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FINAL REPORT

NR 150-087: Studies of decision making as related to personality characteristics  
Contractor: Stanford University  
Contract: Nonr 225 (01)  
Investigator: C. L. Windex

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Objective: The purpose of the project was to contribute to psychological knowledge of purposeful behavior. This objective was to be pursued through the study of the relatively new area of research into decision behavior.

More specifically, the purpose was to analyze processes and levels of decision making to develop methods of measuring decision behavior, to investigate situational determinants of such behavior, and to relate decision behavior to personality characteristics. Necessary revisions and elaborations of personality concepts and measurement techniques were to be undertaken.

The objective defined an area of research which could be pursued indefinitely so accomplishments achieved are appropriately measured not in terms of whether the research area has been exhausted but rather in terms of whether the research area has been opened and explored.

Summary of Research: (This summary is by topic and not chronological).

The primary concern of the relationship of decision behavior to personality characteristics focused attention on the problem of defining decision behavior in terms of measurable dimensions, i.e., giving this term operational meaning. At this point it became appropriate and necessary to select a few types of decision situations, in order not to become hopelessly scattered in terms of development of specific studies.

The first general type of decision situation chosen for study is the judgment problem. This general procedure has been used extensively in classical

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physics and was selected in part because there is an extensive literature available and the specific procedures and methodologies are well defined. Several specific procedures were retained after a wide range of specific procedures had been reviewed, and exploratory studies on the most promising of these were carried out. The specific procedures selected for use are discussed in Technical Reports 1, 3, 4, 5 and 6.

The second type of situation chosen for study is the setting and revision of goals using the so-called level of aspiration procedure. This procedure is discussed in Technical Reports 1 and 7. Considerable developmental methodological work was done and level of aspiration procedures of known relatedness were identified. A set of these procedures was developed such that they yielded essentially equivalent results, while from the viewpoint of the subjects the set of tasks were not similar. The work reported in technical report 7 was possible after this developmental work.

A third type of decision problem studied is that in which changes in relative frequencies of alternatives must be appreciated and utilized. One study concerned with the effects of magnitude of shift and with the direction of shift (where direction means from less to more certain or from more to less certain frequencies of alternatives) was completed up to the stage of being written. This study will appear as the dissertation at Stanford University of Robert A. Bottenberg. Much work in this area could rest on this beginning, but this phase of work was abandoned early when termination of the contract became likely.

A fourth type of decision problem, which was utilized in this project as the basis for a study is a small group bargaining situation. One formal study (Hoffman, Kertinger and Lawrence) resulted from work in this area. Pilot work was done to permit stabilization of the procedure. Efforts were made in the direction of relating personality characteristics to behavior in this type of decision problem but were abandoned under pressure of other work and because of

the decision that the contract had to be terminated.

In Technical Reports 1 and 6, results of efforts to develop directly definitions of personality characteristics correlated with aspects of decision behavior are reported. Other efforts were made but were not reported in detail because the results were similar to those referred to above or because the pilot type study of the hypotheses showed them to be untenable, and negative results are of value only with reference to fairly widely accepted theory or fact.

Results of analysis of the relation of certain standard measures of personality characteristics are reported in Technical Reports 1, 3, 4 and 6.

Technical Reports and Published Articles.

1. Winder, C. L. Decision Making Technical Report 1, ONR Project NR 150-087, Stanford Univ., 1953.
2. Wolff, Wirt M. Certainty: Generality and relation to manifest anxiety. Technical Report 3, Project NR 150-087, Stanford Univ., 1954.
3. Johnson, Laverne C. Speed and confidence of judgment as psychological variables, Technical Report 4, Project NR 150-087, Stanford Univ., 1954.
4. Hoffman, Paul J., Festinger, Leon, and Lawrence, Douglas H. Attitudes toward group comparability in competitive bargaining. Human Relations, Vol. VII, No. 2, 1954.
5. Winder, C. L., and Wurtz, Kenneth R. Some effects of induced success and failure on judgment behavior. Technical Report No. 5, Project NR 150-087, Stanford Univ., 1954.
6. Winder, C. L., and Wurtz, Kenneth R. A study of personality correlates of judgment behavior. Technical Report No. 6, Project NR 150-087.
7. Dean, Sanford J. The generality of expectancy level as a function of set. Technical Report 7, Project NR 150-087, Stanford Univ., 1954.