

ORGANIZATIONAL ALIENATION

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ORGANIZATIONAL ALIENATION

(SUMMARY)

Writing about a topic as alienation one has to present in a comprehensive manner what one feels to be a satisfactory analysis of this concept from different angles. Thus the approach adopted in this paper, although pretty much descriptive, yet it can give the reader a somewhat clearer picture of the dimensions of alienation. There is a lot that has to be said about alienation and it will be beyond the scope of a short article to present fully all the different ideas and analytical studies that touched this topic. And as usual, an article of this sort is but the first step that the writer takes in forming a well developed idea about such an important concept in individuals' behavior either in big communities, developed or under-developed, or in small organizational groups at work.

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INTRODUCTION

The primary attitude displayed by an ordered society towards the alien is one of distinct animosity or contempt. An anti-foreign attitude is caused by the fact that the alien is conspicuous because he is different. Even in his own group, an individual who deviates from the established mores, who dresses or behaves differently, is likely to provoke hostility.

It is natural that since the alien does not conform to the society's patterns, he creates a feeling of revulsion. He is too noisy or too dignified, too free or too reserved. If his moral standards differ from those of society, he is considered immoral. If he has different business methods, he is dishonest or tricky. Thus any deviation from the given schemes of life excites moral disapproval.

The greater the difference in cultural or social linkages, the greater is the repugnance. The experience of difference may vary according to the way in which one makes one's contacts with the alien: as fellow worker, employee, employer, customer, business man, neighbor or competitor.

Not what somebody does or doesn't do, but what he is expected to do, determines the attitude of the group towards him. If people know where you come from, the established opinion of what, in that case, your characteristics should be, will soon be discovered in the anticipated peculiarities.

The alien, therefore, is not only conspicuous as an individual because of his appearance and behavior, but also is objectional as a member of his group whose undesirable peculiarities, opinion is already fixated. He arouses still further resentment if he deviates from the customs and manners arbitrarily assigned to his group.

In the following sections the reader will find a presentation of what the writer thinks fit the topic in the limited time and space assigned to this paper.

Definitions of Alienation:

According to "Webster's" an alien is a "foreigner, belonging to another country, a stranger, a foreign born resident in a country whose language and cultural patterns are different from one's own, or an outsider who bears political allegiance to another country." Authors and writers differ in their definition of alienation. "Erich Fromm" perceives alienation as "awareness of oneself as a separate being, in both the intellectual and the effective sense." ¹ This means that alienation must be approached on two levels. In one sense, any physically mature person who has not achieved full consciousness is alienated. Alienation for Fromm, as indeed for most who apply the term, is separation, and therefore, alienation as experienced, is first of all loneliness and isolation.

Alienation is a general social phenomenon, a feeling that may be experienced in some fashion by any member of a given society. It cannot be understood apart from its opposite, the feeling of belonging, sharing or participation which follows from the individual's inclusion or integration into social "collectivities"

"Gerald Sykes" defines alienation as a mode of experience in which the person experiences himself as an alien. He has become, one might say, estranged from himself. He doesn't experience himself as the center of his world, as the creator of his own acts, but his acts and their consequences have become his masters, whom he obeys or whom he may even worship. 2 The alienated person is out of touch with himself as he is out of touch with any other person in society.

Whatever the method of defining alienation one can generalize that to be alien means to be strange, either to the society or to yourself. This depends on the situation in which the alien finds himself.

TYPES OF ALIENATION

In order to understand alienation, one has to discuss some of its types. There is physical as well as mental or intellectual alienation. Alienation differs in both intensity and manifestation. It seems that it differs from culture to culture, both in the specific spheres which are alienated and in the thoroughness and completeness of its process.

The intensity of the feeling of alienation varies with the number of "qualitatively different collectivities" an individual belongs to and thus to the number of subcultures he participates in. It depends on the extent to which his membership in these "collectivities" is supported by the personal primary groups, such as one's family and childhood, adult peer group, as well as by the ties to one's birthplace, neighborhood or community of residence. 3

The intensity of alienation furthermore depends on the extent of continuity of commitment and attachment during his life cycle and the extent to which membership represents or symbolizes the main body of society and are infused with the prevalent values, norms and beliefs.

In an article titled, "On the Meaning of Alienation", a group of Whittier College regarded the concept of alienation as consisting of three stages of development: First; the predisposing stage where three successive phases take place: powerlessness, meaninglessness and normlessness. Secondly; the stage of cultural disaffection; that is when the person conceives himself to have been let down by events and chooses to reject the relevant cultural norms. Having made that choice, he has become isolated from his contemporaries who are now perceived as strangers, and enters a stage of social isolation at this point. Thus he has one foot in and another foot outside of the social system which makes him a marginal man. Such formulation of alienation processing appears applicable to an analysis of alienation among the unemployed. 4

Where this group of Whittier considers "powerlessness", meaninglessness and normlessness as stages of alienation; "Middleton" includes these under five types of alienation. In addition to these three, he mentions cultural estrangement as a type of alienation where some people don't get interested in some activities or norms of society. There is also "social estrangement" or isolation as another type of alienation where some people feel lonely and aloof. The last type of alienation according to Middleton, who depends on his analysis on "Seeman" definition and categorization, is estrangement from work. 5 Some people don't really enjoy work, but they have to do it so as to achieve some goals and satisfy their needs and wants.

A person is powerless, however, when there is not much that he can do about most of the important problems that he faces today. A worker is powerless when he is an object controlled and manipulated by other persons, or by an impersonal system such as technology, and when he cannot change, modify or act to change this domination.

"Blauner", in his book "Freedom and Alienation" discusses four "modes of industrial powerlessness". First, the separation from ownership of the means of production and the finished products. Secondly, the inability to influence general managerial policies. Thirdly, the lack of control over the conditions of employment and lastly the lack of control over the immediate work process. 6

As a meaninglessness, it reflects a split between the part and the whole. A person experiences alienation of this type when his individual acts seem to have no relation to a broader life program. It also occurs when individual roles are not seen as fitting into the total system of goals of the organization but have become severed from any organic connection with the whole.

"Isolation results from a fragmentation of the individual and social components of human behavior and motivation." 7

Since these are the types, dimensions or intensities of alienation, one has to discuss now the sources of alienation, causes that lead to alienation and factors that contribute to this social phenomenon. The next part will throw light on some of the causes of alienation both in society in general and the working organizations in particular.

III

SOURCES AND CAUSES OF ALIENATION

The question is always asked, "What are the conditions which produce deviates or aliens?" One straightforward answer to this is that man by nature is sociable. He has the ability, the desire and the need to interact with other human beings. But, when pressures and influences are being exerted on people to adopt a certain way of thinking or a certain pattern of behavior, some people conform quite readily, while others are able to resist entirely these influences. Pressures may be in form of laws, rules, mores or etiquettes. Open pressures are generally accompanied by open punishment for deviation in the form of censure, overt disapproval or even rejection from the group.

But why does an individual resist these influences or pressures? First of all, the group might not fulfill the expectations of an individual, he might see no attractive power within the group. Under these circumstances, the relatively weak influence which the group exerts, cannot overcome personal considerations which may happen to be contrary to the group standards.

Secondly, there may not be sufficient communication between the individual and other members in the group. In such instances the deviate may not even be aware of the fact that he is different from most of the others in the group.

No matter how attractive the group is to a particular person; it will be impossible for an individual to interact with the group if there is no way of communication between both.

Thirdly, the influence of some other group to which the individual belongs may be stronger and the attachment more tight than the influence which the core group is able to exert on him. Under these conditions a person who appears as an alien or deviate is so, only because his previous group has chosen to cast him a member of the core group. 8

Fourthly, another reason for deviation or alienation is isolation. It can be considered both as a cause and an outcome of deviation. Social isolation might be either voluntary, due to the previous mentioned reasons, or compulsory on the individual who is prejudiced against by society. The society might isolate an individual who does not conform to its norms and etiquettes. He is considered a stranger, an aloof who must not be dealt with at all.

"Jan Najda", in an article on "alienation and integration" attributes alienation from a larger society to be associated with a "transition from rags to riches, from paganism to Christianity; from childhood to adolescence

or from employment to retirement and from concern with that which is casual to concern with the remote, abstract and self-justifying." 9

A high or moderate intensity of alienation should be expected among individuals belonging to religious, ethnic, political, educational, occupational, associational, residential and other minorities. The changes in individual social location and has transition from membership in a majority, to membership in a minority where he is hardly recognized leads to some exclusion or self-exclusion and consequently could be expected to be highly associated with alienation.

In their book, "Social Crisis and Deviance", Bloch and Prince, affirm the idea that a frequent result of a rapid change is either the incapacity or unwillingness of individuals and groups to adapt to the conditions of change. The incapacity might be psychological or social. But change may produce deprivation, that in turn will bring in their wake frustration for masses of people. If these feelings are not quickly resolved, rationalized or directed, the newly created frustration will seek outlets for the needs that are denied. 10

In all societies there are conventional patterns, techniques, norms, standards, or channels by means of which individuals may express tension. Thus the society tries to influence the individual to conform and in resisting this influence the individual deviates and becomes an alien.

These are the causes or factors that might lead to alienation in society in general. But there are other factors that may be considered the source of alienation in the organization. This is the focal point of the next part.

IV

THE ALIEN IN ORGANIZATIONAL GROUPS

The alienated nature in the modern society, shows the alien not only as a worker, but as a manager and even as an owner of production. The individual has become an economic atom that "dances to the tune of atomistic management." His place is well settled and assigned; he has to sit in a certain fashion, his arms move x inches in a course of y radius and the time of movement will be so and so. Besides, work is becoming more repetitive and thoughtless as the planners and scientific managers further strip the worker of the right to think and move freely. Life is being denied, need to control, creativeness, curiosity and independent thought are being balked, and the end result and the inevitable one is "flight or fight — on the part of worker — apathy or destructiveness and psychic regression." 11

The role of the manager is also one of alienation. His role is to employ profitably the capital invested by others. At the same time his stress is more on the efficient operation and expansion of the enterprise. The manager like the worker deals with impersonal "giants"; with the giant competitive enterprise; with the giant national and world market; with the giant consumer who has to be manipulated; with the giant union and with the giant government. All these giants determine the activity of the manager and direct the activity of the worker and work.

The attitude of the owner of the big corporation to his property is one of almost complete alienation. His ownership consists in a piece of paper, representing a certain fluctuating amount of money. He has no responsibility to the enterprise and no concrete relationship to it in any way. This is, of course, the case of stockholders whose main interest is to get dividends at the end of the year.

EFFECTS OF ORGANIZATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

We object to the undifferentiated image of industrial life that has frequently dominated industrial sociology. We grant that there are powerful alienating tendencies in all modern normative organizations. But whether such tendencies are intensified or mitigated depends, *inter alia*, on the types of personalities in the organization and the effect of organizational environment on the personnel, especially the "indifferent" (e.g. industrial workers), the "ambivalents" (e.g. professionals and staff-line personnel) and small group cohesion.

1. Typology of Personalities

"Robert Presthus", in **Organizational Society**, 12 finds modern Society with big organizations characterized by unbridled competition which has been replaced by an "imperfect market" and by "rational bureaucratic" controls. The kind of personal accommodation an employee displays to the bureaucratic situation is associated with one of his three "ideal" personality types: the UPWARD MOBILES, the INDIFFERENTS and the AMBIVALENTS.

The Upward-Mobiles are those who react positively to the bureaucratic situation and succeed in it. They accept authority without much difficulty. They are motivated by a strong fear of failure. They have respect for organization authority, commit themselves fully to the organization, avoid controversies and cultivate virtues for the key positions in a system that values conformity and loyalty above everything else.

The Indifferents are the uncommitted majority who see their jobs as mere instruments to obtain off-work satisfactions. These include the white-collar as well as blue-collar workers. The typical indifferent tends to reject the organizational bargain which promises authority, prestige and income in exchange for loyalty, hard work, and identification with its values. Instead, he separates his work from the "meaningful" aspects of his life, which include recreation and leisure activities. If the indifferent remains committed to his work, he will sometimes distinguish between it and the organization.

Standing between these groups are the Ambivalents, a small, perpetual minority who can neither renounce their claims for status and power nor play the disciplined role that would enable them to cash in such claims. The Ambivalent is usually a man of middle class background, intellectually oriented, having limited talents in interpersonal relations and resisting conventional values. The organization tends to suppress this group as they refuse to pay homage to hierarchs. They are unhappy but potentially creative. In sum, with the exception of his critical function as the agent of change, the ambivalent type is unique to the bureaucratic situation.

These types are, of course, oversimplified and idealized, but they have value as conceptual tools. They work out their adaptations to the organizations according to their psychological traits of character.

2. Alienation Among the "Indifferents"

Diverse industrial environments produce decisive contrasts in the balance of alienation and freedom. Comparing the printing trades, the textile industry, automobile assembly plants, and the highly automated chemical industry, and using Seeman's specification 13 of different dimensions of alienation, Blauner finds that these industries present very different environments for the worker. In printing, alienation in all its dimensions is minimized through continued adherence to a craft tradition providing job security, a measure of worker control over the job, integration in an occupational community, and fairly degrees of self-expression and self-esteem. In contrast, in the textile industry a sense of powerlessness and meaninglessness is pervasive, but community integration in the tradition mill towns permits the workers to attain relative satisfaction with work in which freedom, control and self expression are lacking. Work on the automobile line is seen as most alienative in all aspects; the worker is self-estranged and suffers from powerlessness and social isolation. In the automated chemical industry, on the other hand, the operators achieve a new kind of control over the automated machinery and as a consequence integration between the self and industrial setting reaches relatively high levels.

Viewing the matter in historical perspective, Blauner suggests that secular developments in technology, industrial structure and the division of labor have affected the various dimensions of alienation in roughly the same direction. In craft industry alienation is low and the workers freedom is at a maximum. The curve of alienation rises sharply in the period of machine industry and reaches its highest point in the assembly line industries of the 20th century. But with automated industry, a countertrend asserts itself. In automated factories the worker gains a new sense of dignity through new responsibilities and this results in more meaningful work in a more integrated industrial climate. 14

"Blauner" permits himself a sense of qualified optimism as he envisages the gradual spread of automated production methods from the oil and chemical industries to other work areas. He does not, however, seem to have considered the possibility that "the industrial system of the future may indeed grant high degrees of a new freedom from alienation to an elite aristocracy of labor while large numbers of displaced workers in other occupations sink further into apathy, self-estrangement and a sense of meaninglessness." 15

3. Alienation Among the Ambivalents Especially Professionals

But alienation from work is not confined to indifferents only. Blauner

and Scott have shown that although professional and bureaucratic modes of organization share some principles in common, they rest upon fundamentally conflicting principles as well. 16 Specifically, there is often a conflict between the assumptions and demands of organizational logic and those of scientific research. Quite apart from personal problems and the scientist's expectations of a great deal of latitude, there is a built-in structural tension. Organizations, in effect, seek accountability, standardization, quantitative standards of performance, predictability, and the like. Such prescriptions however, are often in opposite to the needs of scientific research and the expectations of the scientists. Concerning predictability and budgeting, for example, researchers by definition do not know what they are going to find. There is inherent risk of failure in all research; yet a function of bureaucratic organization is to overcome risk. Administrators often experience difficulty in accepting this kind of ambiguity. A researcher, moreover, does not usually know exactly how much money will be required to complete a project. Organizations honor planning, progress schedules and targets, yet research rarely proceeds by schedule; like many creative activities, it often proceeds by fits and starts. Kornhauser 17 concludes that most conflicts between the scientist or engineer and his employing organization stem from the basic organizational dilemma of autonomy vs. integration. These professionals must be given enough autonomy to enable them to fulfill their professional needs, yet their activity must also contribute to the goals of the organization.

The professional who experiences such conflicts in his work may become alienated in his work, the organization, or both. George A. Miller in a research conducted on scientists and engineers employed by a major American aerospace company, found ample support for the hypothesis that alienation from work is a consequence of the professional bureaucratic dilemma for individual scientists and engineers. 18 One method for alleviating conflict is to modify the organizational structure by providing more professional incentives and lessening the degree of organizational control. Although the relationships involving research freedom and professional atmosphere are similar for both scientists and engineers, these professionals may be experiencing work alienation for DIFFERENT reasons. If scientists and engineers differ in their professional goals, then alienation manifested by engineers may result from their lack of power and participation in organizational affairs whereas alienation manifested by scientists may reflect their lack of autonomy to pursue their work.

4. Alienation in Small Groups

While alienation from "work situations" reflects a feeling of disappointment with career and professional development, as well as disappointment over the inability to fulfill professional norms, alienation from expressive relations reflects dissatisfaction in social relations with supervisors and fellow workers.

The cohesiveness of a group is the "total field of forces which acts on members to remain in the group." 19 This force toward remaining in the group is a function of the valence or pulling power of the group vis-a-vis an individual's goals of different kinds. The greater the cohesiveness in a group, the greater its power, in relation to individual members. With increased cohesiveness, there is more pressure toward uniformity and conformity. This has strong repercussions on group action and performance. Thus, in highly cohesive groups, efforts to agree on specific issues are strong. Then, too, because of greater pressure toward uniformity, the likelihood is for more change in the behavior of individual members. 20.

On the other hand, splinter groups or subgroups in which circumstances and goals are different tend to reduce cohesiveness in a larger group. Other forces too disrupt group cohesiveness. Blocking of group objectives can temporarily increase cohesiveness if frustration is attributed to an attack from without, but the long-run result may be reduced cohesiveness. Conflicts between goals of different members can have the same results. UNPLEASANT experience of members in the group and failure of the group to progress toward its objectives often lessens cohesiveness. And, of course, personality conflicts as seen in aggression of certain members, rivalry for status, and interpersonal dislikes are to be disruptive. 21

According to "Stodgill", loyalty to the group is determined by the ratio between the cost paid for support and the magnitude of discrepancy between expectations and outcomes experienced in the group. So when the ratio is sadly out of balance an individual is (in varying degrees) likely to abandon the group. 22

Cohesiveness can, it follows, be a force in facilitating or blocking management objectives. Where the group aims and those of management are congruent, cohesiveness is a positive force for management. Where they conflict, troubles are bound to follow or at best there will be reduced achievement of organizational goals.

Administratively, a number of actions can alter the cohesiveness of groups. Supervisors who develop loyalty to the group through effective communication have cohesive groups that are high producers. Another way of putting this is to say that adding prestige to a group can increase both productivity and cohesiveness. Maintaining the structure and membership of small groups not only increases cohesiveness but lessens turnover.

CONSEQUENCES OF ALIENATION

Can alienation lead to deviation? To be an alien is to act passively towards the group; to be isolated and socially detract from a community. But if alienation is of a high intensity, the individual might go to the extreme sometimes. Given that an individual, an alien, deviates from a group norm, any of several outcomes can ensue: He may provide others to join his position and thus alter the group norms; or he may be provoked to conform to the original norm. If he is free to leave the group and the group is of little importance to him, he may withdraw from it. Conversely, if he is of little importance to the group, he may be faced with the choice of conforming or being rejected by the group. Where the norms of the group to which the individual holds allegiance overlap and conflict, the individual is faced with a choice between them.

Rapid social change can have several different kinds of consequences for the individual. The industrial revolution and subsequent social change has led to anomalism or to normlessness on the part of the individual. "The major consequences of social change for the individual is an increasing in conflict due to his allegiance to an increasing number of differentiated groups." 23

As for workers, the consequences of alienation depend to a greater extent on the age, status, convenience, and responsibility of the worker. Old, senior, well involved employees cannot but be patient to contrive with the alienating work relationship while those who haven't yet been trapped by age or other circumstances, have another alternative — quitting the job. This applies to young people who are characterized by moving from job to job until they get old and settle at a well paying, satisfactory job with a sufficient retirement arrangement.

In the automobile industry, for instance, there is much greater frequency of active dissatisfaction with alienated work among assembly line workers. This dissatisfaction is a reflection of their independence and dignity which is expressed in other ways besides a generalized dissatisfaction. Thus they quit their jobs more frequently than other workers in different industries.

One of the consequences of alienation is that people whose work provides little opportunity for decision on the job will see their world as being more generally unmanageable. When work is meaningless in itself people find it necessary to substitute extrinsic ends as important goals. Besides, with long hours given over to unrewarding tasks, alienated workers build up a reservoir of frustration and dissatisfaction. Minority groups are likely targets for this hostility, hence alienation in work and prejudiced attitudes should tend to coexist. Moreover, where work doesn't bind the

individual meaningfully, the social order should generally be viewed as being less supportive and trustworthy. Finally, alienated work doesn't reward individuals' investment in the work process. It teaches the lesson of withdrawal.

Seeman maintains that work is nothing less than what it is known to be — often not very rewarding in itself and always necessary. And the big task for the worker is not to convert it into a major source of intrinsic satisfaction, but to manage it so that it can be an acceptable life of the moment by creating occasions, however small, for humor, sociality, decision making, competition, argument, etc., that are at once trivial and remarkable. 24

Whatever the findings of a research would be, the fact remains, however, that alienation is but the first step of an individual's estrangement and deviation. And unless the society, the organization or the group to which the individual belongs, diagnoses the symptoms of alienation and tries to find the causes and solutions for this serious sickness, then a great social ill will prevail and it will be far too late to try to draw alienated individuals back to conformity with groups norms and standards. Therefore, a section on solutions for alienation is worth the effort.

VII

SOLUTIONS TO ALIENATION

In a world that is continually changing, adaptation or readjustment are constantly necessary. There are two factors involved in the adaptational process of biological and social existence. These are: The adaptational capacity of the individual himself and the adaptational situation of conditions of the environment, both natural and social.

Under the best circumstances, some individuals fail to adopt successfully because of something within the environment or because of a defect of personality. Some obvious physical defects may hinder adaptation but sometimes intellectual deficiencies keep the individual away from adaptation. Men, however, don't ordinarily fail because they want to fail but because of innumerable personal reasons covering the entire range of human experience, including their own ambitions prejudices, habit patterns, lack of insight, loyalties and social conviction. Some of the psychological elements is the inability or failure to comply with external conditions. "It might be for reasons of conscience, political or social idealism or ideological conviction." 25

There are some measures that could be taken in order to help encourage potential aliens to adapt and integrate either in the working environment or in society in general.

The first measure is called the "leisure solution" either by employees, unions or the government. It is the hope of many that the opportunities for self-expression and creativity denied by modern technology and bureaucracy can be found again in the freely chosen pursuits of leisure time. This argument is supported by the technological trends that are reducing the necessary number of hours each employee must work to produce the nation's goods and services.

Secondly, enlargements of the contents and responsibilities of jobs; this tends to introduce interest variety and increase the importance of the product to workers. Others may introduce job rotation — a policy that permits the worker to move from one subdivided job to another, adding variety to his work and expending his knowledge of the technical organization.

Thirdly, by increasing opportunity for freedom and dignity of the individual or the worker, a great deal can be achieved in the way of adaptation and integration. A person deprived from expressing himself, suppressed and humiliated, rejected and looked down upon, denied recognition and dignity will never think or try adapting to the society norms and standards.

Fourthly, some people maintain that time is the great assimilator. A person's ties with another group will be stronger at the beginning when

he moves to another environment or to a new culture. But as time passes, the individual starts to adapt and form new standards and new mores to cope with the new social requirements.

Moreover, the rise in economic status and encouraging greater mobility tends to split the person from the original nucleus. Besides, financial success on the part of the alien foreigner means a severance of ties with his less fortunate brethren whom he leaves behind to struggle alone.

Finally, the power of a group to influence its members towards conformity with shared beliefs and actions depends on the positive and negative sanctions (rewards and punishments) the group has at its disposal. The influence of a group over its members depends on how strongly the members value their membership and its accompanying rewards (including interpersonal rewards such as recognition, status and prestige as well as material rewards) and how much the member wants to avoid the negative sanctions.

But irrespective of any measures taken for social adaptation of the alien or the alien foreigner, there still remains quite a number who will never fit into the working or social surroundings, whatever the scales of measures taken to help them. They will form a minority harmful to the interests of their compatriots, who will suffer from the consequent stiffening of the prejudices and discriminatory attitudes of the population in the community concerned.

FOOTNOTES

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