This cannot be done in an offhand way, or by the "expert judgment" of an expert who isn't familiar with your company, or by guess and by gosh. It can only be done by a process of careful try-outs, experimenting with the test with small "pilot" groups of your workers and later with larger groups, so that the scoring can be revised, questions changed or dropped, and so forth—until the test finally gets as much of a sensitivity as it can to the things that make for a good job performance in your particular organization. Whether this will be good enough to serve your needs or as good for you as it was for somebody else is something that only time and some meticulous tinkering with the test can tell.

10

COMMUNICATION: THE ART OF MAKING SENSE

One of the more alarming findings of the scientists who have been analyzing big organizations is that the internal communications of many of them are all fouled up. It seems as if many a right hand doesn't know what many a left hand is doing and that whole troops of guardian angels must be working overtime to keep different departments from tripping over each other. This is, of course, an exaggerated view; but it is no exaggeration to say that many of our existing companies would accomplish a great deal more with much less fuss if information flowed more readily within them.

There are three basic reasons for poor internal communications, and in any individual case all three are likely to be operating together. The first is a weak system for transmitting information—such as one that moves too slowly, or which doesn't inform all people equally well or which is

so incomplete as to encourage guessing and rumor mongering. The second is clumsy use of language—an inability to get a point across interestingly or unambiguously. When something is said dully, people are not likely to pay enough attention to retain what is said; and when something is said in a way that invites private interpretation, the invitation will probably be accepted en masse. The third reason is the tendency of people to read their own hopes and fears into the things they see and hear. This is why psychologists, who are not particularly noteworthy for clarity of language themselves, are nevertheless in the thick of the work that is being done to improve communications.

All three of these underlying factors are, in a sense, related; but we will concentrate primarily on the third because it is the special bailiwick of psychologists; and also because, being the subtlest, it is likely to be the most obstructive element in a company's communications system.

Perishable Information

The information that passes between people can be distorted at either the sending end or the receiving end—or both. Most of the emphasis in improving communications has been on the “senders”—teaching the people who originate or distribute information to send it out “loud and clear.” This is very important since many people do not have a native finesse in expressing their ideas and have to be schooled in the art of saying what they really mean. But it is not enough to train the senders, because the receivers of information (who make up the great bulk of any organization) do not simply sop up information as it flows to them. They are quite likely to actively *change* the infor-

mation by imposing their expectations on it, particularly if the messages are unclear or if their expectations are very strong. It is, in other words, entirely normal for people just to ignore information that doesn't fit their expectations and to make mountains out of molehills when the molehills support their ideas.

It is very important to recognize that information, as such, is very perishable stuff. This is particularly true when it is in transit from person to person. Bare facts can become festooned with fantasies, since people can see and listen with their emotions as well as with their eyes and ears. This danger lurks on the receiving end of any communications network, which is why we have to learn something about the emotional distortion of perceptions if we are to minimize its effects.

It is difficult to say how often the information that people receive is nothing more than what they *want* to receive. This will vary from one organization to another and can be affected by such things as morale, organizational structure, and particularly by the emotional *maturity* of the key people in the communications network. (A key person, in this sense, is someone from whom other people receive their information, such as a department head—or, in an informal “grapevine,” a gossip.)

In any event it is clear that distortion probably occurs much more often than it should. This sorry state of affairs is largely the result of the comparative rarity of the only solid safeguard against it: a balanced, realistic attitude toward the organization on the part of its key people.

This may sound like an indictment, and in a sense it is one. But management is not, after all, immune to ordinary

human frailties; and the tendency to allow one's emotions to distort what one sees is a very human sort of frailty indeed. Within the formal communications network there may be key people who are predisposed to put a private interpretation on the information that reaches them. To further complicate matters, grapevines and unspoken personal attitudes can often affect a company's *real* communications far more than the formal mechanism for distributing information. When this is true, it reflects the inadequacy of the formal communications system. Rumors and half-truths are most likely to thrive where the truth is not understood or has been made to seem unpalatable. It is the job of the key man to make the facts clear and attractive, to hold rumors up to the light so their flimsiness will be apparent, and to be aware of the needs which, if not dealt with directly, will generate a new rumor for every old one that is punctured.

Psychological Blinkers

Two kinds of factors make distortion of information more likely to occur at the receiving end: unclear messages and strong emotional pressures. When the information that a person receives is hazy or incomplete, there is a natural tendency to try to fill in the gaps with conjecture. This is at best a matter of educated guessing and at worst a matter of pretending that one's dreams have really come true. Like a projective test, a poorly worded message invites its receiver to call on his own imagination to figure it out. But imagination is often the servant of private needs that may have very little to do with the real intent of the message. Whether imagination hews close to the clues in the message

or veers off into wishful thinking depends, in large measure, on how realistic the person is able to be about his hopes and fears. If he is mature enough to be able to look reality in the eye regardless of whether or not it happens to suit him, he will probably get as much information out of the message as was put into it in the first place. But if he is so much in love with his own ideas that any others are repugnant to him, he is likely to get only part—or possibly none—of a message that goes contrary to his hopes.

There is nothing inherently unhealthy about a strong wish—or about a strong fear, either, if there happens to be some real danger to be guarded against. These emotions become unhealthy only when they are not balanced by a clear appreciation of what life is really like—of what is possible and impossible, likely and unlikely, and of the defects as well as the merits of one's own ideas. When this kind of perspective is absent, the emotions tend to take over and set up a sort of jamming system to drown out any hints that they may have no foundation in fact. At least in so far as these particular pet ideas are concerned, the person lives in a sort of a dream world, safely insulated from facts that may be as plain as the nose on his face. Facts won't get through unless they can somehow be rationalized and accommodated with what the emotions want to be true. Nothing else is likely to register at all—except, perhaps, in a few brief, embarrassing, and easily forgotten moments.

When someone's mind is screened off in this way it is easy to judge him in moralistic terms—to say that he is a bigot, or narrow-minded or afraid to face the truth. But it would usually be more accurate, and less pompous, to

say simply that he is unable to balance his emotions with realism. This is not because he is a rascal but because the control mechanisms with which his mind confronts reality have not been developed as well as they might have been, and tend to get stuck at a childish, wishful level whenever his emotions become too strongly involved. We are dealing, in other words, with a case of incomplete emotional development—emotional immaturity, if you will—but certainly not with a willful disregard of facts.

There is nothing reprehensible about this, even if it is not especially becoming in a person who holds a responsible position. Certainly nothing is going to be accomplished by debating with such people or exhorting them to take themselves in hand and “grow up.” They are, in effect, wearing psychological blinkers that keep their viewpoints narrow and rigid—just as we all do when we are very young, or very excited, or asleep.

To a greater or lesser extent this kind of know-nothing attitude occurs in all of us at one time or another. Even a mature person is likely to become sensitive at times about one or two points about which he is not particularly prepared to be reasonable. On the other hand, there are some people who think in this way most of the time about most subjects. Whether either kind of person becomes a block to communications depends on whether or not we are trying to reach him with regard to a matter on which he is wearing his “blinkers.”

A person whose emotions have closed his mind in this way will not receive messages in the same sense that was implied by their sender. What is lost in this filtering-out process is more likely to be implications and shades of

emphasis than the verbatim text of what he is told, but even that can be lost if his guard is up high enough. *There is, in other words, no real guarantee that a message will actually convey what it was meant to convey, other than the intelligence and maturity of the receiver.*

Clearing Communications Roadblocks

The only real cure for communications that have been fouled up at their receiving ends is an extremely difficult one—so difficult that it can only be approached on a long-term basis. Somehow or other, the people whose immaturity has made them into communications roadblocks will have to be helped to grow up emotionally—at least to the point where they no longer see their own pet desires as matters of life-or-death urgency. They have to be helped to achieve some perspective on themselves—to realize that their particular point of view is, after all, only one out of many possible ones. In effect, their psychological blinkers have to be removed. This can only be done by making the blinkers unnecessary—by giving the individual a better way of handling his wishes than just pretending that they are real. Half the battle of getting information to flow without obstruction is finding out what people really want to know—or rather, helping them to realize for themselves what they are trying to find in the messages that reach them. Once a person gets some insight into the kind of coloring that he might tend, quite involuntarily, to put on the ideas that other people transmit to him, he can start developing a knack for keeping such tendencies in their place.

Controlling one's hopes and fears is largely a matter of recognizing them for what they are. This all sounds very

facile, but actually doing it is another matter. This would be a very different world indeed, if the art of keeping feelings from distorting thinking were at all widespread.

The biases with which people handle information within an organization are usually related to the kinds of rewards they personally hope to get from the organization; and these in turn are ultimately related to their basic expectations of themselves. The key to clearing the roadblocks to communication is, therefore, better *self-knowledge* on the part of each of the individuals who occupies a key position in the communications network. To know one's self in this sense does not imply that executives should all recline on some collective couch to bare their innermost selves to a psychologist. It does mean that enlightened managements will try to create a working atmosphere in which each executive can reach, by himself, that level of maturity at which he can freely review his own actions and draw some frank inferences about the motives underlying them. A favorable atmosphere for such a development would be one in which anyone's ideas were welcomed as grist for the mill, in which any action or tradition was open to question or review and in which men are judged not by conformity but by performance. In particular, such an atmosphere will recognize the executive's "right to be wrong"—to express new ideas or to experiment with new techniques, without having to fear that his position will be jeopardized if his ideas don't happen to work.

The Responsibility for Being Grown-Up

All this is easier said than done. As a matter of fact, it may often be impossible for this kind of maturation to

occur to any extent. This is because the habit of looking at life through a narrow funnel of dreams may become too firmly ingrained to give way—even to the skillful proddings of an expert. Consequently, management cannot hold itself responsible for clearing its communications by helping everyone in its employ to mature emotionally. Even if swarms of psychologists could be called in to undertake a massive straightening-out process, it wouldn't work—their techniques simply aren't equal to the task. In the last analysis, the responsibility for getting himself into effective command of his own feelings has to rest with the individual employee. No possible amount of paternalistic fretting over his welfare can relieve him of that.

But management can, and should, create a working climate in which this kind of positive growth is more likely to occur by itself. Basically this involves giving the individual a chance to flourish, a process that will eventually move the men with the greatest capacity for personal growth to the fore. The process can be accelerated by selecting men for key executive positions who have *already* developed the breadth of perspective and depth of outlook that their jobs require. It must be recognized that experience, training and an effective contact manner are not enough, in themselves, to guarantee that a man can do a good job of sending and receiving information. It is *also* necessary that he know himself well enough not to be taken in by his own wishes and fears. An executive should, in other words, have demonstrated his emotional maturity before he is selected.

Such a deliberate attempt to upgrade the emotional maturity of management itself can, over the long haul, improve communications in two ways. First, mature executives

will be much less prone to distort the information they receive. Their own actions, as well as the actions of their subordinates, will stand a better chance of being coordinated with the meaning of the original messages they receive. But a more important effect, in the long run, is the impact of the example that such men set by their actions. A tradition of open-mindedness and of being big enough to disagree without ridiculing or sniping can gradually permeate any organization if it is staunchly practiced by a few key people.

But better selection brings its benefits slowly. It has to wait for attrition or growth to create new openings. As for the men who presently occupy key posts in their company's communications systems, the question of whether they could profitably acquire more insight into their own motives must be left up to them. This is always a difficult decision for anyone to make, since the mind closes itself most tightly against an implication that it may be closed. Yet it is an obligation of managers to keep themselves fit to manage, which means that they must keep their own emotional involvement with communications down to a minimum. To do this requires some diligent soul searching and a willingness to double-check one's most cherished assumptions on the chance that some of them might be wrong. It calls, in other words, for a deliberate inculcation of a bigness of mind that is too rarely seen in most adults. Probably no one ever attains it completely, but the manager who consciously aims toward it will be making the most important single contribution anyone could make toward clearing the roadblocks to communication in his organization.

There are, in other words, no quick, easy or dramatic ways to improve communications when they are blocked at the receiving end. It may sometimes be tempting to invite the psychologist to step in and hurry the process along. Yet no reputable psychologist would undertake to impose psychotherapy on an unwilling or unsuspecting person, largely because his efforts would probably cause more harm than good under such circumstances. Moreover, it would be very unwise for management to pressure anyone in any way to enter such a process. No one was ever blackmailed into growing up emotionally.

In the long run, the best way to lower the emotional barriers to communication is the slow way—by creating an atmosphere in which key people understand their obligation to understand their own feelings about their companies and their careers as well as they can. An enlightened, unafraid man who *wants* to keep his emotions in their proper place can learn to do so, either by searching self-examination or by seeking the assistance of professionals if he is convinced that he could profit from it.

Wanting and Not Wanting to Write Well

The world is much too full of self-appointed “poor writers” who either make no attempt to communicate on paper at all or who really don’t try to communicate clearly when they have to write. The rationalization that they *can’t* write is so widely used that most other people are prepared to accept it, usually because they feel the same way about themselves.

It is true that native verbal talent has a lot to do with how well one can write and that a lot of people do not seem

to have been born with much of a gift for expressing themselves. But it is much too facile to assume that verbally talented people write well *only* because they are talented and that relatively untalented people can't write well because they lack the gift. As is so often the case in analyzing human behavior, the truth is a lot more complicated than a superficial look at the facts would seem to indicate.

People who do have a natural gift for verbal expression will tend to use that gift fairly regularly for three reasons. First, they get various forms of applause for doing so. Second, since nearly everybody else abandons the verbal field to them, writing gives them an easy channel to distinction that is relatively unobstructed by competition. Third, and perhaps most important: as they develop their facility with language they find a special joy in saying something *well*, as opposed to saying it in an approximate, hackneyed or dull way. In other words, the talented person is more likely to develop confidence in expressing himself and either to seek training or to develop a personal style of his own than is the "untalented" person.

On the other hand, people without the initial advantage of native glibness are likely to do very little to acquire a greater facility with language and may even shrink from opportunities to do so. The talent for writing, therefore, is an emotional as well as an intellectual advantage; and in the long run this emotional factor is most important because it has a direct effect on the *real* basic cause of good or bad writing: practice.

To get an idea across on paper *beautifully* probably requires some native verbal talent; but to get the same idea across *clearly* requires only some patience and a willingness

to practice. Here, for whatever they may be worth, are a few simple steps that anyone can follow to get a point quickly, unmistakably and freshly on paper:

1. Get acquainted with a dictionary and a thesaurus. Browse through them regularly. All of the expressive power of the language is stored there and is yours for the taking.

2. Think your ideas through before you lift a pen. Good style is a natural outgrowth of clarity of thought. An idea that seems clear to you but doesn't make sense on paper probably isn't as clear as you think it is. Slipshod thinking is sometimes easy to conceal from one's self, but on paper it sticks out like a sore thumb.

3. Say what you have to say once, and only once, with the word or phrase that most appropriately states your point. Pinpoint your meaning rather than circle around it with several approximate expressions. Make sure the terms you use are *defined* as carrying the shade of meaning you think they have.

4. Don't emulate anyone else's style—try to discover and develop your own. Most people are capable of a personal idiom which can be perfectly intelligible to others and yet is also a natural outgrowth of their own thinking habits.

5. Try to write as you would converse. Remember that what you write will be read by someone who is trying to get some information from it and not by a schoolteacher who will mark you down for poor grammar. Concentrate on the *idea*; you can always tighten up the grammar a little afterward, if necessary.

6. Make it a point to use adjectives and adverbs. They are the spice of language, and while it's easy to use too

many of them, a selective use of descriptive terms can add accuracy, as well as interest, to what you have to say.

7. Edit yourself. Go over drafts of what you have written to prune the excess verbiage and to restate your ideas more simply or accurately. Don't let any written statement go out until you're sure that *you* can't improve on it.

Last, it should be very obvious that the author must make the same plea to his readers that the plump physician made to his overweight patients: "Do as I say, not as I do!"

Psychological Reports

A psychological report is often a crucial document. It can enter into decisions that make or break careers and can even lead to broad policy changes that affect entire organizations. We have already devoted considerable space to the ways in which psychologists arrive at the conclusions that are embodied in their reports; now we ought to discuss how these reports are written and how they ought to be read.

Most of the psychological reports that executives see are evaluations of specific individuals, usually in terms of their qualifications for a specific job. Ideally, these reports should be *clear, pertinent, informative* and *helpful*. In actual practice, they often fall short of one or more (or even all) of these criteria. The effects of a poorly written psychological report can range all the way from exasperation to downright misinformation on the part of the executive who reads it.

Clarity is above all a matter of avoiding jargon. The psychologist's jargon has the same rationale as all technical vocabularies: it is supposed to be a more accurate way of stating an idea than everyday language, with its ambigu-

ties and shades of meaning, would ordinarily permit. However, new jargon has a way of being invented much faster than new ideas. In fact, it sometimes seems as if being up-to-date on the latest phraseology has become a sort of status symbol among professionals. To make matters worse, there is many a layman who gets a vicarious joy from bandying about technical terms whose meaning may actually be very vague to him. The net result of all this is that when technical jargon is used between professionals and laymen, it is usually more of a word game than a bona fide means of communication.

Despite the disdain in which ordinary English is sometimes held by people who trade in complex ideas, it is usually a more effective vehicle for conveying information than any form of technical terminology. A good psychological report should require no translation—it should be written in plain English, which in the last analysis is more expressive, more exact and even more dignified than jargon can ever be.

A good deal of what is said in a psychological report is likely to seem inconsequential. If it is, it shouldn't be there; and if it isn't, its importance should be spelled out on the spot. Psychologists are trained to observe comprehensively, noting every last detail—which is all to the good when they are formulating their own conclusions. But the same exhaustiveness, when carried over to a written report to an executive, simply annoys and obscures without adding any real substance to the report. The value of a report is measured by the issues it clarifies and not by its weight, length, or the ponderousness of its verbiage. Conciseness, rather than comprehensiveness, should be the keynote. Any sen-

tence that is not its own self-evident retort to the question "So what?" does not belong in a psychological report to management.

Too often a psychological report contains more "preface"—in the form of background data—than "text" in the form of fresh, pertinent insights into the individual about whom the report is written. Sometimes the report will recapitulate facts and figures about the individual that are already known from other sources or it may tick off a lot of test statistics and technical terminology that give it more bulk than meaning in the eyes of a layman.

This kind of writing is a relic of the early training of most psychologists, when they were concerned with writing laboratory reports that would enable other psychologists to duplicate every last detail of their experiments. As a form of reporting to management, however, it is about as useful as submitting a set of rough notes taken in the field, leaving the executive to decipher them for himself. *Analysis* and *interpretation* are the payoff in any good psychological report; all the rest are preliminaries and should be stated as briefly as possible.

The ultimate purposes of a psychological report are to aid the executive in reaching a decision about the individual and/or to enable management to develop a better working relationship with him on the job. Everything in the report should have a clear place in the chain of observations and deductions leading to those ends. Whatever does not enlarge the executive's understanding of the person's potentialities or does not point to a sounder basis for dealing with that person on a day-to-day basis is superfluous.

A common complaint about psychological reports is that

they are too long. As a matter of fact, the pertinent parts of these reports—the parts that illuminate and clarify—are typically *too short*. It is the preliminary phases of the reports, with their histories, scores, and blow-by-blow interpretations of every last test, that are too long.

No matter how well-thought-out and well-written a report may be and no matter how sophisticated the executive is who reads it, it should not be the sole means of communicating the psychologist's findings. Rather, wherever possible the report should be studied as a *basis for discussion*. There is no substitute for face-to-face conversations between the psychologist and the executive, as a means of clarifying and enlarging upon the report. Even a telephone conversation, while definitely "second best" as a way of clearing up the fine points of a report, is preferable to merely submitting a written report and letting it go at that.

Many a fine job of psychological evaluation has been ruined in its final stages because a psychologist didn't make his point clearly enough, or because an executive misconstrued it, or both. To rely entirely on written reports as a means of conveying psychological information is neither practical nor economical. It is very much like ordering a valuable, delicate tool—and then neglecting to have it properly installed.

II

A PHILOSOPHY FOR MATURE MANAGEMENT

The technical revolution has antiquated some basic managerial philosophies—and it has done it so quickly that the obsolescence of certain old ideas is not widely recognized. One of these is the assumption that management's basic responsibility was to oversee the production of enough material things to keep people fed, clothed and sheltered. Not everyone has a full stomach or a decent roof over his head as yet, but the means are clearly at hand for giving him all that and then some. Potentially, nearly everyone in the industrialized countries is a potential customer for gourmet foods and backyard swimming pools. The problems of producing material things have been so thoroughly licked that we already have to resort to snob appeal and planned obsolescence at times, just to keep our prolific factories booming. Our concept of a decent standard of living moves more and more toward the second car and the bigger house. Pro-

ducing enough material things to satisfy the need for them may still be a problem—at least in detail—but it is no longer a managerial *frontier*.

But in the meantime, another kind of hunger has been growing—one which could, in its own way, be even more devitalizing than not having enough to eat. In various ways, social commentators have noted an undercurrent of boredom and discontent running beneath all our opulence—a vague feeling that the individual has somehow become unimportant, that he can no longer accomplish anything of consequence and that his place in the scheme of things is simply to be a consumer. In America and most Western countries, we are living more and more in a coddled, overabundant world of our own making—a world where many people only need to keep their noses clean in order to live well and be catered to by eager armies of advertisers. Yet along with all the plenty there grows a sense that this is somehow wrong, an affront to man's dignity and creative instincts.

For those people who are not hobbled by dependency, the basic need is not for comfort but a challenge—something tough enough to pit their skill and ingenuity against. To some degree we have an outlet for this kind of hunger in various kinds of research and planning work or in the “creative” hobbies that are so often prescribed as releases from boredom. But most people have to earn their livings in rather routinized ways; and hobbies, for all their variety, have a limited appeal. There remain a vast number of people for whom life in general and their jobs in particular have become just plain dull.

Nevertheless, people turn quite naturally to their jobs

for a chance to satisfy their needs for self-expression. Their jobs, after all, still occupy the bulk of their day—the period during which they are the most alert and energetic, when their capacity to get things done is at its peak. Even though their work is often tedious and repetitive, it is for many people the only aspect of their lives in which they can hope to accomplish something worthy of their talents.

It seems to me that the greatest challenge facing management today is to meet this need for a feeling of accomplishment and significance in people's work. Our great need now is for working atmospheres in which latent creativity, deftness, or just plain love of hard work can blossom forth. Boredom is not so much a problem in itself as it is a symptom of management's newest frontier—*maximizing the achievement potential of its people*.

There are many reasons why this challenge should be taken up, some of which are more worthy than others. Unleashing the full achievement power of individuals and groups would, of course, give an enormous boost to the very process we have already carried so far forward: making things for people to use, admire and luxuriate in. But that is not where the real challenge lies—nor, indeed, does it lie in some vaguely humanitarian opportunity to make people happier on the job. The basic reason why management should undertake to maximize its people's chances to achieve all they can is simply this: it is the most difficult possible challenge to management's own ability to manage. It is management's opportunity to develop its *own* skills and potentialities to their highest levels.

Historically, management has been undergoing a transition from a class of proprietors to a class of professionals.

Many of today's executives—perhaps most—come from families of moderate means and qualified themselves for their jobs through a lengthy training process which often involved a financial sacrifice for them or their families. Management is, in other words, full of men who got there the hard way and who therefore tend to look upon their jobs as a challenge to their ability—something they have to be equal to—rather than as a custodianship of their private nest eggs. Executives are, of course, paid well and enjoy a high degree of prestige. But the feature that tends to dominate their own psychology has very little to do with wealth or ostentation: it is their concept of themselves as *professional problem solvers and decision makers*. Like anyone else who has been fortunate enough to develop his capacities to a high degree, an executive's principal satisfaction from his job comes from being good at it.

The appeal of enabling an organization to maximize its achievements does not rest on altruism, or even on the highly touted profit motive. It rests on the strong basic motivation of a new class of professional managers to develop *themselves*. A recognition that the development of managerial skill is inseparable from the development of organizational achievement is, it seems to me, a hallmark of mature management.

What Is Maturity?

Nowadays maturity has become a very popular concept, something that nearly everyone subscribes to in theory and either seeks or affects in practice. There have been many attempts to define maturity for both individuals and organizations. These usually tick off lists of traits that would

characterize a mature way of running an organization and are likely to include such concepts as objectivity, empathy and insight.

At the day-to-day level, however, maturity is more prosaic. It is a matter of making an honest effort, within one's limitations, to handle each problem in the best way one can. More than that, I think, it is a matter of trying to surpass one's self—to be above one's own biases and fears. Maturity is, in other words, a relative thing—differing from person to person because they are each struggling to lift a different set of potentialities above a different set of limitations.

Maturity lies in the trying—not necessarily in what is achieved. It does not necessarily have anything to do with gray hairs or with having been around long enough to see everything. It is a freely chosen, freely adhered-to state of mind—an acknowledgment of whatever smallness and fears one may be burdened with and a commitment to somehow rise above them. It is having enough humility to admit being wrong, coupled with enough audacity to attempt to be great. In moral terms, it is the daily determination to be the best kind of person one is capable of being.

Organizations, like individuals, usually have latent capabilities for achievements that are well beyond what they are accustomed to attempting. Like people, organizations also have inhibitions—fears of departing from tradition, fears of falling behind the competition because of a wrong decision, fears of upsetting the applecart. Similarly, organizations are capable either of surrendering to their inhibitions or of striving to lift themselves above them and reaching for the limits of their potentialities.

The potentialities of an organization can be something more than just the sum of the capacities of all of its members. In a well-led organization, people can bring out the best in each other, making possible group achievements that far surpass what most individuals could attain by themselves. Even the occasional genius, whose creativity exceeds that of any group, is likely to be more productive when he is backed up by an alert and highly motivated organization.

True, many organizations are sluggish and seemingly incapable of rising above a very humdrum level. Sometimes managers despair of ever being able to get cooperation without pressure and come to feel that this situation is unavoidable because of the caliber of people they have to employ. Sometimes they are right. But very often, a listless or uninspired organization is simply reflecting management's own attitudes toward it. When management develops the conviction that it is dealing with people who are incorrigibly childish or "innately" incapable of anything more than menial achievements, it is entirely natural for the group to react with sullenness and minimal cooperation—usually punctuated by petty "revenge" in the form of waste, theft or carelessness.

In other words, there are times when the symptoms that seem to "prove" a group's inability to advance are *caused* by a prejudicial attitude on management's part. The oft-heard assertions of "practical" men that nothing can be done to elevate the efficiency and self-discipline of an organization, because the people in it are too dull or too lazy to be inspired, are sometimes little more than rationalizations. Usually something *can* be done and ought to be done. Obviously, it has to be done first with management itself.

Building Better Organizations

Men who fight back against the childish residue in their own personalities—those ubiquitous feelings of unworthiness and inadequacy that frighten most people into throwing up barriers against each other—are free to develop their own capacities to the fullest. What is more important, they can also appreciate the untapped potentialities in others, instead of blinding themselves to them for fear that they may hurt their own prestige or security. They can recognize that the ultimate challenge to their managerial talents is somehow to create a working climate in which *other* men will want to lift themselves above *their* faults, too—and to test the limits of their own abilities. Managerial maturity is, in other words, indispensable if an organization is to be inspired to surpass its apparent limitations.

One of the key problems facing a mature managerial group is to define a common purpose—a goal which excites the imagination of the rank and file and which is attainable if they go after it as a team. To be exciting, it must either be something new that will give them a distinction they can share or something hitherto considered too difficult or even impossible, so that they can feel that they are spearheading a breakthrough for the rest of their industry. Developing a new product or opening a new market is an example of goals which can mobilize the imagination of emotionally dormant organizations. But the novelty can also be a matter of quality, efficiency, speed or productivity; it really does not matter what mark the company elects to shoot at, as long as it is hard to hit and will enhance the pride and prestige of each member if the group reaches it.

Morale is, after all, a matter of feeling that one ~~has~~ has a common cause with his organization—indeed, that the organization provides the best vehicle for attaining what the individual wants. It is increasingly apparent today that what many people want most is a sense of accomplishment—a feeling that what they are getting paid to do helps to make the world better and isn't just a meaningless exercise for the sake of money and security. Where the organization has no apparent goal other than perpetuating itself, some of its people—probably the ones with the greatest potentialities—are likely to start feeling like prostitutes.

However, attempts to stimulate group feeling can easily be overdone, particularly if they are used prematurely. Cheerleader tactics, bogus appeals to feelings of fellowship that haven't actually had a chance to develop yet, sloganeering before the meaning of the slogan has had a chance to take shape in the minds of employees—any such action is likely to give people the feeling that the whole project is sophomoric. If a goal is selected for its inherent appeal to the imagination and professional pride of an organization, it will not have to be "sold" very hard. Ballyhoo is likely to be seen as a tacit admission of lack of faith in one's ideas, one's organization, or both.

Mature management attempts to build a legitimate sense of excitement and importance into each man's job. Many jobs, particularly in manufacturing, have had the variety and challenge pretty well "engineered" out of them. Wherever possible, this trend should be minimized: just knowing that one's work may require one to show expertness can be more stimulating to morale, alertness and efficiency than a dozen rest periods.

But for most people, the excitement in a job does not come from the actual tasks they perform or from histrionic attempts to whip up their enthusiasm. It comes from a sense of intimate involvement in a significant project. This feeling of participation can best be developed by the first-line supervisor, backing up the broad appeal of management both with his own example and with personal recognition of individual efforts. In fact, the best way for management to ensure individual morale is to develop the best possible corps of first-line supervisors.

There is also the matter of sharing in the rewards of achievements that surpass old standards. While it is true that the achievement can be rewarding in itself, such a feeling can be quickly undermined if people feel that they have been "used" in order to enrich their employers. Any further attempt to rouse employees to new heights of achievement are likely to be greeted cynically, with great suspicion and resistance. It would clearly be shortsighted to build a strong *esprit de corps* without definite plans for sharing whatever gains the increased effort brings about.

In the long run, maturity can be a potent advantage to any organization. However, there should be no illusions about a mature group necessarily being able to make more money than its competitors. The main gains from group maturity are *esprit de corps*, continuously sharpening creativity and judgment, and a more complete realization by each individual of his total potentialities. These can, of course, produce economic gains as a by-product; but they are not likely to be attained unless they are sought for their own sake, rather than as a tool for other ends.

The standard against which mature management judges

its performance is the ultimate potentialities of its own organization—not the performance of its competitors. Merely to keep up with, or even to exceed, another group will very often cause an organization to settle for far less than it is capable of achieving. The essential obligations of an enlightened management are to define the potentialities of its own organization, to create a working atmosphere in which men will want to strive toward them, and to attract the kinds of men who can and will participate in such a growth process. Psychology, when properly understood and applied, can help management to approach these goals—but psychology cannot achieve them for management by itself. In the last analysis, despite all the aid and comfort that psychology and other consulting services can bring, management will have to provide its own salvation.

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