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SOME ISSUES REGARDING POWER ROLES IN EMERGENCIES AND
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SOME ISSUES REGARDING POWER ROLES IN EMERGENCIES AND EXTREME CONDITIONS*

E. PAUL TORRANCE

In this paper I shall examine some of the issues regarding power roles in emergencies and extreme conditions in the light of the small amount of relevant research available and a considerable quantity of anecdotal data. Power will be regarded as "an individual's ability to determine the behavior of others whenever he wishes to do so" (28). Small groups in emergencies and extreme conditions will include: aircrews downed behind enemy lines, on water, in the Arctic, and in other extreme conditions; ship crews under fire and in other dangerous situations; groups in isolated, dangerous, Arctic outposts; prisoner of war, escape and evasion groups; groups of secret agents; underground groups; infantry squads and platoons under severe enemy attack; and air to air fighters in combat.

The general issue to be examined can be stated as follows: How does the power role of the leader differ in emergencies and extreme conditions from power roles under relatively "normal" conditions? Does our knowledge of the functioning of the power role in relatively non-stressful conditions provide a basis for improving leadership in emergencies and extreme conditions? Or, does a knowledge of power roles in emergencies and extreme conditions provide clues for improving leadership in relatively non-stressful situations?

Some of the leading issues are exemplified in such dramatic statements as those of former Secretary of War Patterson that "there can be no democracy in the platoon advancing under fire to take a tactical objective" (11) and of Homans, a respected sociologist, that "familiarity breeds contempt" and that "officers impair their authority by 'going around with' their men" (19). Further issues include such questions as: How does a leader validate his power role in emergencies and extreme conditions? When is he justified in acting outside his authority? When the leader does not validate his power role, is mutiny justified? In small groups, is a leader with power really needed in emergency and extreme conditions?

Intimacy and Power

First, let us examine the issues connected with intimacy and the maintenance of power. Homans (19) argues that intimacy between the leader and his men is undesirable because few men are flexible enough to work out a two-toned emotional relationship, one for the time when authority must be exercised and another for everyday relaxed routine. Boag (3) and other Arctic explorers have complained of the increased difficulty of the leader in maintaining his power if he has to live in the same cramped quarters as his men.

A considerable amount of evidence, however, leads me to question the

* This paper is an informal note and is subject to modification or withdrawal at any time. If referenced, it should be described as an "unpublished draft."

validity of such conclusions as those of Boag and Homans. Hayron (17) and his associates found that the leaders of the better combat infantry squads were better acquainted with their men than the leaders of the less effective squads. Flight leaders in air to air combat, interviewed in our own study of leadership and organizational factors in fighter interceptor combat effectiveness (32), maintained that their power was not adversely affected by intimate association and living in the same cramped quarters. In fact, many of them maintained that the better flights could be identified by the fact that the members ate together, drank together, and "went around with" one another. Ellsworth's account (13) of a small group of men on a long and dangerous mission on one of the Pribilofs during World War II presents another argument in favor of closeness in the relationship between the leader of a small group and his men. Ellsworth, a staff sergeant, was placed in command of the detachment instead of an officer because it was thought that an officer would have to "keep things G. I." in order to maintain his authority and that before the winter was over either the men would drive the officer "nuts" and "go nuts" themselves.

The problem has been examined in two of our studies at the USAF Advanced Survival School where the airmen and officers of a crew live together on a rather intimate basis during their training. Hites and his associates (18) found that Survival training results in more intimacy and less stratification among crews. In another study, I found that about 90 per cent of the men in this same situation maintained that the experience resulted in an increase in respect for their leaders (33). It has become obvious that some few officers are unable to pass the test which this situation imposes; they are unable to validate their power roles. Evidence from another study by Levi, Torrance and Fletts (29) suggests that aircraft commanders (crew leaders) who are able to validate their power roles during advanced survival training pass an important test which affects the later combat effectiveness of the crew.

Validation of the Power Role

Next, let us take a look at what leaders do in order to validate their power roles in emergency and extreme situations. The intermediate degree of stress provided in advanced survival training as examined in the study of factors which raise or lower the crew member's respect for his leader provides some interesting clues. The following factors were found to be relevant (33):

1. Expertness: being able to "get the crew out of trouble when lost, displaying adequacy in living off the land, etc.
2. Willingness to share danger and discomfort: sharing unpleasant tasks; being able "to take it" in spite of size, physical condition, injury, age, etc.
3. Willingness to take risks: trying new skills first, trying new foods first, etc.
4. Willingness to make decisions and take action: making firm decisions when the situation demands it, taking consequences of his decisions, giving airmen responsibility and showing respect for their judgment, etc.

5. Acting outside his authority: taking care of his men.
6. Willingness to take police action: making the men keep clean, not drinking excessively and becoming abusive, getting the men to accept the situation, etc.

Evidence from other studies and from anecdotal records can be marshalled to support the importance of each of these factors. Regarding expertise, it is quite obvious that the maintenance of power is dependent upon the leader's ability to meet the needs of the members of his group and in emergency and extreme situations this depends upon expertise. This is apparently recognized by those who accept a leadership concept of themselves. In a study involving self concept of survival adequacy and the acquisition of survival knowledge (29), I found that the greatest gains as measured by pre- and post-tests were made by (a) those who felt adequate and accepted a leadership self-concept and (b) those who felt most inadequate rather than (c) those who felt adequate for survival but rejected a leadership self-concept.

Perhaps no factor looms more important in the behavior of leaders in emergencies and extreme conditions than their willingness to share danger and discomfort. Repeatedly this has stood out in studies of combat behavior, such as Egbert, Cline, and Meeland's study of fighters and non-fighters among ground troops (12); Terrance, Rush, Kohn and Doughty's study of leadership in air-to-air combat (34); and Flanagan's study of officers in Korean combat (14). It also stands out in accounts of escape and evasion (6, 24, 26, 27), prisoner of war survival (2, 4, 10), underground and resistance groups (7, 8, 20, 35), and Arctic survival (13, 31). In some respects, this concept seems to be contrary to findings such as those of Katz and his associates (21, 22) that supervisors of the more productive groups tend not to work along with their men and not to engage in the same kind of work and the concept of many business executives that the "trappings of power" are necessary for the maintenance of power. I have encountered considerable disagreement as to the degree to which the leader should expose himself to the same dangers and discomforts as his men, but there is much to indicate that it is expected and that the failure to meet this expectation is accompanied by a decrease in power. It seems fairly clear, however, that the "trappings of power" are not necessary in emergency and extreme conditions.

Willingness to take risks has been repeatedly observed as a part of the behavior of the leader who is able to maintain his power in emergency and extreme conditions. Furthermore, in simulated survival situations, it has been found that leaders who arrive at group decisions in a democratic manner are willing to take more risks than are leaders who fail to consult their men (37). Apparently the confidence which comes from the feeling that the group supports him and shares responsibility makes the leader willing to assume greater risk. Willingness to take risks is especially prominent in such combat leaders as the British air ace, Bader (5), American jet ace and fighter commanders (34), underground and resistance leaders (7, 8), and POW leaders (26).

Unwillingness to make decisions and take action may at times be tolerated and actually encouraged in everyday affairs, but cannot be tolerated in emergencies and extreme conditions. The result is usually panic, death, or mutiny.

This does not mean that the leader cannot make use of the judgments and other resources of the members of his group, but he still makes the final decision and initiates action. Research in simulated survival situations (30) has indicated that power differences frequently stand in the way of good decision making and occur more frequently in permanent groups than in temporary groups.

Acting outside one's prescribed authority is championed in the Air Force's official manual on leadership (11). This manual cites the example of an officer at a blacked-out combat station attempting to get bombs fused and loaded and into his airplane. During this ticklish operation, a stream of supply trucks from another outfit drives dangerously near the airplane. The drivers have authority to use that route and to drive fast. But a collision with the airplane in the blackout is imminent and will blow everyone to kingdom come. Time will not permit the officer to go to the truck driver's commanding officer because the danger is imminent and requires immediate action. According to the Air Force manual, the officer has the moral authority to alter the route of the trucks. Such acting outside authority is the very essence of leadership in emergencies and extreme conditions because almost by definition such situations are unstructured and cannot be covered by usual rules. Many dramatic illustrations of the exercise of the power role can be found in survival experiences. For example, one aircraft commander threatened to shoot a crewmember who wanted to "give up" and had refused to continue with the crew. The ailing crewman came along and survived. Today, he is very happy that his aircraft commander literally exercised the "power of the gun." Another aspect of this acting outside authority in emergencies and extreme situations is the successful leader's unwillingness to accept "no" for an answer. This is dramatically illustrated in stories of Bader, the legless British ace (5), American jet aces (34), and stories of evasion and escape (5, 26, 27).

The Air Force's manual (11) on leadership warns that in war there is a pronounced tendency to let down on "standards of police." It further warns that additional effort will be required to retain previous standards of cleanliness and that failure to exert this effort will result in a tendency for the men to live like animals and the deterioration of health and morale. This appears to be true of all kinds of emergency and extreme conditions of any considerable duration and is especially crucial in prisoner of war groups (9, 10, 35) and small isolated outposts (13). Some of the stories resulting from failures along this line are almost unbelievable. One might question why extra effort is required of the leader in stress situations. One possible explanation is that in emergencies and extreme conditions, individuals resort to the more primitive types of behavior and show a need and craving for a leader in the image of an omnipotent, godlike, father figure (15). In other words, it may be necessary for the leader as a function of his power role to act in a very paternal way in assuring that cleanliness and discipline are maintained during emergencies and extreme conditions. This may be why ordinary techniques of command and discipline fail, as illustrated in such stories as Gann's Inland in the Sky (16) in which the aircraft commander, a strong leader even in ordinary circumstances, unsuccessfully attempted to exercise power in his usual way. After a man froze to death as a result of not following an order, he took sterner measures in handling the remaining men.

One final question emerges concerning the validation of the power role of the leader in emergency and extreme conditions: When is it necessary to validate one's power role? Must it be validated anew in the emergency or extreme condition or is it accomplished through prior tests or minor emergencies. Research and anecdotal evidence (4, 23, 31, 26, 35) suggests that in permanent, small groups this validation takes place prior to the emergency or extreme condition. In newly formed groups, previous claims to eminence must be re-established.

Mutiny

One of the most perplexing leadership questions throughout history has been concerned with the issues surrounding mutiny. When the leader fails to validate his power role, what can be done? When survival of the group is threatened, this becomes a crucial problem indeed. The issues are rather clearly drawn in the well-known story of the Quine Mutiny (36). Captain Quine had been tested in minor emergencies and had been found "wanting" by his men. In an emergency threatening the very survival of the entire ship's crew, he again faltered and his subordinates assumed command. Greenwald, the lawyer, bitterly infers that Quine's failure might have been avoided if his men had supported him all along. Unfortunately, when the extreme emergency occurs, this alternative is too late. Anecdotal evidence indicates that this phenomenon occurs in real life in survival emergencies (31), prisoner of war camps,* underground and resistance groups (8), and other emergency and extreme conditions.

Is a Leader with Power Necessary?

A final issue to complicate matters is concerned with whether or not a leader with power is needed in a small group. At first, you may think this question absurd and consider that this issue has been settled long ago. To question the need for a leader, especially in extreme conditions, is probably sheer heresy. Actually, the issue is not as absurd as it might appear at first. Philip Deane (10), repatriated from a North Korean POW camp, argues the point quite strongly. He maintains that a small group like the one of which he was a member does not need rule. Power resides in the whole group and issues can be decided by discussion. Having a leader or spokesman would create a need for greater uniformity and in Deane's group it was important that this be avoided. They wanted to capitalize upon their individuality and thus make their behavior less predictable. He maintains that it was still possible to present a united front to the authorities. To the enemy, trained in deep respect of hierarchy, this was sheer heresy. Deane also argues that this had the additional advantage of making it impossible for the enemy to approach them as a group, if it did not suit the purpose of the group. Research demonstrating the deleterious effects of power differences resulting from position on the quality of group decisions (30) suggests that it might be

* Unpublished manuscripts and documents.

possible that many small groups might function more effectively without a leader to exercise the power role. Would this eradicate the phenomenon of the committee of three with all of the work being done by the chairman? Would each individual then assume more responsibility for the success of the undertaking? What effect is size of group likely to have? Since close communication would be necessary, it is likely that problems are likely to increase rapidly with an increase in number.

CONCLUSION

In closing, it can be concluded that issues regarding power roles in emergency and extreme conditions are almost totally unexplored in small group research. There is available enough anecdotal data to suggest a wealth of hypotheses. Many of these hypotheses are supported by findings from research with small groups under relatively non-stressful situations. Others challenge traditional concepts. On a number of issues, the anecdotal evidence appears contradictory. There are many methodological difficulties involved in research in this relatively unexplored area. Much anecdotal data remain almost totally unexplored and need to develop more powerful techniques for conceptualizing these data. I also think we can advance much further through both laboratory experiments and field experiments in simulated emergency and extreme situations with an intermediate degree of threat to survival.

As may be inferred from evidence scattered throughout this paper, expectations of and demands upon the power role of the leader in emergencies and extreme conditions varies in a number of ways from expectations and demands under less stressful situations. There is a need to re-examine some of these differences and test the efficacy of the alternative concepts in both the more stressful condition and the relatively non-stressful one. There is a need to examine in a systematic manner the ways by which leaders of different kinds of groups under different conditions validate their power roles. We also need to know something about the process by which members of a group test their leaders and how the leader must validate his power role, especially under conditions which involve close and intimate association, danger, and discomfort. The roles of expertness, sharing danger and discomfort, taking risks, decision making, acting outside authority, and taking police action appear to be of special importance. There is a need to stop denying the existence of the mutiny problem and come to grips with it in a realistic fashion. Finally, we need to determine under what conditions, if any, a leader is not needed.

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