THE NATURE AND PHILOSOPHY OF LEADERSHIP

15 September 1954

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INDUSTRIAL COLLEGE OF THE ARMED FORCES

Washington, D. C.

Dr. Fillmore H. Sanford, Executive Secretary of the American Psychological Association, was born in Chatham, Virginia, 1914. He attended Hargrave Military Academy and the University of Richmond, Virginia. He received his M. A. degree from Harvard University in 1937 and his Ph. D. from that school in 1941. From 1941-43 he taught at Harvard, after which he became an officer in the U. S. Navy. He had a terminal assignment as senior officer of the Aviation Psychology Section at the Naval Air Training Bases, Corpus Christi, Texas. He now holds the rank of lieutenant commander in the U. S. Naval Reserve. From 1946-48 he taught at the University of Maryland in the Psychology Department, and then became professor of Psychology at Haverford College. He wrote a book which is being used in a leadership course at the Naval Academy at Annapolis and one which is used as a text for chief petty officers of the Navy. He has also written a book entitled "Authoritarianism and Leadership" which was published by the Institute for Research in Human Relations, as well as various articles published in scientific publications. He is a member of Phi Beta Kappa and Omicron Delta Kappa, honorary fraternities.

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COLONEL BARTLETT: We are honored this morning to have with us the Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Mr. Fogler.

Admiral Hague, General Niblo, and gentlemen: In preparation for this introduction, I recently looked up in the dictionary the definition of leadership. There are several definitions. One of them pertains to explosives, fireworks, and demolitions. In that sense a leader is a quick fuse causing a rapid ignition. I thought that was an appropriate definition for military leaders and the qualities of leadership.

But our speaker this morning, I am sure, will give you better definitions of leaders and also will discuss the psychology of leadership. His biography, to which you have access, is indicative of his work in this field. You will notice his distinguished record, the books he has written, and his service in the Navy. Some of our Navy members may have seen his textbook, which is used at Annapolis and for petty officer courses. He was a member of Phi Beta Kappa in college, but, as you would perhaps guess from his dimensions, he was also quite a football player. The highest compliment I can give him, though, is to tell you that this is his fourth consecutive appearance here. Dr. Sanford.

DR. SANFORD: Mr. Fogler, Admiral Hague, General Niblo, lady, and gentlemen: It is a privilege to be here, but I come with some disillusionment. I have had considerable admiration for the college and for the students, but Colonel Bartlett has just given you evidence that things are getting in a rut here.

My pleasant experiences, stimulating and sometimes embarrassing experiences, in meeting people in this environment have made me very proud of our armed services and very aware of my own limited knowledge and experience in leadership. But it has given me generally a good feeling about you people and your peers.

My own present inclination is to thank the Lord for the officers we have in our armed service.

There is something a little ridiculous about a fellow in my position trying to talk to you about leadership. The accumulated years of

experience represented here would amount to an entirely fabulous figure. My own experience and my own research is limited.

My attitude about administrators, people who handle positions of responsibility, is that you are very complicated integrating mechanisms as you go about your daily chores. You must take in much evidence, many points of view, much information. You must digest it, weigh it and assess it; you must eliminate some items and accept some; you must put a lot of things together and then come out with a decision about something. And this is a daily function. Sometimes you do not have adequate evidence, sometimes you have to fly blind, but the process of integration goes on.

This is truly an integrating function and an alleged specialist, such as I, fits into this in that he can feed into the integrating system some additional facts, some additional points of view, which you, as the responsible do ng, decision-making person may find of value to you tomorrow or next week as you go about your administrative functions.

Another way of saying this is that I, being a behavioral scientist, and you, being officers, have very much in common in our activities. We are all scientists in a way. The decision-maker is a scientist. He does many things the scientist does--not always in the same way, not always with the same degree of precision, not always with the same technique and system, but often with more effectiveness

You, in going about your business, do have theories and you do test hypotheses. These are the main characteristics of scientific activity. Each of you has a theory of leadership and your theory leads to specific hypotheses that you test in specific situations. Sometimes these are articulate and sometimes not. Sometimes they are not articulable. Some of these are so articulated that leaders write books on the theory of leadership. But each leader has both a theory and a set of specific hypotheses. And each leader acts every day on the basis of his theories and hypotheses.

Maybe you have studied John Paul Jones or George Washington and adopted their way of looking at leadership problems. Or maybe you read a book and adopted its theories as your own. Or perhaps your theories spring unconsciously from your own personality needs. Or perhaps they are based very sensibly on your own experience.

Leaders, administrators, scientists do have theories, and they all apply them as they go about their business.

Parents, too, have theories. I heard a father say he thought a good way to solve the feeding problems of children would be to put them in a barrel and feed them through the bung hole. I am not sure this hypothesis was set up experimentally and is actually valid in certain situations. But parents, teachers, administrators, people going about their business act as if such and such were true.

Incidentally, I hope that some of you in discussing the Joe Robbins case will pay a little attention to what sort of theories Joe Robbins is acting upon; what theories Shattuck is acting upon. How good are these theories? The whole process of living is a process in which you hypothesize about how to do things and what will happen. You act on your hypotheses. They become sharpened with experience; this is learning.

Again, I say I can give you some facts and some points of view which you may use in going about your scientific business, if you accept the definition as outlined. You are going to make the decisions. You are the integrators; you are the scientists. If I can confuse you intelligently by a new point of view or a new fact so that your hypothesis tomorrow will be a little better a little more discriminating, then it is worth while my being here; if not, it was a nice try, and I will apologize for having taken up your time.

All right, with this, I would like to summarize in a very sketchy way some of the research on leadership and then go on to talk about a piece of research which I was connected with some years ago, with the idea that in this somebody may be given a hook to hang an idea upon, somebody may be led to think about things in a way that is new, different, and profitable.

As you may know, most of the research on leadership has been in the area of selection. Since men have been organized into groups, there has been an interest, I am sure, in how do you select leaders. How do you predict in advance what individual will do well in future operations of a group, who will do well in handling increased responsibility.

This problem has been attacked mainly by psychologists and sociologists through an attempt to find traits of leaders. Psychologists can measure a large number of human traits. It would be awfully

handy if we could say the leader has such and such traits in such and such an amount. Then we could test the whole population and immediately specify those who are likely to handle leadership well. This would be very practical and would solve a lot of problems.

There have been, oh, perhaps 200 separate time-consuming, intelligently executed studies of the traits of leadership. I think it is a fair summary to say these 200 studies have succeeded mainly in turning up negative knowledge.

If you consider it on a factual level, there are no traits of leaders. There is no single attribute that you people share that seems to have anything to do with the fact that you are leaders--and you are highly selected leaders or you wouldn't be here today. But you don't have any common attribute that anybody could measure that separates you from seven of your peers who were left behind when each of you was selected to come to this institution.

Now this is a fairly extreme statement and needs a little modification. The results come out something like this: It is a good and sensible hypothesis that leaders must be more intelligent than followers. But out of 25 separate researches that have investigated this hypothesis, it turns out something like this: In 11 out of 25 situations leaders are more intelligent than followers; in 10 out of 25 situations, leaders are less intelligent than followers; in the other four situations, there was no difference. So you can't make the general statement that leaders are more intelligent than followers. This sort of thing holds in regard to almost any ability, almost any other single trait you can find.

This doesn't mean that intelligence is not important. But it means that if you are interested in making general statements as to traits of leadership, you cannot really say that leaders are intelligent. You have to qualify enormously any such statement.

Selection of leaders still goes on. You were selected. Leaders in all branches of the service, in industry, and in Government are selected. They do their jobs. So leadership selection is effective, but there is no scientific way as yet to do it. There is no real evidence that you people, for example, are any better leaders or perform better than your peers who were left behind. The staff of the school can't really prove that they have selected you well. It couldn't prove that you are better leaders without taking an equal number of your peers who were

rejected and watching them over the next 20 years to see who performed best, you or they.

This is a very expensive sort of experiment to perform, but it is the only sort anyone seems to know about that would enable us to validate the process by which you were selected, the process by which military officers generally are selected. We select people for the various military academies, but we can't be sure that the ones we select perform any better than the ones we reject. The ones we select do perform--and therefore we are inclined to say our selection process is good. But we don't know and can't prove it. You can't make a statement that any current selection process hypothesis is the best.

Now this doesn't mean that there will not be good scientific statements about the selection of leaders. There is much research in progress. There is no existing evidence that makes it possible to say that a person who has certain attributes will make a good leader. But there has been progress. Relatively few research resources have been put into the problem, but my own feeling is that we are on the verge of having good scientific and sensible statements about group processes and about leadership. We don't have them now.

There has been a good deal of effort invested in the training of leaders. All branches of the service now have leadership training courses. It is awfully difficult to deny that these courses have some value. It is equally difficult to prove that they do, because it is hard to define what is good leadership.

The definition of real leadership is as difficult a problem to wrestle with as any you can get. Who is a good leader? No one can define now in general terms what is a good leader. You may recognize it when it appears, but try to define it in scientific language and you have a real problem on your hands. There is an inconvenient absence of clear-cut criteria. The absence of a precise definition and measurable criteria clutters up research on both initial selection and advancement.

In one research at Annapolis, we found out we could change some aspects of midshipmen by a course in leadership. We put on a course based on a specially prepared book. Then we ran an experiment to see if the course did anything. We took all sanitary precautions to see that the experiment made sense. We did come up with evidence that the course produced improved scores on various tests, for example, there

was improvement on a test of logical reasoning and on a test of social intelligence. We changed, and I think most people will agree we improved, the sort of solutions they found to human relations problems. But whether we improved their leadership capacity is an inferential matter and no one knows. We think perhaps the midshipmen will do better jobs for the navy by having gone through this intellectual experience.

How would you test the negative hypothesis that you are wasting your time here or the positive hypothesis that you are getting something out of your course? It is very difficult to get scientific evidence, but it is fairly easy to make a sensible argument that it is valuable. It is a good bet--I can't give you precise data to back this up--that mere reading of books about leadership has very little effect on changing behavior or improving the sensitivity or effectiveness of one's performance. And there is good reason to doubt also that listening to lectures is much more effective. There is good reason to believe that discussion groups are more effective than lectures because they come closer to putting you in actual situations from which you must learn your way out. It is a good principle that more learning happens where you are doing it in real life situations.

You can't memorize formulae from books and blindly apply them to life situations. From lectures and books you may pick up new and valuable ideas, but you have to try them out in real life before you know they are any good. The discussion of the Joe Robbins' case comes close to real life situations. You would probably come closer to life if there were movies which would supplement the written account of the case. If you can feel Joe Robbins' tensions and emotions, if you can feel your way out through the case, then you probably can learn from it as you can learn from real life.

Industry is always investing a great deal in training supervisors, and these courses are probably worth while. People do learn. People do get new hypotheses. They do experiment to find new ways of behavior, and if you buy at all our notion that intelligent behavior is something likely to happen if there are alternate hypotheses in a certain situation, if you can buy the idea of liberal education, then you can buy the idea that training courses like this one are worthwhile experiences.

Now for a change of pace and of topic. Recent work on leadership has focused on the operation of small groups. I am sorry I cannot

summarize this research for you. It is too recent and much of the literature on it is in process of publication. And time here is too short. But all branches of the Armed Forces are now spending research money on problems of small groups--squads, bomber crews, military teams. Groups vary enormously in effectiveness. Why? One squad hangs together, gets jobs done, and has low AWOL rates; another falls apart. Why? There is no reason that we cannot eventually find out.

The small group is as much of an entity as the amoeba or the magnetic field. It can be understood, analyzed, predicted. And when we understand groups, we also understand something about leaders. If the group a leader controls is a productive, stable group, there is a good basis for saying the leader is a good leader.

This research on group process is promising. There is a good deal of inventiveness and potential profit in it. The best I can do now is to say you should watch for it during the next five years. The results of this research when translated into decent English, may be of considerable help to you in your daily business.

The fact that so much research on traits of leaders led to nothing very positive started researchers off in other directions in this area. One directive concerned the study of small groups. And this directive involves the study of group discussion. Obviously, if leaders are more intelligent in this situation and less intelligent in this one, and if intelligence matters here and not here, there is something in the situation that is important. Maybe we need to look at leadership situations systematically so that we can describe them and go back and say, in situation A intelligence is important, but it is not important in situation B. And perhaps we can describe precisely the nature of situations A and B.

There has been a good deal of systematic work done in trying to describe social situations in delineable, definable, quantifiable terms. We can do this with individual personalities, after 25 or 30 years of scientific research on traits. We cannot yet, however, talk in terms of the traits of groups. But if we could, we might be able to say, for example, that a given group has a certain "personality" or profile: It is large; it is homogeneous; it has high viscosity, in that the members are real close together, it has great density and great potency. In a group of a certain profile, the functions of the leader are one way; whereas in a group which is sort of loose in organization, a heterogeneous group, one with low density and low potency, the leadership functions are different. You can see that perhaps around this approach

there is potential sense to be made. Good declarative sentences may come out of this sort of thing, but there are none I can give you now. This is an approach you may find useful in thinking about your own problems. The general hypothesis is that the adaptive function of the leader varies according to these aspects of the situation in which leadership occurs.

I will leave that point there unless somebody makes the mistake of getting interested in it and wants to come back to it later.

Another approach is one we adopted in doing some research under the sponsorship of the Office of Naval Research in Philadelphia some years ago. We took a very simple line of approach that, since studying the leader hasn't really paid off and since the studying of the situation is awfully complex, why not study leadership by studying the follower. He is the guy who follows or not, vigorously or with feet dragging. Let us study him. Maybe he is one of the real keys to understanding what happens when leaders and followers get together.

We went about this in a number of ways but the fundamental one was based on the notion that followers are followers only so long as there is psychological profit in it for them. That is a straightforward sort of thing but it has some implications. A man will stay in a group and go in a certain direction only so long as he sees more advantage than disadvantage in it.

Another way of thinking about follower response--if you want to try it on for size--is who gets what out of what in a leadership situation? This leads to another statement, equally pious and general, that the good leader in a situation is one who maximizes psychological income for the members of the group; a poor leader minimizes it. Such a statement must be complicated by a consideration of the "official" functions the group is supposed to carry out, but let's leave it as is for the moment.

People may wish for many things. Often people don't desire what the company or the commander wants them to want. But the good leader still is one who finds a way to maximize income for followers while getting the job done.

If we could understand more about American followers in general, we would also know more about leadership in America. What will

Americans accept and what are their ideas about leadership? When they come into the armed services, what do they expect? What readinesses do they have to respond to what sort of leaders? They do come with these readinesses. They have spent 19 or 20 years learning from their parents attitudes toward authority. They have learned a certain sort of willingness or unwillingness to follow squad leaders, platoon leaders, commanders, or anybody else.

We could go about studying this American readiness for leadership, but in not too complete and systematic a way. We had a limited amount of money to spend on this. I will give you one example of how we went about this and one specimen of the results we got. I will give you some more if you look bright in the eye at all. But if you want to hurry along, just look bored and we will skip the details.

We used as part of an hour-long interview, what we call the poor man's projective test. We tried it out on a thousand doorsteps in Philadelphia--we used a number of cartoons, line drawings like this one, for example (shows line drawing). Here is a picture of a leader saying something. What do you think a person in the group says? The response a person gives is an indication of what his real attitude is, gotten at without the editorial factor of censorship that comes in if he is engaged in talk with a stranger on his doorstep. We feel that we get real answers, not fakes. The leader is saying, "Since I am head of this group, you had better do what I say." Here is a standard American over here--what is his answer? Keep it clean, now. You can edit what would be the most frequent answer to this: "Since I am head of this group, you had better do as I say."

CLASS: Oh, yeah!

DR. SANFORD: Out of a thousand respondents, the most frequent one was like you say--471 said "Nuts," or some variation of it, depending on individual differences. This then is what we can tentatively describe as the standard American response to this sort of leader. It is not at all subtle or surprising. What is surprising is that only 471 or 47 percent of our people gave this response; others gave what seems to be an un-American response; 31 percent gave answers in the "we will obey" area, indicating acceptance of directive leadership. Ten percent gave what I think are more mature, relaxed responses. They said, "Well, wait a while." "Let us talk this over." "Take it easy." These people can accept or reject; they don't have to go either way. They gave what seems a discriminating response. Four percent gave a pouting response, meaning "I quit." "Let me get out of here." We have some

evidence that this sort of situation is threatening to some people and that they want out, that they haven't the courage to stay there and reject, nor can they accept; they have to get out. The American response, Philadelphia type--we don't generalize outside Philadelphia--is "Nuts to you." That is the most frequent thing. We do find people apparently who readily accept this sort of thing. Other people do not respond violently either way immediately or directly. They say, "What is this about?" "Keep your shirt on." "Let us talk this over." A few withdraw in some kind of pouting, escapist way.

To go on with this, we do not have complete data on American orientation to authority, but I can give you some of the facts we uncovered. What about these people who say, "Yes, sir" as compares with the people who say, "Nuts"? Are they different sorts of people? We went into the personality of people like this by a little personality test and we can make a discriminating statement about what sort of people seem inclined to bow immediately to directive leadership and what sort of people reject this kind of leadership. We can defend the statement that an individual's readiness to accept any form of leadership is based on his personal needs.

If you know what a follower's personal needs are, you can predict pretty well his response to the forceful, direct, domineering leadership or to nondirective and more democratic leadership. By looking into individual personalities, we can see what their needs are with respect to leaders. Then we can predict what sort of leader this person would accept in order to establish a mutually satisfying relationship between leaders and followers.

We went into another segment of it and said, "If we can understand the American reaction to one leader they all know, we will know a lot about their readiness to follow leaders in general." We felt that a wide segment of the population would know about F. D. Roosevelt. So we devised questions to get them to tell us their feelings about him. First, we asked, "Was Roosevelt a good or a poor leader?" Ninety-six percent of the population in Philadelphia of our sample, which was a representative one, said he was a good leader and gave the reasons why. This clouded up our design. We only got 6 percent negative results which were not frequent enough to do any statistics on.

We also asked our people to nominate the greatest person living or dead whom they admired most. Forty-two percent of our population in 1950 named Roosevelt and gave their reasons. By the process

of sneaking up on good, general statements, we did get judgments we could put into psychologically consistent categories. The first and most frequently given category of reasons was that he was a warm human being who liked people; this was the way he was perceived by many people. He was friendly, he was a human being, he grinned, had humanity in his system.

Second, he was perceived as a strong person. He had all the attributes of strength--the prestige of education and money in the bank; he was a powerful public speaker. He could attempt to pack the Supreme Court and he could run his party. These added up to a general impression of strength.

Another factor was that he did things that were materially beneficial; he got Uncle Fud a job; saved grandpa's bank and did many things yielding material benefits. These three factors--warmth, strength, and material usefulness--seem to be the important ones in the orientation of American people to national leaders.

Public orientation to any national leader, we think involves the need for personal warmth from above. This is probably a cultural trait with many Americans, to want approval from above. We train our children that way. The American picture of the good father is that of a nice fellow who likes me, accepts me, is in favor of me, wants me to grow up, and wants me basically to be me.

This factor is probably important in almost any leadership situation. But its importance will vary with the situation. For example, when guns are being fired in anger, it doesn't matter to an individual whether his leader is a nice guy. He wants some other attributes.

I am building up here to the general notion that the needs of the follower vary as the situation changes, that followers in different situations put different demands on leaders.

Now let's look for a moment at the factor of strength. The business of strength is an interesting sort of thing. It has been surprising to many people to find that American people want strong leaders; they do. But they don't want leaders who have strength alone. I think that is a good hypothesis.

You can go back in recent political history and find potentially national leaders who seem to have all the attributes of strength but

who lack warmth. They haven't done very well. And you can find those who have nice, mushy, warmth, who love everybody, but do not have the personal ability to do things--to get jobs done, who do not have prestige, or perceived strength. These have not done very well.

So in America, in national political situations, we can make the tentative general statement that what people want is a leader who has warmth and strength. His warmth is there for me and his strength is there for me because he likes me. Americans will buy that sort of leader. This is a general political hypothesis.

With respect to the material payoff thing, we found that the strength of this sort of follower need differs according to economic levels. But it is definitely there. People do have material needs. They want leaders to furnish them with material benefits. Other things being equal, they will follow Huey Long, or Roosevelt, or Eisenhower if he does the things that today are materially important.

If farm prices stay up--other things being equal, the President is good; if farm prices go down, he is bad. If banks fail, the President is bad, and so on. There is not necessarily logic in this sort of thing, but we were trying to get it down to the feelings of the people.

Now, with respect to needs, we can't tell you from this research what they are in any situation. We can set up some criteria, however, and this is in line with my attempt to give you a few of the things that may be useful to you.

First, the pattern of follower demands on the leader will vary from situation to situation. You can set up hypotheses to test by experiment in the laboratory, if you wish, around this general statement. As the situation becomes more of an emergency, for example, there will be more need for strength and for technical competence on the part of the leader and less need for him to be a nice fellow who will make you feel approved and wanted. In an emergency situation your life depends on his doing a job. If he does it well, he can be a prime SOB and you will follow him. But a prime SOB will not do very well in a Pentagon operation, where there is less emergency and more need for decent human relations.

You can elaborate on this sort of notion. For example, it is a good bet that the more concrete the goals to be achieved, the more important become the technical competences of the leader. And the

more visible the goals to be achieved, the more important the technical competences of the leader. On the other hand, if there are no concrete and visible goals, people can't tell whether you have chemical competence. In groups where the goals are not clear and not particularly important, the leaders function is more of a human relations function; he must create a favorable work atmosphere, must see to it that members of the group feel reasonably satisfied, reasonably decent about collecting his pay; he must do what he can to see that each member is getting some income out of the relationship with his fellow workers, is getting some approval from the leader, and so on.

These are illustrative hypotheses. Others can grow out of these. Once you find out what the demands on the leaders are, then you can go back and talk about leadership traits. We haven't tried to do this in terms of research. As soon as I finish my present job of shuffling papers in Washington, I would like to go back and get at some actual laboratory experiments in this area.

When follower-demands are of a certain sort, what sort of potential leader meets this sort of demand? We have said here that in many situations the follower needs warm approval from above. They are trained for many years to need it and to expect it. They have a pretty keen idea of who is for them and who is against them. Now who can supply what the follower needs? Who is personally able to supply warm approval?

There are some potential leaders who have no warmth in their systems. They don't like people. They use people for tools. They are more interested in their own success than in any job or any other human being. This man is no good for a job where this warmth factor is important.

Now there are other individuals, at the other end of a continuum who are so darn mushy, warm, and prohuman that they can never take responsibility for a group.

Which of these people would you choose for a job where human relations are important? The guy who hates people, who is paranoiac about them, who thinks they are out to get him and he will get them first, that they are tools to be used for his own need--he wouldn't be any good. But the prohuman, squashy, mushy leader wouldn't be good there either. He wouldn't dare make a decision for fear somebody would dislike him for it. You can't put him in a position of responsibility

for a group. He can't be completely squashy and still get the job done. He can't help people very much because of his continual worrying about his own problems. Perhaps the best one for the job at hand is one falling somewhere between the extremes we have sketched--one who is fond of people but who can still accept responsibility. That is the sort of hypothesis you can study. These still can serve as very good, though not well-defined, models for your thinking in your experiments tomorrow or next year, as you go about your business.

Now this has been a very "once over lightly" sort of exposure to some aspects of leadership research. Some of it I hope has been of some interest to you. And maybe somewhere along the line you have an idea that will be useful to you.

It is to me, as a psychologist, an honor to be here. As a taxpayer, I feel relatively glad about contributing something to your monthly pay, and as an American citizen of the patriotic type, aware of the grim realities of 1954 and 1964, I am glad you exist.

Thank you.

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