Towards A New Line-Staff Model

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A review of Robert T. Golembiewski, *Organizing Man and Power: Patterns of Behavior and Line-Staff Models* (Chicago: Rand McNally and Company, 1967), 277 pages.

THE book primarily aims to develop a new model and a new theory of organization and management. Specifically, the emphasis of the book is on the line-staff relationships in organization. The book challenges a long current myth in organizational design, the persistent notion that staff in any enterprise should be outside the chain of command, that it should and does provide service rather than exert control, that it only performs activities that are purely advisory in nature, and so on.

Three models of line-staff relationship are identified in this book. There is the *Colleague Model* which is essentially team management and is dynamic in its approach. Three patterns of behavior are inherent in this model: one, the subservience of the staff, dominance of the line; second, the subservience of the line, dominance of the staff; and third, consensus about alteration of roles. The third pattern allows line and staff to develop any other pattern of relations which is at once their own, is congenial to them and is sanctioned by

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the formal structure. The *Alter Ego Model* is present when the staff man assumes the personality of the head of the organization and where the staff man is enjoined to "live inside the mind of the head of the organization and know what these policies are, although they have not been announced," (p. 10) such that anything coming from the staff man would be regarded as coming from the head and would be obeyed instantly. There is no provision for bargaining that is implied in the *Colleague Model*. The *Neutral and Inferior Instrument Model* suggests that line authorities are the central elements of the administrative system and regards staff as necessary but secondary.

The staff model that has been perpetuated by the traditional theory of organization is the *Neutral and Inferior Instrument Model*. This type of line-staff relationship can only be "at home" with the traditional theory of organization. The author challenges point by point the weaknesses of the traditional principles of organization such as unity of command, span of control, specialization, etc., and replaces them with new and modified principles. Convincing explana-

tions are offered on why many structures based on traditional principles have not worked and why many structural innovations have worked. The author claims that the traditional theory of organization as well as its attendant principles become untenable where complex organizations are concerned. It is inappropriate in this changing environment and in the presence of rapid technological innovations and inventions.

The content of the book reveals that the author has done extensive background research in the field of organization and management. Specifically, this is evident in his familiarity with the works of other experts in the field like Simon, Gulick, Argyris, McGregor, Likert, Drucker, Stahl, Sampson, Brech, Thompson, and Blau. The contribution of his study in the field may be viewed as the integration of a broad range of materials from the frontiers of organization and management. The book can even be a good introduction to the field for, at a glance, one becomes familiar with the various theories, concepts and principles of organization and management. The language is simple and the book is outlined in such a way as to reveal the wealth of information and breadth of treatment.

Although there are some digressions from the discussions, these are, nevertheless necessary. The author touches on a wide range of topics such as the concepts of power, communication, flow of work, crises and stress in organization, motivation of personnel,

computers in organizations, and theory X and theory Y of organizations.

A fault, perhaps, of the author may be the tendency to discuss too wide a range of aspects of organization and management, thus, leaving some portions lacking in details. Discussions on crisis management, on computerization effects on reorganization and on organization as a system of power could have been elaborated on. To include these details would perhaps have doubled the volume of the book. However, the book is provocative enough to invite empirical researches and offer more details to test the validity of the author's model. In fact, this is what the author aims in his study, that is, to provoke "empirical rejection or refinement" of his model.

The book's chief merits are its comparative and integrative approaches. The comparative approach is useful in assessing the merits of the traditional model against the proposed. The tables, illustrations and diagrams presented to pursue this approach are enlightening. See, for example, Figure 8, page 116, which presents "Two Contrasting Patterns of Identifications of Program and Sustaining Officials," or Figure 13, page 182, which gives "Two Ways of Organizing Top Levels."

The study develops a new model of. organization which is integrative of the behavioral or the human relations approach and the scientific approach to organization and management. Current trends of thought in organization and management are divided into

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these two schools. The behavioral approach places increased emphasis on people over processes which are the principal foci of the scientific approach. Golembiewski's study is eclectic in the sense that it synthesizes valid and useful points from each school or approach.

The following hypotheses regarding line-staff relationship are proposed by the author:

1. Line-staff relationship has been accepted as a given. It is arbitrary.

2. Line-staff relationship worsens as staff activities become more important to organization.

3. Staff grows exponentially while line grows linearly.

4. Line-staff relationship becomes increasingly critical as organizations achieve some size.

5. The administrative system have changed radically since the days of the early development of the line-staff concept.

6. The traditional theory of organization has misemployed power by putting so much authority in the hands of the line.

The discussions on the line-staff problem that the author presents in the book are very relevant. The problem pervades all organizations, both private and public, at present. The problem as to what is a line or a staff function, their working relationships and hierarchical positions, has been perennial. It extends even to the separation of line-staff activities which the author calls "program" and "sustaining" activities respectively. The author says that such organizational problems are consequences of the traditional views of line-staff relationship. Tensions between personnel from the line and the staff develop. Here, the author presents interesting insights regarding possible factors that heighten such tensions. It can be observed that the staff are closer to the boss, thus, they are more likely to play the role of the "informant." Because of this closeness, they easily get concessions, i.e., they are always the candidates for promotion. The staff is literally all over the organization.

The author suggests and sells the idea of a 'Colleague Model' of line-staff relationship. In this model, there is no prescribed particular pattern of behavior of the line vis-a-vis the staff or vice versa. The fluidity of their relationship is recognized, that is while either the staff or the line assumes a dominant role, the other accepts the subservient role. There is consensus on alteration of roles. This feature makes this model dynamic and adaptive to changes in the environment and technologies.