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THE LEADER'S SENSE OF LEGITIMACY AS A SOURCE OF HIS CONSTRUCTIVE DEVIATION

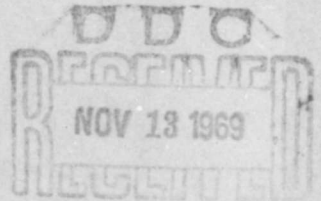
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ABSTRACT

An experiment was conducted to determine how persons placed in the position of "leader" variously employ their legitimacy to exert influence through innovative deviation. Ss were 40 male undergraduates drawn from 52 who initially had come together in groups of at least 12 each to take part in a discussion of urban problems. They were then separated and each S was led to believe that he either had been appointed or elected leader of a team, and either as "top choice" or "third choice." The team was allegedly meeting in another room to consider alternative action programs to alleviate urban problems. As leader, each S's task was to exercise his own judgment in setting the priorities for these action programs, after taking account of recommendations received as messages from other team members. The major dependent measure was the leader's rejection of these recommendations on critical trials, when presented with a reverse ordering of the true preference ranking obtained from pilot work with similar Ss. The results indicated that both source of authority and strength of endorsement affected the willingness of leaders to deviate from team choices, with "elected" leaders significantly more inclined to manifest such deviation.

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A leader's "legitimacy" is the base on which he operates to exert influence. In broadest terms, it grows out of the authority vested in his role, the source of that authority, and a conglomerate of impressions he conveys to followers regarding his competence and motivations. Rather than being a unitary quality, therefore, legitimacy is made up of several variables which may be variously evaluated by followers in determining the leader's ability to be accepted and to be successful in his attempts at influence.

One way to approach legitimacy is to see it as embodying an implicit transaction in which the leader gives something and gets something. Thus, "The leader provides a resource in terms of adequate role behavior directed toward the group's goal attainment, and in return receives greater influence associated with status, recognition, and esteem" (Hollander & Julian, 1969, p. 388). A problem associated with this transaction, however, is the process by which a person senses the legitimacy of his role as leader and acts on that legitimacy. To paraphrase Hemphill (1961), the general question raised is "What makes people attempt acts of leadership?" The literature contains evidence from several studies (e.g., Bavelas, Hastorf, Gross, & Kite, 1965; Pepinsky, Hemphill, & Shevitz, 1958; Zdep & Oakes, 1967) indicating that even simple signs of "legitimacy," such as the use of lights as reinforcers for some group members, produces a marked increase in their leader acts. But such signals are rarely specified further in terms of the kinds of data which leaders have to go on in their interactions with followers.

From earlier work on the perception of leaders by followers it is clear that the source of the leader's authority has an effect on followers, even in subtle ways. In one experiment by Hollander, Julian, and Perry (1966), for example, it was found that for elected leaders there was a significantly stronger relationship between the followers' actual acceptance of the leader's influence attempts and their perception of having been influenced by him than if he had been appointed to his position. This difference suggests that with an elected leader there existed a greater willingness to acknowledge having been influenced than was the case with an appointed leader. A subsequent experiment by Julian, Hollander, and Regula (1968) showed that the "success" or "failure" of elected or appointed leaders was differentially reacted to by followers, with particular regard to expressions of continued endorsement of them in their roles as leaders. Thus, depending upon the followers' perceptions of the leader's initial competence, elected leaders were found in general to be more vulnerable to a withdrawal of endorsement where they had been unsuccessful in representing the group. This finding can be interpreted as supporting the proposition that election, in this context at least, builds higher demands by group members on the leader's role.

Viewed another way, elected leaders are those in whom the group feels a greater investment. This is especially the case where elected leadership is both desired and possible of attainment. With this investment the leader may also be seen as someone to whom the group accords greater latitude to act in behalf of group goals. The dynamics of this process are provided for in the "idiosyncrasy credit" model (Hollander, 1958, 1964). It suggests that a person gains credits, in terms of the positive impressions held by others, which he may then draw on in exerting influence, particularly

regarding innovations from normative expectancies. Thus, competence in helping the group attain its goals, and earlier manifestations of conformity to the group's expectancies, allow later assertions of influence to be accepted. An experiment by Hollander (1960) revealed that such assertions were likely to have an effect on the procedures for guiding the group's activity as well as the actual content of the group's task. For this process to work, however, the person who is a leader must have a sense that these credits are at his disposal; he must, in short, sense his legitimacy. Accordingly, our emphasis here turns to how the leader sees and acts on his latitude for constructive deviation.

Problem

The essential question posed in this study is how the leader's sense of his own legitimacy determines his expressions of deviation. The term "deviation" refers here to an assertion of influence to redirect the group's effort at a task solution. Using the idiosyncrasy credit concept of non-conformity as a feature of higher status, we may consider a willingness to deviate from the group as an indicator of attempted influence. It may also be that deviation reveals resistance to conformity pressures from the group. Thus, the leader may manifest his sense of legitimacy and higher status by assertions of influence or by resistance as a counter-influence.

It follows from the concept of gaining credits that the elected leader, in light of his supposed choice by the group, will already sense support from the others; for the appointed leader, such support may still need to be gained. The latter may indeed have to overcome the prevailing disposition that a leader should be elected. Therefore, where team members come together as a new group, election should provide a greater sense of credit than does appointment. This ought to be so in many circumstances where groups, such

as committees, are newly organizing for mutual activity. In the case of institutional structures, where appointed leadership is characteristic, the legitimacy which goes with the role normally vests the incumbent with influence, and the expectancy operates in his favor. But this does not rule out the necessity, even with this backing, for him to gain credits through appropriate actions as a leader.

With these considerations in mind, we may therefore predict that where group members expect that leaders may be elected as well as appointed, elected leaders should display greater constructive deviation, as acts of influence assertion, than appointed leaders. We also would predict that a sense of strong endorsement should heighten this deviation. Thus, both source of authority and strength of endorsement as bases for legitimacy should contribute in a mediating way to the leader's willingness to attempt influence or counter-influence. In addition, we would also expect that, when they are deviating, elected and appointed leaders should differ in the amount and kind of communication they direct to their followers. With a greater sense of legitimacy, the leader's need to justify and conciliate should be lessened. Thus, his messages to the group should be less elaborate in these respects.

Method

Task and Setting

The task was specifically selected to engage interest and to permit the free-flow of discussion among subjects in the first phase of an essentially quasi-naturalistic experiment. Subsequently, it was to serve as a reasonable vehicle for the clash of ideas so as to ascertain the willingness of Ss, placed in the position of a "team leader," to overturn proposals from their team members.

For the first phase of the experiment, 52 male students from introductory psychology classes at the State University of New York at Buffalo took part in one of four discussion sessions. Each of these sessions drew no less than 12 Ss, and all four were treated in as comparable a way as possible. Students had volunteered for this study of "Group decision-making in urban planning" from among other alternative studies available to them. Participation in research was part of their course requirement.

Once assembled for the discussion session, the Ss were provided with name tags and seated in a circle with an identifying number before them. A faculty member was introduced to them as an "expert in urban problems" who would serve as the discussion leader. Orientation materials were then distributed in which they were told, "As we all know, our cities are faced now with a multitude of problems ranging from financial shortages to major social ills. You are here today to help decide which of the problems a city faces appear to be most critical, and what actions can be taken to help alleviate these problems. Our procedure today also will help in looking at the decision-making processes involved in coping with these problems." They were then asked to read a description of about 700 words, which had been developed by the Western Behavioral Sciences Institute, to cover the problems of an imaginary city dubbed "Colossus." Ss were then asked to write down the problems they individually considered to be most important, after which they would each have a chance to voice their views on these.

The discussion period lasted approximately forty minutes. Ss were told that this was a time for them to shape their ideas and to get to know the opinions of others. The level of evident involvement was high. At the close of the discussion, the group was told that the discussion group members would now be separated and reconstituted into three teams, each consisting of a

task leader and his staff. Ss were further informed that the leaders would be separated from the others, though they could pass messages to them, largely to determine how communication processes affect decisions about ways to deal with big city problems.

Design and Induction of Treatments

From each discussion session, 10 Ss were isolated in rooms for the second phase of the experiment, the induction of treatments. Two raters observing the group discussions in the first phase had been tallying interactions to ascertain which Ss among the 12 or more were lowest on interaction; these Ss remained behind in the discussion room while the other 10 went to their assigned rooms. On arriving there, half of the Ss found an election ballot on which to nominate three people for team leader, by name or number, whichever they recalled; these Ss were in an election condition.

After a few minutes, Ss in the election condition were informed by an E that they had been elected to lead a team, while in the appointed condition they learned that the expert who had served as discussion leader had chosen them as a team leader. Cutting across these treatments, half of the Ss were told that they were the "top choice" for the leader position and would lead "Team A," and the other half were told they were the "third choice" and would lead "Team C." The design therefore was a 2 x 2 with two sources of authority, and two levels of strength of endorsement. Given the five Ss each in the election and appointment conditions following the discussions, a counterbalanced, alternating number of Ss (2-3, 3-2) were assigned to the strong and not strong endorsement conditions. Furthermore, with four sessions it was possible to have the S assigned to a particular room following each discussion session to be representative of a different cell in the design. Thus, each room was used only once for each of the treatments, thereby

reducing any possible effects.

Dependent Measures

Once isolated, all of the Ss were provided with a sheet to look over listing various urban problems, and four action programs for each problem area which had been suggested to alleviate these. In order, the ten problem areas were: Education, Welfare, Culture and Recreation, Housing, Urban Renewal and Beautification, Fiscal Affairs, Race Relations, Police and Riot Control, Industrial and Economic Development, and Transportation.

When each S had been told he was to be a team leader, he was also provided with a sheet entitled "Task-Group Procedure." This gave him full instructions for the third phase of the experiment. It indicated that the team would be discussing each of the ten problem areas and considering the four action programs proposed to alleviate each. On a "communication form," the team would then be ranking all four action programs within a problem area by placing a "1" in front of the program they favored most, a "2" before the one they favored next, and so on through "3" to "4," the one they favored least of all.

Each communication form was delivered to the team leader by an E; the leader's task was to decide which of the four action programs should be put into effect. He did this by sending his own rankings back to the team on the same form, with any comments he wished to make as a message to the team. In actuality, all of these communication forms had been prepared in advance with the alleged team rankings. The first and third, dealing respectively with the problem areas of Education and Culture and Recreation, were presented with the actual preference rankings obtained from a pilot study with 17 male Ss drawn from the same population of introductory psychology students. The forms for the other eight problem areas were contrived to present the "team leaders" with precisely the reverse ranking from the true preference order obtained

from the Ss in the pilot study. The last seven presentations of these erroneous rankings, beginning with the fourth problem area, "Housing," constituted the seven "critical trials" in sequence. The format for this form is shown below as an illustration of the general pattern employed.

COMMUNICATION FORM--4

Indicate your ranking of these action programs in the column marked "Leader's Ranking." Your first choice should be marked "1," your second "2," and so on. Whatever you choose as "1" will be recorded as your team's recommendation.

HOUSING

Team Ranking	Leader's Ranking	
<u>1</u>	_____	Construct a "satellite city" offering housing for families at every income level.
<u>3</u>	_____	Convert public-housing projects into cooperatives--owned and run by the residents.
<u>2</u>	_____	Create a city-housing authority to own and rent housing in the city.
<u>4</u>	_____	Sponsor low-cost private housing for poor families, with no down payments and long-term mortgages.

Any Comment:

The major dependent variable was the number of critical trials on which the Ss reversed the team's first choice. A reversal would mean assigning a "4" to the action program the team had supposedly marked "1," and a "1" to the action program marked "4." Other dependent measures were obtained through a post-decision questionnaire, which contained five scales, and an analysis of the volume and content of the messages the Ss sent back to their teams on the communication forms.

Following consideration of the last of the ten problem areas, \underline{S} s were asked to fill out the post-decision questionnaire and were then brought together for a briefing about the nature of the experiment and the inductions employed. The responses to two open-ended items on that questionnaire ("Who were you chosen the leader of one of the three urban planning teams?" and "Would you please take a moment and comment on the nature of your experience as leader of a decision team and your ideas about the hypotheses under investigation?") revealed relatively few signs of suspiciousness about the procedure employed. Indeed, the bulk of \underline{S} s found no difficulty whatever in giving a response to the first question in line with either their selection or appointment, and with evident satisfaction at having been selected for the role.

Results

Deviation from Team Decision

Figure 1 shows the major finding regarding the differential deviation of appointed and elected leaders under the two conditions of endorsement, strong or weak. The index used in this figure is the mean number of reversals out of the seven critical trials, when the leader totally reversed the team's first-choice choice. Recall that four options are provided to be considered, and that these are presented in a preference order precisely opposite to the actual preference ranking of similar \underline{S} s. As will be seen in this figure, elected leaders deviated from their teams considerably more than appointed leaders, and in each case the presence of strong endorsement resulted in increased this deviation. The highest reading is for elected leaders under conditions of strong endorsement, a value of 3.4, which indicates that on approximately half of the seven critical trials these leaders totally reversed the team's judgment. An analysis of variance of

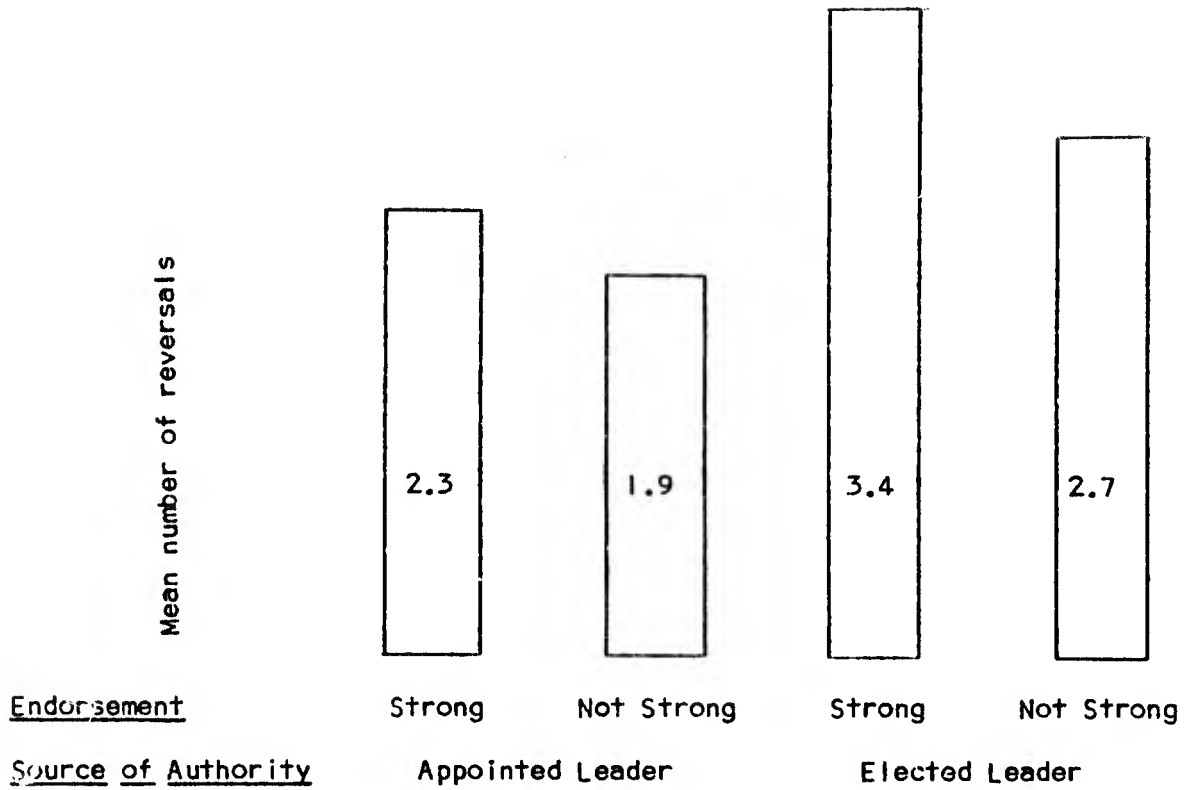


Figure 1. Mean number of seven critical trials on which leaders reversed team's first rank choice. N equals ten Ss for each treatment.

these data yielded a significant effect from source of authority ($F = 5.11$, $df = 1/36$, $p < .05$).

This finding represents confirmation of our main hypothesis, in a highly specific fashion. More generally, however, we find that the sum of all deviations from the group rankings, on the seven trials, is significantly higher for elected than appointed leaders. A chi-square analysis shows elected leaders to be significantly inclined toward higher deviation and appointed leaders toward lower deviation ($\chi^2 = 5.18$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$).

Post-Decision Ratings

With regard to the success of the inductions, Table I provides a number of relevant findings. In response to the first item, as expected, elected leaders reported themselves as having more support. Here again, a chi-square analysis yielded a significant difference between the elected and appointed leaders ($\chi^2 = 3.8$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$).

In connection with the report of agreement with the judgments recommended by the members of the team, the second item of Table I reveals no significant difference by treatment. Accordingly, a further analysis was done, employing tetrachoric correlation, to test the association between the deviation reported and the actual sum of an \underline{S} 's deviations on the seven critical items. The coefficient obtained equalled .78, with $p < .01$.

Regarding perceived competence in the handling of urban problems, the third item in Table I reveals differences which produced significant main effects both for source of authority and strength of endorsement, as well as a significant interaction term. The highest F obtained was for source of authority ($F = 14.70$, $df = 1/36$, $p < .001$), with elected leaders significantly more inclined to see themselves as competent. The main effect for endorsement was less pronounced ($F = 4.41$, $df = 1/36$, $p < .05$). The interaction term, as already noted, was also significant ($F = 9.55$, $df = 1/36$,

Table 1
Mean Ratings on Questionnaire Items*

Items	Source of Authority and Strength of Endorsement			
	Appointed Leader		Elected Leader	
	Strong	Not Strong	Strong	Not Strong
1. To what extent team members supported you as their choice for task leader.	3.1**	2.7	3.7	3.3
2. To what extent you agreed with planning judgments recommended by your team.	2.8	2.5	2.8	2.5
3. How competent you think you are to recommend policy on urban problems.	3.9	3.8	4.0	4.6
4. How much you enjoyed participating in this study.	4.9	4.9	4.5	4.8
5. How much restrictions on communication affected your final decisions.	4.0	3.6	3.7	4.7

*6-point scales, positively-oriented.

**N equals 10 for each mean, except for this mean which is 8.

$p < .01$), and is attributable to the high mean of 4.6 for elected leaders without strong endorsement. This finding is anomalous and will be discussed subsequently.

For the fourth item in Table 1, enjoyment in participating in the study, no significant difference was found between the treatments, in line with expectation. In general, however, it is noteworthy that all of the means for this item approximate a value of 5 on a 6-point scale, thus revealing a uniformly high degree of enjoyment. For the fifth item, regarding the effect of restrictions on communication in reaching decisions, a significant interaction term was obtained by analysis of variance ($F = 4.504$, $df = 1/36$, $p < .05$). Here again, elected leaders with less strong endorsement showed the high mean.

Leader Communications

In Figure 2, data are presented in summary form on the number of words used in communications to the team when the leader is totally reversing the team's first choice. An analysis of variance revealed a trend toward a main effect from strength of endorsement ($F = 3.01$, $df = 1/36$, $p < .10 > .05$). The strongly endorsed leaders used fewer words when reversing their team's rankings.

Pursuing a related consideration regarding the nature of communications, a content analysis was undertaken of the messages directed to the teams by each of the SS as leaders. The messages from each were rated by the three investigators, independently, on a scale that ranged from 0 to 3. The quality which proved to have the greatest reliability of rating, and the greatest relevance to the issues under study here, was referred to as "group orientation." This is taken to be a willingness to show a recognition of the viewpoint of the team and to conciliate differences. The corrected

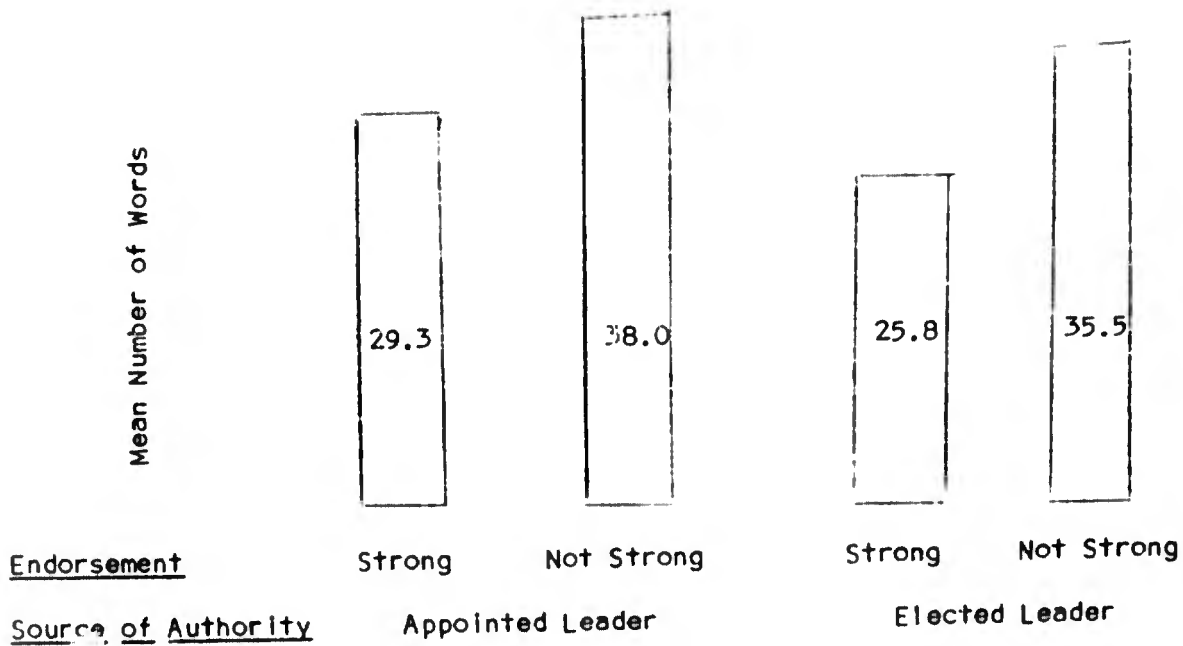


Figure 2. Mean number of words contained in written messages from leaders to teams on trials where team's first rank choice is reversed. N equals ten \underline{S} s for each treatment.

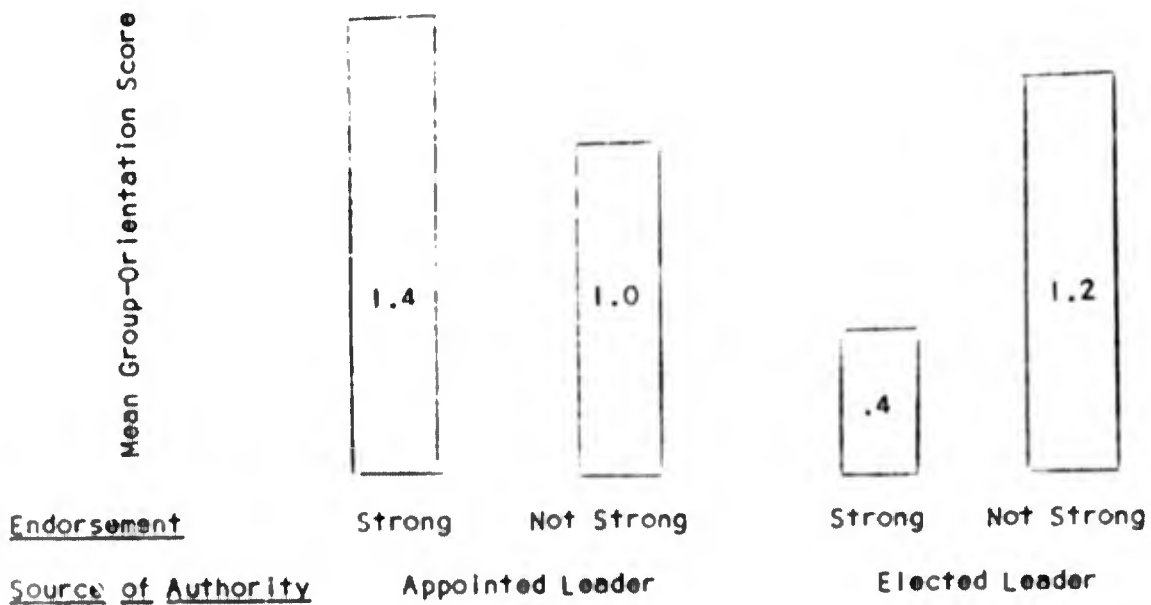


Figure 3. Mean Group-Oriented Score from content analysis of written messages from leaders to teams. N equals ten \underline{S} s for each treatment.

reliability of this measure, for three raters, was .89. Figure 3 reports the average ratings obtained, on the rating scale of 0 to 3, for leaders in the four treatment conditions. As will be seen there, those least likely to reveal such an orientation in their messages to members were the elected leaders with strong endorsement. The interaction term, in an analysis of variance, was significant ($F = 6.95$, $df = 1/36$, $p < .01$).

Discussions and Conclusions

In the aggregate, the findings of this experiment provide substantial additional evidence for the differential effects of election and appointment. Viewed here from the standpoint of the leader, the leader's sense of legitimacy appears to be a compelling factor in determining his willingness to assert influence through constructive deviation. Evidently, the leader acts with an awareness of his source of authority, and this can be seen to have consequences on his responses to the team.

The specific aspects of the results accord in a patterned way with expectation. Thus, the elected leader with strong endorsement not only deviates significantly more, but he also uses fewer words in his messages to the team when deviating. Furthermore, his messages in general reveal less conciliation and, presumably, less need to justify his position. Alternatively, the appointed leader without strong endorsement appears by comparison to be far weaker as a source of influence, in terms of these measures. Both aspects of legitimacy are therefore found to be effective in producing the leader's response to followers.

Among the results from the post-decision questionnaire are two unexpectedly high means for elected leaders without strong endorsement (see Table 1, items 3 and 5). The first of these is not in accord with prediction. One may conjecture that some kind of compensatory reaction

is being expressed to reveal a greater sense of competence, in the absence of strong endorsement. In the case of the effect of restriction of communication, shown in item 5, again the elected leaders without strong endorsement appear to be affected most. All in all, these results suggest that the elected leader expects strong endorsement, as a function of the very process by which he was cast in the leader's role, and that its absence may prove disquieting.

In keeping with the "idiosyncrasy credit" concept, the findings of this experiment indicate broadly that the elected leader, at least in this situation, feels more confident of his position and is more willing to expend credits by deviation. Yet, from the previous work of Julian, Hollander, and Regula (1968), we know that the elected leader is also more vulnerable to censure by the group if he is not successful. A similar result has also been reported recently by Alvarez (1968). While we did not employ the variable of success or failure in this study, it should be interesting in future research to see how this variable may alter the leader's sense of legitimacy and diminish or enhance his innovative actions.

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14. **KEY WORDS:** Key words are technically meaningful terms or short phrases that characterize a report and may be used as index entries for cataloging the report. Key words must be selected so that no security classification is required. Identifiers, such as equipment model designation, trade name, military project code name, geographic location, may be used as key words but will be followed by an indication of technical context. The assignment of links, roles, and weights is optional.