

THE ADVANTAGES OF THE SOCIOMETRIC APPROACH TO PROBLEMS OF NATIONAL DEFENSE

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INTRODUCTION

These notes were stimulated by an invitation from the Social Science Research Council, Sub-Committee on Methods of Prediction, under the chairmanship of Dr. Samuel A. Stouffer, to write a critique on a study, "The Prediction of Personal Adjustment," by Paul Horst and associates,¹ designed to be of use to the authorities of our National Defense. At the time of this invitation,² I prepared, in the form of a memorandum, some remarks on the applicability of sociometric and spontaneity tests to the psychology of military and defense situations.

The semantic relation of terms like "Stegreif," "impromptu," and "spontaneity" to the term "Blitz" is obvious. In military situations of modern times, a premium is placed upon emotional stability, speed of performance and--above all--split-second judgment in action. An individual may be in possession of the knowledge and skills for specific situations, yet be unable to fulfill the requirements of the situations. The factors beyond skill and knowledge which determine behavior require tests of a new sort. It is at this point that the spontaneity test in its various forms--particularly in testing individuals in standard life-situations--has shown the way.

METHODS

A new trend in the testing of behavior has been introduced by sociometric and spontaneity procedures for the study

¹"The Prediction of Personal Adjustment," by Paul Horst, with collaboration of Paul Wallin and Louis Guttman, assisted by Frieda Brim Wallin, John A. Clausen, Robert Reed and Erich Rosenthal; Bulletin No. 48, Social Science Research Council, New York, 1941. xji + 447 pp.

²May 21, 1941.

of group and individual behavior, respectively. Since the trend is gaining ground in many other laboratories,³ it may be pertinent at this time to recall some of the main principles involved.

"The problem was to construct the test in such a manner that it is itself a motive, an incentive, a purpose, primarily for the subject, instead of for the tester. If the test-procedure is identical with a life-goal of the subject, he can never feel himself to have been victimized or abused..... Yet the same series of acts performed of the subject's own volition may be a 'test' in the mind of the tester. We have developed two tests in which the subject is in action for his own ends. One is the sociometric test. From the point of view of the subject, this is not a test at all: it is merely an opportunity for him to become active in matters concerning his life-situation. The second test meeting this demand is the spontaneity test. Here, in a standard life-situation, the subject improvises to his own satisfaction, but to the tester it releases a source of information in respect to the character, intelligence, conduct and psychological position of the subject..... Through the sociometric and spontaneity tests, the artificial setting of the....Binet intelligence tests is substituted for by the natural life-setting."⁴

"The director sets up the various experimental or test situations....situations and roles which they (the subjects) themselves wish to produce and which they may have within themselves in some degree or development..... The material gained from such tests can be used for diagnostic interpretation."⁵

The situational tests took place before a group of observers averaging 15-20 individuals. Like members of a jury, each of them was able to arrive at an evaluation of the performance.

³See H. L. Ansbacher, "Murray's and Simoneit's (German Military) Methods of Personality Study," Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, Vol. 36, No. 4, October, 1941. pp. 589-590.

⁴J. L. Moreno, "Who Shall Survive?", Nervous and Mental Disease Publishing Co., N.Y. and Washington, 1934. pp. 14 and 15.

⁵J. L. Moreno, "Das Stegreiftheater," Gustav Kiepenheuer Verlag, Berlin, 1923, and its translation, "The Philosophy of the Moment and the Spontaneity Theatre," Sociometry, Vol. IV, No. 2, May, 1941, p. 210.

"A series of situations as they may occur in community life, home life, domestic life, business, etc., is constructed The situations are either chosen by him (the subject) or suggested to him by the instructor. . . . The students are told to throw themselves into the situations, to live them through, and to enact every detail needed in them as if it were in earnest. The emphasis is placed upon how true to life a certain procedure is.

"One student takes careful record of each performance. A copy of it goes to every student. . . . After each performance, an analysis and discussion of it opens up in which the students as well as the director take part.

"The criticisms range from consideration of the emotions displayed in the situations, to the mannerisms, the knowledge of the material nature of the situations, the relationships to the persons acting opposite, and the characteristics of carriage, speech and facial expression.

"Many traits which indicate personality difficulties are disclosed: anxieties, stage fright, stuttering, fantasies, unreasonable attitudes, and so on."⁶

To the material obtained from these tests in standardized life-situations was added materials gained from the initial interview, case-study, and the individual reactions to the sympathy, hostility, fear or any other emotion hurled at the subject by the persons placed counter to him in the situation. A test procedure lasted for two or three sessions, the duration of a session ranging from one half-hour to an hour. The recording was usually stenographic, but at times speech recording and motion-picture devices were used.

The operational aspect of the test-procedure was thus moved into a place of first prominence, and the observational aspect relegated to second place. Sociometric procedures, as applied to group situations, have been described elsewhere.⁷ The same general principle prevails with sociometric testing as with spontaneity testing.

⁶From a paper by J. L. Moreno and Helen H. Jennings which was read with motion-picture illustrations before the 91st. Annual Meeting of the American Psychiatric Association, Washington, D.C., May, 1935, and published in the Sociometric Review, New York State Training School for Girls, March, 1936, p. 17.

⁷J. L. Moreno, "Who Shall Survive?", 1934, pp. 69-266, etc.

PSYCHOMETRIC VS. SOCIOMETRIC APPROACH

Methods of Prediction. The prediction of personal and interpersonal adjustment is made upon the basis of various tools and methods. One method is the psychometric approach, a method which is excellent but one-sided. It is the more one-sided the more the other persons in the situation affect the personal picture. Predictions must, therefore, of necessity be hampered and narrowed by a large number of contingencies, and the more so the more complex the problem is. Another method is the sociometric approach. This approach is important not only in order to make the predictions more accurate, but also to make them plausible and acceptable to those for whom they are made--as well as for those who make them.

Prediction tables can be based upon psychometric methods and sociometric findings separately or combined, and by the integration of the respective findings. As long as prediction tables based upon the psychometric approach are made exclusively to increase our knowledge of individual behavior in general, one can look more tolerantly at their statements and conclusions. But when the intention is to use them on actual individuals in real-life situations such as, for instance, choosing for a man his working associates or his vocation, or trying to adjust his interpersonal problems, the consequences are extremely serious. It then becomes of strategic importance to know which steps to take first--that is, which tools to use first--which steps to take second and third, and which final steps to take in order that prediction tables may work in congruence with adjustment tables, and not independently of one another.

Main Tasks in Personal and Interpersonal Adjustment. There are at present two main tasks in all personal adjustment: first, to match one man to another man or to a social group, and second, to match a man to a vocation or a job. According to statistical prediction tables, constructed on a psychometric basis, there may be an extremely high expectancy that John will make a good work-associate for James, or that John will fit into a certain group of workers. To take the extreme case, John and James are to be thrown together strictly on the basis of psychometric prediction tables made with a sample group without John and James ever having met and without the predictors ever having interviewed either of them. A similar procedure might be applied to John's assignment to a vocation or a work-group, although John may

never have met any of the men with whom he is to work, and neither he nor they have ever met the predictors.

It does not seem to me that statistical prediction based on psychometrics is as yet sufficiently worked out to be accurate or--in the last analysis--attuned to certain fundamental ethical demands postulated by the individuals of our culture who expect to take an immediate part in the decisions which are made about their lives. The sociometric approach lends itself better than the psychometric approach to the working-out of prediction tables. Sociometric prediction tables would be able to predict with greater accuracy.

Psychometric vs. Sociometric Case-Study. Individual case-study--as a psychometric approach--is an excellent procedure as far as it goes, but it does not go far enough. The individual is still an object--an object of study. Case-study techniques, whether using the oral interview or the formal questionnaire, fail to get the full coöperation of the subject. They fail to make the object of the case-study an enthusiastically and critically participating subject, as is the case with sociometric techniques.

Sociometric Procedure. It is possible to approach the whole problem of prediction from the opposite end of the prediction-adjustment axis and to begin the work at the level of the real situation of the concrete individual, preparing as the first step adjustment tables and then moving more and more away from the real situations, and gradually developing prediction tables. Into the preparation of these can be integrated any of the research methods outside of sociometry. Prediction tables based in this manner upon the combined sociometric and psychometric approaches will have their feet on the solid ground of intimate knowledge of the actual needs of the individuals and, at the same time, will give this information to the independent technician in such a way that he can draw practical conclusions from it.

Critique of Psychometric Tests; the Advantages of Spontaneity and Sociometric Testing. A basis for psychometric prediction can be found in the following procedures: probationary performance, proficiency tests, and personal and social characteristics associated with success or failure. I believe that the use of probationary performance as a check on behavior in activity--a method both extremely unwieldy and costly in application--should be substituted for by a series of spontaneity tests in standardized life-

situations for each applicant. On the basis of experiments it has been found that these spontaneity tests provide a highly accurate short-cut to the prediction of behavior in activity--however specialized. Proficiency tests are, of course, indispensable, but they can easily be coordinated with the spontaneity tests suggested above. This procedure has many advantages. For instance, a person may disclose an increased or a decreased skill in a performance when he is working all by himself, when he is working with agreeable partners, or when he is working with associates who are distasteful to him. The personal and social characteristics of the individual can be arrived at by sociometric and spontaneity tests and a sounder basis for prediction thus be achieved than if psychometric methods are used alone.

Application of Sociometric Procedures to Problems of National Defense. The responsibility which the scientist assumes when his suggestions are to be applied to concrete individual situations is so great that it is worth while to challenge the whole view of many psychologists who seem to believe that one can move individuals into jobs or into new communities without their full participation and consent. The defense situation may be particularly tempting for one holding such a view. All of us have been brought up to think that a good soldier is an individual who doesn't think at all but merely obeys orders which come from some authority above him. Blind obedience to orders will go on only as long as the suggestions made by the superior prove logical in the end and successful in combat. But when defeat and failure set in, protest and rebellion spread to the surface from the grapevines.

Sociometric methods, although they are based on the individual's most personal situations, lend themselves just as easily as any of the psychometric methods to the strictest discipline within defense units. It must be made clear that it is the information which comes direct from the individuals--not the decisions which come as a result of the information. These latter are made exclusively by the sociometric technicians or the military authorities in charge. The individuals within a sociometric system of social organization have no more influence upon the decisions made by the authorities--merely because he expresses his most objective and most sincere feelings about his job or his associates--than has a soldier who reports to his superior officer what he sees through his field-glasses. The soldier tells the truth to the best of his ability.

His statements are used by his superior officer according to the latter's best judgment. The officer would be negligent if he did not take full advantage of the information received from every possible individual to whom some responsibility had been assigned. Again, it is like the situation when the soldier has suffered an injury and reports to the medical officer where his pains are, and the latter uses this information--in addition to other media--in coming to a diagnosis. In sociometric work, the authority of final choice and decision rests with the technician and the commander. The individual is used as the most sensitive instrument we know today for sizing up his own sensations and reactions to his environment. The experts of prediction and the experts of adjustment must come to a common course of action. We should consider, in the present emergency, the commonsense, direct sociometric approach in preference to any exercise of power over individuals, based upon sample groups which have been studied and analyzed independent of the actualities of the individuals themselves.

The sociometric devices which should prove to be particularly helpful for the needs of the national defense program now in development are the sociometric test and the spontaneity test in standardized life-situations. Both tests are applicable to the two main objectives for which expectancy and prediction are desirable: the assignment of an individual to a vocation and the assignment of an individual to other individuals with whom he is to work, live and function in any defense situation. Although neither of these procedures is an interview technique, they both nevertheless reveal to the investigator what any interview would disclose and, in addition, bring forth other personal and social characteristics which are ordinarily hidden from the observer. They are both systematized shortcut approaches to the individuals in action.

It is important to emphasize at this point the low cost of sociometric work. This low cost is due to the fact that all the individuals to be investigated, assigned or adjusted are themselves turned into investigators by the very nature of the sociometric process, thus eliminating large staffs. Another of the virtues of both the sociometric test and the spontaneity test in standardized life-situations is their great simplicity of operation and their immediate appeal to the average mentality.

A program which is to assign individuals to communities or to vocations must determine the first step to be undertaken. The first step cannot, in my opinion, be a statistical prediction table--not, at least, in the year 1941 with the sciences of psychology, social psychology and sociology in their

present stage of development. The first step cannot--again, in my humble opinion--be prediction tables based upon case work study, nor can the first step be based upon the "observation" of activity and probationary performance by participant observers or spectators. The statistical psychometric prediction table operates in a highly-organized vacuum, but, nevertheless, in a vacuum. The case work methods function with single, independent individuals, but what is needed today is an approach to masses of people and their behavior; statistical prediction considers the mass as an abstraction.

The first step to be taken must be with the consent and the coöperation of the individuals concerned. It must be made by them as if it were their own project--their own design for living. There is no other way imaginable which can enlist the spontaneity, the critical intelligence and the enthusiasm of grown-up, thinking people.

There is a systematic approach available today which, under the label of "sociometry" has developed methods which are at the very least able to make a frontal attack--an attack which seems, even to the subjects, to be plausible--upon some of the most crucial problems with which our defense program is faced today, for we are taking men out of the groups and communities in which they have been living and we are banding them afresh into new groups and communities designed for but one purpose: the organization of defense. Here I purposely emphasize this one point, the first step--for I believe that all other steps following the first can make use of many of the researches and methods which lie outside the sociometric domain. If we have the first step right, the prediction tables will follow. If we have the first step wrong, the prediction tables are useless and sterile.

I cannot believe that there is employed within our defense system even one technician capable of putting together--like a jig-saw puzzle--the overwhelming and, I fear, confusing number of methods and tests which are offered to them. Indeed, the danger is that the technicians and defense authorities may not use psychological, sociometric and psychiatric methods at all, but come to feel that we social scientists know nothing about people--especially the Army.

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Sociometry, Vol. 4, No. 4 (Nov., 1941), 384-391.

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