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Democratization of Large Bureaucratic Organizations Having a Vertical Power Structure and an Authoritarian Leadership

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Introduction

This paper discusses how grass-root workers in large bureaucratic organizations can organize and thereby force democratic changes in the workplace when it has a vertical power structure and an authoritarian leadership. The kinds of organizations we are considering are large factories and similar organizations where a majority of the members are manual or low skilled workers. When we discuss leaders, we are primarily considering the management leadership, but under some circumstances also top-leaders when it is relevant. The paper will first define and discuss the relationship between democracy, bureaucracy, power, leadership, vertical power, and authoritarian leadership. Second, we will discuss how workers can organize and force democratic changes within the workplace; thereby reduce leaders' power sources and power bases that permit leaders to manipulate the behavior of workers. In this context, we will closely examine how democratic changes forced by grass-root workers influence each power source and power base controlled by leaders. Third, we will discuss the consequences the democratization process has on grass-root workers' job situation and the organization (workplace) as a whole; including the bureaucratic structure, the authoritarian leadership style and the vertical power system. Forth, we end with a short conclusion.

Background and Definitions

There are several definitions of democracy. The two we will combine in this paper are from American Heritage College Dictionary and Dean Alger's "Megamedia." The former states that democracy exists when the majority rule and the common people are considered as the primary source of political power. Democracy is the principle of social equality and individual rights." (American Heritage College Dictionary, 1997, p. 369). The latter has a slightly different view, but fits

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well with the above definition. Alger (1998, p.19) suggests that everyone should have an equal opportunity to express him or herself about any outcome, and everyone should have sufficient opportunity to understand the context and consequences of the decisions they want to make.

Some writers view bureaucratic organizations as democratic, while others argue that bureaucratic organizations are rather more totalitarian. Put into context with the definition of democracy given above, bureaucracy will be considered as opposed to democracy; it is a controlling tool that leads to social inequality and suppresses individual rights and political participation of the many by the few. Jary and Jary (1991, p. 38) define bureaucracy as "a type of organization in which administration is based on impersonal, written rules and a hierarchy of offices; there is a clear distinction between the office and its incumbent, and official positions are filled on the basis of formal qualifications. Bureaucracies are based upon rational legal authority which means that there is a belief that those in higher offices should have power over subordinates." Perrow (1986, p. 5) says that bureaucracy is a tool, "a social tool that legitimizes control of the many by the few. This control has generated unregulated and unperceived social power. Bureaucracies also shape our ideas, our very way of conceiving of ourselves, control our life chances, and even define our humanity." From Perrow's point of view we can get an idea how the average worker is suppressed, not only by the leaders, but also by the bureaucratic structure.

Both Jary and Jary (1991) and Perrow (1986) write that leaders have legitimate control over subordinates in bureaucratic organizations through the use of power. Hall believes that power, in a relationship between two or more actors (not necessary individuals), means that the behavior of one (or more) affect the behavior of the other(s). In other words, A has power over B to the extent that A can get B to do something B would not otherwise do. Power is an act that has to be used or exercised. To sustain power, power holders must exercise power to signify to others their awareness of their role obligations. Units and people in organizations get their power through their control of both power sources and power bases. (Sources are the mechanisms that allow parties to control the power bases.) These sources can emanate from one's office or position, level of expertise, or from charismatic qualities (Hall, 1999, 109-112+114). "Power bases refer to what power holders control that permits them to manipulate the behavior of others" (French

and Raven, 1968). There are five different power bases. 1) "Reward power" is based on the ability of a social agent (person, role, norm, group etc.) to reward the recipient for compliance. 2) "Coercive power" is based on the ability of a social agent to punish or sanction the recipient if he does not conform to the requirements specified. 3) "Legitimate power" is based upon the notion that a social agent has a legitimate right to direct the behavior(s) of the other. 4) "Referent power" is based on the recipient's identification with the social agent in terms of how he behaves, believes and so on. 5) "Expert power" refers to particular knowledge or expertise in a given area possessed by the social agent (French and Raven, 1968).

There are two types of power structures in bureaucratic organizations, vertical and horizontal power. We will discuss horizontal power at a later stage in the paper. Vertical power in bureaucratic organizations means that the power relations are built into a hierarchy; people in positions high up in the hierarchical pyramid have the most power while those at the lowest level have the least power. There are clearly written rules explaining the power relations. Each level is given just the amount of power necessary to carry out its responsibilities. The reason that ascendant levels in the hierarchy have more power is because they have a broader knowledge about the organization and task expertise, therefore, they control the power sources and the power bases. Only those at the top or at a higher level have the legal power to make decisions or changes in a vertical system, therefore, power is distributed between the privileged and the unprivileged (Hall, 1999, p. 109-111).

Many see power closely linked to leadership. Under some circumstances they are right, but as we shall see, this connection is far from democratic. From a more democratic point of view leadership is the ability of a leader to influence (non-coercive) followers to alter their preferences to coincide with those of his own. Leadership is closely related to power, but it differs in that it entails influence or change of preference, while power means only that agents' preferences are held in abeyance. Leadership is not only power allocated to a position, but also something that is "voluntarily" attributed to people by their followers (Hall, 1999, p. 136). Leaders are at the same time given a legitimate right to their position because of the power bases, but how they use the power bases differ (French and Raven, 1968). There are two main types of supervisory leadership, supportive and authoritarian. A supportive leader will not take too much advantage of the power bases, like for

example coercive power, but rather be more cooperative and democratic in behavior (fits with the above definition of leadership). On the other side, an authoritarian leader will use the power of his position and use the power bases more or less to a maximum, for example, he will be more punishment oriented (Hall, 1999, p. 140). Be aware that authoritarian leadership does not fit with the way "leadership" is defined above where there is a clear distinction between leadership and power (even though they are connected). Authoritarian leadership merges with power, and is simply an exercise of power where leaders only give orders and make decisions (Hall, 1999, p. 137). It is not democratic in its style, since it is only an act of power totally based upon the control of power sources and power bases.

The Democratization Process

As an organization grows larger, its administration becomes more complex, resulting in increased specialization and division of labor. This requires a "stronger" leadership and a reduction of grass-roots input into leadership decision-making, despite the fact that grass-root workers often constitute the majority of the members of an organization (Michels, 1962, p. 71). By reducing the 'floor" workers input into decision-making, the organization as a whole becomes less democratic. As mentioned earlier, democracy means that the majority rules and that all members are considered as source of decision-making, and that everyone should have the opportunity to express themselves about any outcome. When leaders have control over all aspects of the organization, the organization is more totalitarian than democratic. Michels (1962, p. 72) says that when leaders dominate larger organizations, they tend to organize themselves in pursuing their own interests. This statement also shows that democratic control in these types of organizations is reduced to a minimum, because the lower range workers (the majority) are not taken into account about organizational life and benefits.

Organizations where those at the top or at a higher level have the legal power to make decisions have a vertical power structure (Hall, 1999, p. 109). Leaders in these organizations get their power through their control of power sources and power bases which permits them to manipulate the behavior of the workers. Authoritarian leaders are likely to rely on the power of their position and to be more punishment oriented, which means that all five types of power bases are regularly employed (Hall, 1999, p. 141). The supportive leaders are more

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employee oriented (consider the needs of subordinates, and treat them with dignity), democratic in behavior (ask subordinates for their opinion etc.), and they give more authority to their subordinates (Hall, 1999, p. 140). All power bases are often not relevant (though power sources often are) for supportive leaders and/or in a horizontal power structure. Often, only referent power and expert power are relevant (French and Raven, 1968), which means that supportive leadership and horizontal power structures usually are more democratic in nature since the opinions of the grass-root are taken into consideration about organizational decision-making. In a bureaucratic organization based on vertical power and authoritarian leadership, the workers have very little input into organizational decision-making. Growing centralization in industry, industry-wide bargaining, government intervention, and the need for organizational experts have all resulted in more bureaucratic and centralized organizations (Nyden, 1985, p. 1182). Perrow (1986, p. 3) writes that bureaucracies are based upon rational legal authority where there is a common belief among organizational members that those in higher offices should have power over subordinates. This may explain why there is a general immobility and passivity among the average worker (Michels, 1962, p. 364). Hall (1999, p. 143) states that members are socialized into this kind of organization, and will themselves see authoritarian leadership and a vertical power system as the "natural" way to structure their daily routines. How is it possible to democratize a bureaucratic organization based upon a vertical power system and an authoritarian leadership? The answer here will be to minimize the strength of the power sources and the power bases from where leaders get their power to manipulate the behavior of the workers. As we will see, this can be done if the grass-root members become a group *in-itself* rather than being a group *for-itself* (as Marx wrote).

What changes are needed for the organization to be more democratic? The central issues are higher wages, better protection of workplace (occupational safety and so on), employee benefits (better health service and so on), and organizational democracy where the workers play a central role in organizational decision-making (at least to a much greater extent than before) like organizational politics, contract decisions, election of different representatives and establishment of committees to protect workers rights, especially minority members (Nyden, 1985, p. 1186). Weber recognized that "floor" workers may have their own broader political awareness that can moderate the power

of leaders. He saw vertical power structures and authoritarian leadership in bureaucratic organizations not only as obstacles to the maintenance of democratic processes, but also as obstacles that could be overcome by the lower ranged workers (Nyden, 1985, p. 1181).

Nyden writes that democracy is built from the bottom up, it is not imposed from the top down. Therefore, democratic reforms start from a very basic level. Once democratic building blocks are in place at the bottom, broader democratic structures can be built into the organization as a whole. Success emerges when the workers have consciously evaluated the advantages of particular organizational structures and are ideologically committed to democratic processes. It includes the ability to bring about normative changes in the organization. Groups seeking democratic reforms within the organization are most likely to succeed if they themselves are democratic. All workers/members must be involved in the decision-making process within the group. The ones with the initiative to start organizing a group are often individuals with "guts," who are not afraid to ask organizational leaders certain questions. Often, these individuals also become grass-root leaders, at least in the beginning (1985, p. 1183-1184, 1187 + 1193). Kochen and Useem (1992) indicate that individual and collective voices are critical in changing organizations. Nyden argues that when organizing a group, the presence of an "occupational community" with intermediate social networks that integrate the workers must be present. In other words, it is important that workers be afforded the opportunity to associate with fellow workers in the workplace, and that they have ties/can build ties in their leisure time through family and community relations. If these factors overlap, it builds the basis for a pervasive social institution with string bounds and agreement (1985, p. 1183).

Equally important, members must create connections to the "outside;" they should become members of unions, integrate into (local) political organizations, and in general keep in touch with different sources of political power from where they can receive and gain support. By having support from the outside, workers will build strength, and as a large collective, they may be able exert more pressure on the leadership of an organization for reforms and changes. Campaign strategies based on democratic ideology is a crucial factor for success, even though it is time consuming to develop political strength. It takes more time to educate members about the merits of a political platform than to form alliances with existing political cliques in the surrounding political area

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(where gains are but short-term). The group must emphasize commitment in bringing about specific reform program(s) and not just short-term electoral victories regardless of the consequences for a true democratic reform. The group must, therefore, be picky and consistent in its strategy, and enter an alliance with other groups or political organizations only if it can immediately or in the long run gain anything. The group must build its organization and campaign on the basis of a political ideology with a long-term time frame (Nyden, 1985, p. 1192-1193). Kochan and Useem (1992) state that organizations are often slow to change, therefore, it is necessary to have a long-term schedule so that any major changes can see the light of day. Educating members about organizational structures and procedures as well as involving them in activities and campaigns, helps to guide them into progressive politics. This may assure their continued support (Nyden, 1985, p.1198). Nyden (1985, p. 1183) writes that union members, and organized workers in general, cause organizational leaders to be more responsive to workers' interests.

It is important to have a communication network that is public, so that groups of members from different sections of the "new" grass-root organization can hold regularly scheduled meetings as a way of increasing involvement in politics. In order to be successful, it is important to have a strong link between group members and group leaders. In political meetings and elections it is important to emphasize issues rather than personalities. This will "force" members to really listen and think about existing problems. Consequently, members will be more inclined to work on specific issues and ultimately establish steering committees. By retaining a consistent long-term democratic ideology reinforced through regularly scheduled meetings emphasizing specific issues, it is easier to get members engaged: not only in issues concerning more money and better pensions, but also in areas addressing corruption, safety, and grievances. In addition, the organized group should publish newsletters. By writing articles for the newsletter, members will learn more about how the organization works and about any injustice happening at their workplace. Workers will also learn to focus on the important aspects of an issue and it might persuade other workers to support their position (Nyden, 1985, p. 1184, 1187-1188).

The way to democratize a bureaucratic organization characterized by a vertical power structure and authoritarian leadership is to minimize the strength of the power sources and power bases through which the

leaders manipulate workers behavior to fit their expectations. We have in the last paragraph viewed how the lower ranked workers can take action to minimize the power of the leaders. Action is necessary because manipulation through the power bases makes the organizations' democratic processes invisible. Let us now take a look at how the proposed democratic changes discussed in this section can influence each type of power in the power sources and the power bases relevant for organizations based on vertical power systems and authoritarian leadership. (Note: all five power types in the power bases, and all three power types in the power sources are relevant for organizations based on vertical power systems and authoritarian leadership).

The leaders will still have reward power. French and Raven (1968) argue that attempts to use power outside the social range tend to decrease reward power. Leaders will, therefore, have greater difficulty rewarding someone informally—based solely on character and so on— instead of job performance. The workers may be more aware of what is "the real requirement" to receive certain rewards, because they are informed through meetings and newsletters about different forms of "injustice" and the limits of power compared to their "democratic" rights. The leaders must, therefore, be careful to reward one worker and not others if there are no specific, acceptable reason for making a difference. In addition, leaders may not be able, at least not to the extent that they could earlier, to reward only individuals at the higher level of an organization if they do not have good arguments for it. This is due to the fact that workers may be more conscious about corruption and injustice, so they might require their part of the "cake" if they feel that they have a "democratic" right to do so. In a union where workers are well organized, they can protest with the "tools" available. French and Raven (1968) argue that the strength of reward power increases with the magnitude of the rewards that leaders can provide. The workers may have learned in their grass-root organization that they can require different or higher rewards than what leaders normally have given or want to provide for certain behavior/action. If so, the reward power is reduced. In this context, workers would probably not accept all types of rewards, especially if they understand that the forthcoming reward is not high enough or equivalent in kind. One can say that the reward power still exists, but that it may be reduced in strength since the workers' organization will protest against any undemocratic behavior of the leaders.

Coercive power too remains relevant. However, if a leader wants to punish or sanction a worker, they must frame the rationale in such a way as to insure that the rest of the work group will either agree or at least find the action reasonable, since they presumably are now well organized and well-informed. For example, to give someone the sack will be difficult without sound, well-reasoned justification. This is particularly the case in situations were workers are well organized and in a position to take action if they find the sanction(s) to be unfair. French and Raven (1968) write that the strength of coercive power depends on the magnitude of the threatened punishment. Since workers are organized and can exert pressure on leaders, one can assume that formerly 'undemocratic" sanctions and punishments exercised are not in use anymore which would reduce the number as well as the degree of punishments. The leaders are probably also more or less forced to be more consistent with the use of coercive power, so that members higher up in the hierarchy also would be punished by their leaders relatively in the same degree as the lower level workers. Another important issue in relation to this is that the leaders must be careful so they do not punish people differently based upon sex, age, and race. If they do, they can expect to get reactions from the workers' organization. Coercive power still exists, but it is probably reduced in strength and degree since the workers are aware of their human rights and have, through their own organization, more knowledge about how the organization operates and should operate. The workers will probably take action if the sanctions or punishments are not democratic. The workers may now be aware of what Hall (1999, p. 140) suggests, that leadership based on punishment is not "good" leadership. They want to be heard and treated with dignity, and would demand more democratic behavior from the leaders.

The charismatic (power source) and referent (power base) powers may both be heavily reduced when confronted with the democratic attitude of the workers. Referent power is the ability of the workers to identify with the leader and gain satisfaction by conforming to the leader. The strength of this type of power depends upon how strongly the workers can identify themselves with the leader (French and Raven, 1968). If the workers are committed to democratic processes and have opted to follow a democratic ideological politic, they may have difficulty receiving satisfaction by conforming to an authoritarian leader. The entire value system (believes, attitudes, behavior) completely contradicts what they fight for and believe in. The leaders may therefore loose (at

least in the long run), this kind of power, especially if the workers' organization grows strong in number and strength, and if the workers adopt collective resistance. The leader may also loose his/her charisma because with an authoritarian leadership style personal qualities will not inspire any popular devotion and/or enthusiasm. Hall (1999, p. 140) writes that leaders influence followers in the interaction process, and the reactions of the subordinates to the interaction impact upon the behavior of leaders. Since workers are be more inclined to focus on the issues and are committed to democratic processes, they will understand their rights as a collective, thereby changing their behavior accordingly in the interaction process, which would then influence the behavior of the leader. The leader must be careful not to use unnecessary force, because the workers might "protest" if they feel unfairly treated. Consequently, the leader might be forced to take the subordinates' opinion into consideration and treat them with more dignity to a larger degree than before.

Legitimate power will, in-itself, remain strong since the workers must accept that the leaders have the right to influence them (as long as they believe in any hierarchy at all). But, since referent and charismatic powers are weakened, the workers might refuse in one way or another to accept the legitimate power of the leader. French and Raven (1968) state that referent power is the most important form of power. If the leader does not change, the consequences might be serious. Legitimate power is strong if the workers accept the social structures in the organization. It is obvious that they do not in this case; therefore, the legitimate power is reduced. The workers are committed to democratic processes, and receive a lot of information from the rest of the group through meetings, newsletters and so on. In essence, they would not accept the social structure caused by a vertical power system relying on authoritarian leadership.

Expertise (power source) and expert power (power base) remain strong since the leaders normally have more skills than their subordinates. However, the workers may understand the importance of their work in the larger context, therefore, the leaders are probably not looked upon as "high" or "respected" as they might have been earlier. The relationship might become a little more dualistic. One reason for this could be that some workers might have developed more general and/or specific knowledge by participating in the organized meetings (or told by their group to get more expertise). Thus, workers can formualte

arguments and initiate discussions with the leader, thereby reducing the latters level of expertise in a relative sense. The expert power (expertise) will be reduced if the worker(s) compare their level of knowledge with that of the leader's and discover the existence of discrepancies.

Position (office) which is a source of power will remain strong. The workers will probably accept a sort of hierarchy of positions, and will pretty much accept that there are persons "higher up" who do a different job than them. What they do not accept is to be "mistreated" and not being able to participate in organizational decision-making. That leaders in higher positions have "too many" benefits, and that leaders can direct workers behavior how they please, will probably not be accepted.

Consequences for the Workers and the Organization

The conscious creation of democratic organizational structures will lead to a more open decision-making process and a greater involvement of broad segments of the membership in organizational functions. The organized workers will in the long run have more influence upon organizational life and enhance the possibility of receiving more benefits such as higher wages, occupational safety, and better health service, etc., by collectively pressuring the leaders. This, of course, will also require them to be more informed about organizational life and take a larger part in decisions about the present and future situation of the organization (Nyden, 1985, p. 1185-1186). The organized workers can also force organizational leaders to make changes which, for example, would make the working conditions more pleasant; better equipment, better clothing, more breaks and so on. The workers may also have a greater chance to reduce corruption and "injustice" within the organization, because they would probably be more aware of their democratic rights. They will expect to take part in more meetings and committees than before. The workers might not be satisfied by only participating in meetings/committees, they might also require that more positions within the organization are elected and not simply assigned (Nyden, 1985, p. 1186). Since the workers are many in number, they can threaten the leaders by refusing to do anything outside the minimum requirements (overtime and so on), stop working for a while, and even strike. Remember, workers would probably have support from outside politicians, organizations, and unions, i.e., they can place combined pressure on leaders. Even if the leaders threaten the workers by giving them the sack and so on, the grass-root organization created by the

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workers will have a great chance to survive since outside organizations and unions might continue their work for change.

As we have seen, the power sources and bases through which the leaders have the power to manipulate the behavior of the workers have been reduced in strength. Because of the increased power and influence the workers can receive, the organizational leadership is kind of forced to make some changes to fit the newly developed situation. The leaders must, at least to a degree, take workers' opinion into consideration, perhaps give them more independent authority, and treat them with more dignity. The result will probably be that leaders have to change their authoritarian leadership style more toward a supportive leadership style, which is according to Hall (1999, p. 140) more democratic. French and Raven (1968) state that, the weaker the bases of power, the weaker the power is. Reduction in power (bases and sources) will automatically decrease the strength of authoritarian leadership. This is because authoritarian leadership is based upon the use of power and cannot survive without obedience of the workers.

As a result of the strength reduction in leaders' power bases and sources, the vertical power system is weakened. The reason, as we have seen, is that the power of those higher up in the hierarchy may be reduced. A vertical power system is based upon a relationship where those higher up in the organization have "total" power over the ones below them (and that the subordinates conform to it). This is not the situation anymore (leaders still have power over subordinates, but it is reduced). As mentioned earlier, Hall (1999, p.111) suggests that the reason that ascendant levels in the vertical hierarchy have more power is because they have broader knowledge about the organization and task experience, therefore, they control the power sources and the power bases. As a result of the democratic organization of the workers at the grass-roots level, they become more educated and learn more about their democratic rights and how the organization really works. This will provide them a broader knowledge base about the organization and give them more task experience. The power of the leaders may be reduced since the workers can now challenge the leaders on the very premises that gave them power in the first instance. As a consequence, the organization might be forced to change their structure from a vertical power system toward a horizontal power system where the leaders and the workers are more equal, and have a more dualistic cooperative relationship.

The bureaucratic structure will survive (in terms of how it was defined earlier) but it will become more democratic since the workers can express themselves about outcomes too a larger degree than earlier. This is, of course, contingent upon their participation in more meetings and elections within the organization. Workers will, through their own grass-root organization, receive information about the decision they are about to make. The changes in the organization will lead to more social equality and an increase in individual rights among workers. The idea that the majority rules and every single member of the organization (including all workers) is considered as an equal source in the decision-making process, will probably not be fully the case yet since the leaders would probably protest and refuse to make too many large changes. Leaders will still be powerful even though their power is reduced.

Conclusion

We have attempted to demonstrate how lower level workers can organize themselves and thereby force democratic changes in their workplace. They can do so by developing a long-term consistent democratic ideology that activates and educates workers, toward building connections to unions and different political organizations. All these factors will put pressure on leaders, who will be more or less forced to change their authoritarian leadership style more toward a supportive leadership approach, and flatten the vertical power system into a more horizontal system. The paper does not consider a total change from vertical and authoritarian power structures to a supportive and horizontal system, but just some changes that will make the organizational leadership less authoritarian and the vertical power structures less "steep." The obstacles against complete change include the fact that leadership will probably not accept too many large-scale changes and the recognition that solidarity among workers has its own limits.

Kochen and Useem (1992) argue that organizations need to support participatory decision-making and communication across organizational structural boundaries. Employees and leaders within organizations need to increase the level of participation and cooperation, therefore, organizational hierarchies need to flatten as a means to encourage a flow of ideas and influence from lower range workers to be competitive in today's global world. Vertical and horizontal boundaries need to be more "open" to promote crossfunctional integration, communication, and problem solving.

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