A common approach in instituting markedly more participative forms of organization is to introduce them into new units rather than to attempt major change in existing units of a complex organization. Among the organizations that have followed this approach are Procter and Gamble, General Foods, DuPont, Westinghouse, and Olin Conductor.

The introduction of forms of organization such as Likert’s System 4 (Likert, 1967) or McGregor’s Theory Y (McGregor, 1967) represents major change for most organizations. Therefore, working with new social systems within an organization has several obvious advantages. Many difficult problems in overcoming resistance to change are obviated. New norms, different from traditional norms in industry, can be developed. Rather than the problem of changing established roles and role expectations about how supervisors or employees ‘‘should’’ act, roles are established anew. The newness of the physical setting and technology is congruent with the institution of a new approach to organization and interpersonal relationships.

At the same time, such an approach makes the selection problem all the more critical. People, many or most of whom are unknown to company personnel making selection decisions, must be selected for very different kinds of organizational roles than they have previously experienced. This poses an interesting transactional problem. The selection decision makers must obtain an accurate indication of whether or not the candidate is likely to function well in a participative organization. At the same time, prospective employees need
accurate information to assist them in deciding whether or not it is advisable for them to join such a new system. They are more likely to make valid decisions, and if selected make quicker, more effective transitions in their behavior, if in the selection process they clearly experience (1) this organization as truly “different,” and (2) what the major differences are and how such differences will affect them.

The fact that a Systems 4 form of organization is not everyone’s cup of tea is well documented. Red Jacket Manufacturing Company of Davenport, Iowa, was an early leader in the movement toward participation management in industry. A number of years ago, James E. Richards, president of the company, gave these replies to questions about his organization (Lawrence & Seiler, 1965, pp. 971–72):

Q. What about the selection of personnel?
A. This question is a very real problem. An organization that develops in this way becomes very closely knit, with a constructive capacity to deal with disharmony as well as harmony. So it’s hard finding someone to walk into this atmosphere who’s unused to the business of squaring off. It’s hard to find the [person] who’s developed a tolerance for direct contact. I’m inherently suspicious of projective testing and that kind of thing. For selection I don’t know, at the moment, of tests that can tell me, in a way I can believe, how a man’s going to be in action. . . .

Q. Does anyone want him to go ahead and talk about it? I think he should [performance of people in the system].
A. Well, all right. We’ve fired [people]. We’ve downgraded [people]. We’ve upgraded [people]. And we’ve transplanted [people] and reshaped functions. We’ve pulled some real boners. But by and large, I think we’ve found some effective methods. . . .

Vroom (1959) has demonstrated that need for independence and authoritarianism moderate the response to opportunities for participation. Tosi’s (1970) results did not support Vroom’s findings but did support the existence of an interaction between personality and the effect of opportunities to participate in decision making. Recently one of my Ph.D. students, Peg Rucker (Rucker & King, 1971), in a laboratory study found that low-ascendant, externally oriented subjects preferred assertive and manipulative supervisors to participative ones.

In a symposium in 1964 (King, 1964), I suggested that laboratory training concepts and techniques might usefully be applied to problems of selection and placement, particularly for unusual or temporary assignments. The basic idea is to set up a series of interactive experiences that provide all parties involved with
richer, more realistic data about how prospective members would fit in rather than the data provided by more traditional selection procedures.

Typically, selection on the one hand and team building and other OD efforts on the other have remained separate and distinct activities in most organizations. This is unfortunate in several respects:

1. Employees may well receive very different sorts of treatment before and after their selection and hence form ambiguous expectations or expectations at variance with System 4 values.
2. As indicated above, traditional selection procedures and criteria may not be relevant or at least may be inadequate.
3. The organization may miss opportunities to begin organizational development at the very moment of birth of a new organizational unit.

A NEW PLANT

Recently I had the opportunity to assist in the selection process for a new General Foods plant located in Topeka, Kansas. The plant is committed to a Systems 4-Theory Y form of organization. The major tasks, such as producing a product, are assigned to teams. The division of more specific responsibilities is one of the tasks of the team. First line supervisors are called team leaders. Status differentials are at a minimum—one parking lot, one cafeteria, etc.—and rules have largely been made by committees whose membership is drawn from throughout the organization. One could extend the list of differences between this plant and traditional organizations, but these may suffice. The four operating managers who formed the basic cadre for the plant asked me to work with them in developing appropriate selection procedures for team leaders. I was later peripherally involved in the selection process for nonsupervisory employees. The remainder of this chapter discusses the rationale that was followed, the selection procedures themselves, and how things worked out.

The principles that guided our work explicitly or implicitly include these:

- All selection decisions are made by the people who are to work with those selected.
- Decisions should be based on how prospective employees function in collaborative and conflictual group situations, as well as how well they handle themselves in one-on-one situations.
- All prospective employees deserve direct, immediate, and “nonsugar-coated” feedback from those making the selection decisions as to why they are or are not offered a job.
The selection process should mirror, as much as possible, the jobs for which these candidates were being considered—that is, status differentials between selectors and applicants should be minimized; the process should be personalized; the emphasis should be on the implications of the candidates’ behavior for their own growth and development; and dialogue should be two-way, selectors should be accessible, and they should be as exposed as the applicants.

- Paper-and-pencil test data are (1) to be used only as secondary information to validate the reactions of the managers making the selections or to indicate strengths that might not be readily ascertained in directly observable ways; (2) collected by outsiders (the author for supervisors, the Kansas State Employment Service for hourly paid employees); and (3) not to become part of a person’s file.

- Contact between current members of the system and prospective members should become more extensive and open as the selection process progressed.

**SELECTION PROCESS FOR TEAM LEADERS**

The selection was managed by a group of four operating managers and a consultant. The plant personnel were the plant manager, operations service manager, manufacturing manager, and technical manager. The selection process for team leaders is described next. A step-by-step approach was used where application blanks containing rather extensive, albeit traditional, information were first screened. Those applicants who looked as though they might be promising were then independently interviewed by at least two of the operating managers. The interview’s purpose was twofold: to convey to the applicants the nature of the organization for which they were being considered and to gather information about the applicants. If there was consensus among the interviewers that applicants should be given further consideration, they were invited for a weekend at the company’s expense. The company also paid each applicant a modest sum for the person’s time. Ten applicants were invited to spend a weekend at a motel in the city where the new plant was being built. The design of the weekend was the most unusual part of the selection process and is outlined in detail:

**SATURDAY**

12:00–1:00 Lunch
1:00–2:00 Plant visit
2:00–3:30 Detailed briefing regarding the organizational system of the new plant followed by a description of the rest of the weekend.
SELECTING PERSONNEL FOR A SYSTEM 4 ORGANIZATION

3:30–4:30 Role-play of an organizational problem: a role-playing problem involving conflict between processing and packaging supervisors. The problem was one the applicants would face if selected. The four managers designed the role-play, played ancillary roles, and observed how applicants handled the problem. All attempts to refer the problem to higher authority or duck the problem in other ways were blocked. The senior managers sent clear signals that this was their (the applicants’) problem, and they were expected to work it out. This was exactly what the senior managers expected when the plant opened.

4:30–5:00 Mechanical Comprehension Test Form CC: a difficult form of the test designed to assess knowledge of physical and mechanical relations and laws. The author administered and scored this and all tests.

5:00–5:40 Purdue Creativity Test: test is designed to measure the extent to which one can think in novel and innovative ways.

5:40–6:30 Cocktails

6:30–7:30 Dinner

7:30–9:30 Group problem-solving task and compensation task: the applicants were divided into two groups of five and completed the NASA1 exercise. After each group made its decision the group’s decision was scored. The winning, i.e. more accurate, group was then told that the company would provide $13 for them to divide in the following fashion: $6 to the member who contributed most to the group’s decision, with $4, $2, $1, and nothing for the other four members. This was again to reflect the person’s relative contribution to the group’s effort. The losing group was given $6 to distribute $3, $2, $1, with two applicants receiving nothing. The groups were given a time limit to reach their decisions as to how to divide the money.

SUNDAY

8:00–9:00 Breakfast

9:00–9:30 Personnel Classification Test: a short test of mental ability that provides separate verbal and quantitative scores.

9:30–10:00 Survey of Interpersonal Values: a forced-choice questionnaire that provides scores on the following dimensions: support, conformity, recognition, independence, benevolence, and leadership.

10:00–11:30 Shift division problem: applicants were divided into two groups of five and were asked to make tentative assignments for themselves to the first, second, or third shift. No more than two people in each group could be assigned to a shift. They were informed the tentative assignments would be one factor considered in making permanent assignments, if they were selected for employment.

11:30–1:00 Lunch

1:00–2:30 Bridge building exercise: the group was split and two subgroups were given materials with which to build a bridge between two tables. Issues as to what
type of design to employ, how to divide the work, etc. were to be decided by the groups.

2:30–3:30 Plant role discussion: as a total group the applicants came to tentative decisions regarding whether they would prefer working in the processing or in the packaging phase of the plant’s activities. Again, the applicants were informed that their decisions would have potential relevance in actual future assignments. (During most of this hour the senior managers and I met separately to share reactions, make final decisions about who would talk with each applicant, and agree upon any special information we would want to be certain to convey or obtain in the interviews that followed.)

3:30–5:00 Individual feedback of reactions, observations, and test scores: each applicant met for approximately thirty minutes with one of the operating managers to discuss the manager’s reactions to the person during the weekend and also met separately for about ten minutes with the author to discuss test scores.

Several features in the flow of activities can be noted:

- The activities moved from a focus on the applicant’s functioning as an individual to small group activities, and ended with the total applicant group working together.
- Activities became more collaborative as the weekend progressed.
- The last activity, plant roles discussion, was self-regulating and gave the managers who designed the weekend a final opportunity to compare reactions to the applicants before their closing interviews with them.

After this weekend, offers of team leader positions were extended to six of the ten applicants. Five accepted and are now working in the plant. One was currently earning $3,000 more than he could be offered and reluctantly declined the offer. The reaction to the experience was uniformly highly positive. It is of interest to note that, of the four people not offered positions in the new plant, one was offered and accepted a position at another plant in the company and two later applied for nonsupervisory jobs in the new plant.

**SELECTION PROCESS FOR NONSUPERVISORS**

In line with the criteria previously discussed, the team leaders were then charged with working out a selection process for nonsupervisory employees. My involvement was limited to consulting with the team leaders for two days on the plan they were devising.
Over seven hundred people applied for sixty-three production job openings. Initial interviews were conducted by Kansas State Employment Service personnel. If the applicant met several specific criteria, e.g. willingness to work rotating shifts, desire to learn multiple skills, and mechanical aptitude, he or she was interviewed by one of the team leaders in the offices of the State Employment Service.

Those who appeared to be good prospects were then asked to complete the General Aptitude Test Battery. This was also administered by the Kansas State Employment Service Testing Department. Since broad skills would be required of employees in the new plant, adequate performance across all nine aptitudes measured by the test battery was the criterion for further consideration.

Subsequent interviews were then conducted in the General Foods office. Background checks were conducted (after approval of applicants to do so), and applicants were given an extensive physical examination.

After these steps, approximately ninety-five applicants remained. They were invited to spend a Saturday at the plant site after which the final selections would be made.

Team leaders decided that a balance of experience and talent was necessary to mold well-rounded teams by shifts. Team leaders agreed that the team leader who initially interviewed an applicant had first choice of selection.

A letter of invitation to the selection weekend was drafted and sent out individually by team leaders. The letter explained events, time, place, and date and requested confirmation of attendance. When confirmation of attendance was not given to team leaders, there was telephone follow-up on some applicants.

The Saturday session began by greeting applicants and giving each individual a name tag to wear during the day’s activity. The groups assembled at one of the two construction trailers at the site of the new plant, which was then nearing completion. The sessions opened by welcoming each group and explaining the four hours of activities. Following this, there was a plant tour of about one and a half hours.

After the plant tour, everyone met in one of the trailers for coffee and rolls. The next portion of the program was handled by one of the four senior managers. Applicants worked on the NASA exercise. This was the same problem used in the team leader selection. This part of the program took about two hours, during which time the team leaders acted as observers. The NASA problem was first completed individually, then in two separate groups. The winning and losing groups divided prize money as designated by the exercise leader.

Following the NASA problem there was an open question-answer period. After spending some time informally, the session ended and each applicant was given a modest amount of money for his time and effort.

Sixty-two of the sixty-three people to whom job offers were made accepted the offer. This is remarkable considering almost all were currently employed,
and the starting rate (which was the same for all new employees) was competitive, but not particularly high.

**WAS THE SELECTION PROCESS EFFECTIVE?**

The approaches described here are similar in some ways to those used in assessment centers (Byham, 1970); however, there are important differences. Every effort was made to play down the evaluative component of the process. Two-way interaction between those doing the selection and those being considered was maximized. In both assessment center activities and these selection procedures, the implications of individuals’ performance for their own growth and development were stressed.

What was learned from the process that might not have been learned via other procedures? There are no hard data that can answer this question, but a couple of specific situations are interesting. At least two of the prospective team leaders who looked very good on paper and handled themselves well in one-on-one interviews did not function well in the group activities. Neither was made an offer. On the other hand one prospective team leader who had been characterized as bright but bitter and sarcastic before the weekend handled himself well and demonstrated strong interpersonal and technical competence.

The careful, step-by-step approach, and the fact that it was a different approach to selection, clearly signaled this was going to be a significantly different kind of operation, and that the advertising material saying the company was looking for employees to “work in a new modern . . . plant with an exciting new organization concept which will allow you to participate in all phases of plant operation” was not merely designed to get people to apply for jobs.

Also the survivors felt, with justification, that they were a carefully selected, high-power group. I am certain this helped establish positive early expectations regarding what one could expect from fellow employees and oneself.

Lastly, I continue to be impressed by the high level of commitment to one another and to the concept of organization in the plant that has been exhibited by all the employees. I feel that the selection process helped to get members of the organization off to a good start in this regard. The interest and excitement generated carried over to the work itself.

When this chapter was written (October 1971), approximately nine months had passed since these employees were hired. During this time only two employees left the company, one of these for an excellent opportunity to become a partner in a new business venture. Absenteeism has averaged less than 1 percent. Productivity data indicate that, after initial difficulties due to delay in completion of the plant, productivity gains are exceeding those projected in a
stringent nine-month start-up plan developed before the plan was operational. Figures for amount of spoilage are also excellent.

Several cautionary notes should be voiced, however, in assessing how the system has worked:

- The plant is still quite new and there has not been adequate time to collect longitudinal data.
- All the members of the organization are fully aware that they are a part of a social experiment. Thus some of the positive data may reflect a “Hawthorne effect” phenomenon, which may wear off in time.
- The data reported in this paper are as seen through my eyes or those of people in the plant. Although effort was made to be aware of biases and to present a balanced, accurate picture, all the sources of data would obviously like the plant to succeed.

A final cautionary note is in order. One applicant filed a complaint charging discrimination with the Equal Opportunities Employment Commission (EEOC). The EEOC investigators ruled that there was no basis for the complaint. They cited the fact that the percentage of minority group employees was higher than the percentage of minority group citizens in the community as the primary reason for their finding. They did express concern about the division of money in the NASA exercise by applicants. You will recall that the applicants themselves decided on this division on the basis of relative contributions to their group’s decision. The company was interested in the accuracy of self-assessment and assessment of others, not who received the most money. The EEOC investigators concluded (correctly I think) that this process would inevitably be viewed by the applicants as a peer rating with possibilities or probabilities of racial, sexual, or other biases involved. Plant officials have concluded that they will eliminate this phase of the selection process for production employees if and when they face similar selection tasks in the future.

Note

1. In this exercise fifteen items are ranked, first individually and then by groups, in the order of their importance for survival in reaching a mother ship on the moon.

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