

CHAPTER 23

AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING BEHAVIOR

Previous concept chapters have attempted to show that over a period of time, an individual can improve his or her linear, non-linear, and contextual skills¹ in dealing with specific situations. He or she can learn which behavioral concepts work under which circumstances. An individual can improve his or her conceptual, human and technical skills² in diagnosing problems. He or she can learn to use "models" which help in analyzing diagnostic data. He or she can become aware of the personal characteristics and expectations³ of others which relate to the problems they face, and thus help the individual develop empathy with, and sympathy for them. He or she can develop a better understanding of his or her personal characteristics, values, ethics, and specific strengths. He or she can learn to maintain reflectively a positive and enthusiastic approach to organizational issues. Finally, he or she can develop an understanding of the leadership processes by which change occurs in an organization. In a real sense, the leader's primary task is to influence people in organizations to make positive change that benefits them and the organization in both the short and long term.

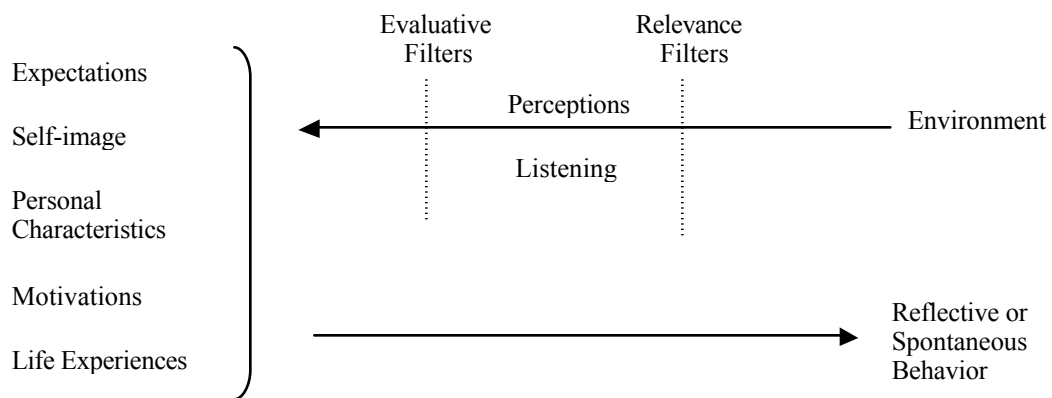
Individual Behavior

Some aspects of organizational and individual behavior seem especially important to the leader. We have examined how process concepts of motivation including expectations (psychological contracts including organizational goals and objectives and/or expectancy theory⁴), self-image (including individual goals and objectives and/or equity theory⁵), and personal characteristics (including personality⁶ and life experiences) influence the behavior of people. We have also examined how perception, communication, and content theories of motivation (including power⁷) influence the behavior of people. Now we will integrate these concepts into an approach useful to leaders as they try to understand the behavior of those around them and attempt to answer the question: "Why do individuals behave as they do and what can be done to influence that behavior"? This integrated approach may be diagrammed as shown in Exhibit 1 on the following page.

Briefly, the individual "sees" the environment, filters out what is not relevant, evaluates the remainder, processes this data through his or her self-image⁸ and/or sets of expectations, and/or personal characteristics, motivational factors and life experiences and then responds with reflective or spontaneous behavior⁹. Both the relevance and evaluation filters are products of the individual's self-image, expectations, and personal characteristics and life experiences. Let's take a brief example of this sequence: On a dark night, we have to take a walk through a rather run-down section of town. As we round a

corner, we come face-to-face with a very large, muscular, unshaven, disheveled man in tattered dirty clothes. At the very least, our behavior might include a rather uneasy feeling and a little shrinking away from this man. Let's analyze this sequence. The actual event which occurred in our environment was the appearance of a man of a certain description in a certain situation. Because of his particular appearance which startled us, our relevance filters immediately passed this data on. Because we had already evaluated these particular surroundings, our perception was somewhat biased and we evaluated or perceived him as a potential threat. Among the factors influencing our behavior was a need for security and a desire to stay out of harms way. Therefore we began a spontaneous behavior pattern to deal with the environment: we backed up a little and got the adrenaline started.

Exhibit 1



This is a very basic example. Most of the situations in the managerial world involve many things occurring in the environment at once. Complex sets of perceptions, and the many factors influencing the individual's behavior are all operating at once. An important thing to keep in mind is that any behavior is a function of the perception of the individual, and not necessarily what is occurring in the environment. We still do not know if the man we met is a threat to us or not.

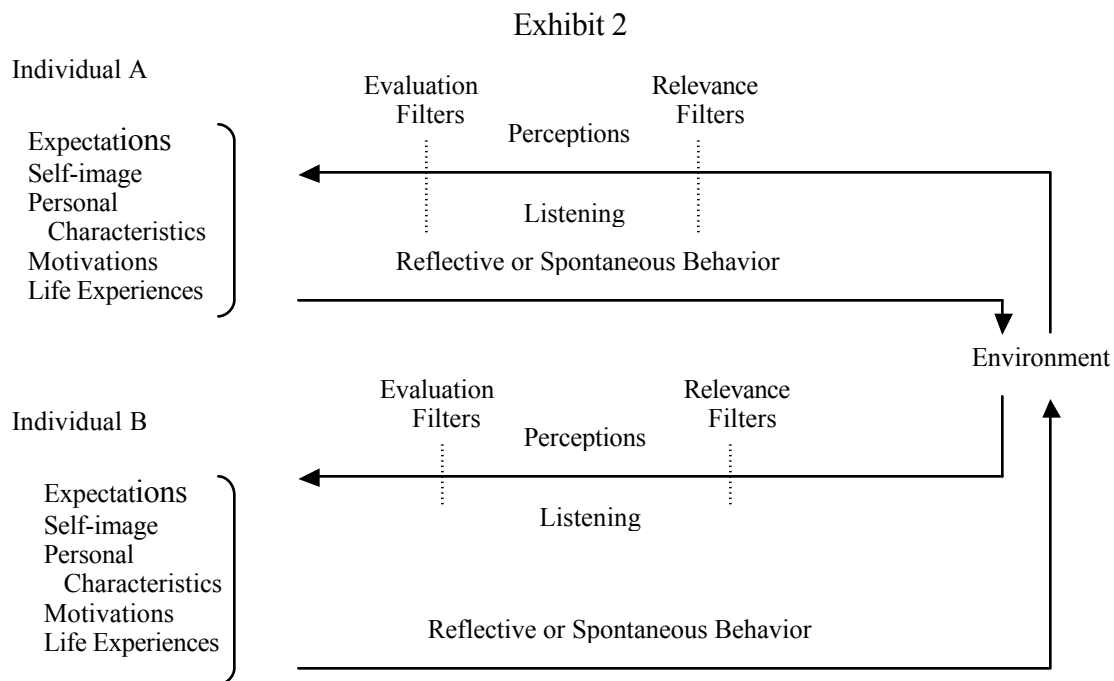
Two-Party Relationships

The next natural extension from our integrated approach to individual behavior is the interaction between two individuals. While there are many different two-party

relationships which we could examine, probably the most important from our point of view are the ones between the leader and the people with whom he or she must work. There are three basic types of interpersonal relationships with which we must be concerned. The first is the superior to subordinate relationship. The second is the leader and his or her peers or specialists who help accomplish the work. The third is the relationship between the leader and his or her boss which is probably the single most important relationship influencing the performance of the leader. Although the relationship of the leader with his or her superior could be viewed as just another superior-subordinate relationship, its importance justifies a separate category.

If we expand our integrated approach to understanding behavior to a two party relationship, it is necessary to recognize that individual A is part of individual B's environment and vice versa. If an understanding of individual behavior is difficult, an understanding of the interactions between two people is exceedingly more complex and difficult.

We can diagram a two party relationship as shown in Exhibit 2.



We might say that perfect communications would be the transfer of a concept or image from the mind of Individual A to the mind of Individual B, without distortion. Although perfect communications may occur where the concept or image is highly technical and both individuals are thoroughly trained experts in that field, it occurs less often in the more intangible managerial aspects of interpersonal relations. The words

Individual A uses or the behavior he or she exhibits are based on his or her personal characteristics and life history. Individual B, on the other hand, using his or her own personal characteristics and life history, might mean something quite different were he or she to use those words or exhibit that behavior. Hence, the difficulty of communication.

If both individuals understand the various factors influencing the other's behavior and want to understand and be understood, then the channels of communication may be opened wider and a freer flow of information with a minimum of distortion is more likely. We are all aware of the many efforts of management to communicate with employees. Employee manuals, company newspapers, letters from the president, and all of the form and reports that are generated in organizations are designed to obtain similar perceptions among employees. We have already seen that the communication problems which face the leader in relationships both with subordinates and with specialists who support him or her are frequently a problem of listening¹⁰ with the focus on what the communicator meant, not what the words or behavior meant.

Now that we have, at least to some extent, described the interaction between two individuals with our integrated approach, we will explore some of the implications of this for the leader as he or she operates within the organization. Two factors which are especially important are the set of skills and understanding which he or she brings to bear, and the style of behavior he or she exhibits. It is essential for the leader who wishes to be effective to take the initiative in clarifying the perceptions between him or her, and either the specialists, the boss, or the subordinates involved. If we think about what a leader does, to a very large extent he or she manages relationships between him or herself and others to positively influence their behavior. He or she concentrates on getting individuals to behave in functional ways. The specific behavior selected or used can only be evaluated in terms of the way in which it influences getting the job done.

One of the major problems faced by the leader is that the relationships with others may demand conflicting behavior modes. His or her superior may expect him or her to be forceful and directive with subordinates; the specialists may expect him or her to be technical and logical; the subordinates may expect him or her to be warm and human. Our integrated approach may be expanded to include as many relationships as the leader needs to examine.

To this point, we have been talking about the relationships faced by any leader. When we look at an individual leader, can we use our integrated approach as it is, or must it be expanded and used differently? One of the factors which complicates our integrated approach is the degree to which people in organizations hold allegiances to groups which are not departments of the organization (e.g., allegiances to professions such as physicist or diplomat, or to outside organizations such as church, fraternity or family). Sociologists call these groups "reference groups". In a very real sense, the fact that many of the members of the organization may be part of another organization or group to which they have strong attachments complicates our integrated approach. Members of such

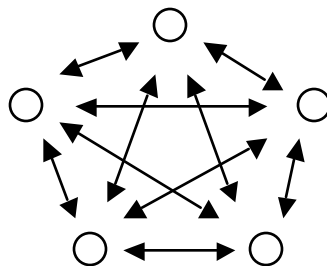
powerful reference groups may have different subcultures than do other members of the organization. The existence of such powerful reference groups outside the organization with which we are concerned makes the individual leader's job more difficult.

Inter-Group Cooperation

In one sense, we can study the interaction between work groups in much the same way as we study the interaction between two individuals. If we take our integrated approach for the individual and for the interrelationship of two individuals and expand it for a group, we can diagram it as shown in Exhibit 3.

Actually, our diagram would have to be much more complex. Each individual is perceiving each other individual as an individual, and in sets of two, three, or more. At

Exhibit 3



the same time, each person's behavior is directed toward these same numbers. Few, if any, managers have either the time or the need to consider all of these relationships at one time.

To make the integrated approach useful to the manager, we will attempt to treat the group as a separate entity, having an identity and characteristics similar to an individual. Indeed, as was noted in Chapter 17, "knowing what makes groups tick is as important as understanding individuals."¹¹ We will try to describe those factors which are important to us as leaders.

If we are to analyze any group, especially a group within a larger organization, it is important to keep in mind that there are two ways of viewing the group. Many different names have been used to identify these, the most familiar being "formal" and "informal". The formal derives from the reason for the team or group to exist or the actions required by the task. This is often referred to as the "required system" (or task related content interactions), and includes those activities and interactions which the team or group must carry out to remain a member of the larger organization and to enjoy its benefits. As an example, a department utilizes a certain technology to provide a product or service to the rest of the organization, e.g., the machine shop must use cutting tools to

provide machined parts for the fabrications department. This required system, coupled with the subcultural factors that evolve in the group over time as well as the sets of factors influencing the behavior of the specific individuals who make up the group, leads to informal patterns of behavior often called the "emergent system" (or process related interactions). Most of us have relatively little difficulty in identifying the parts of the formal or required systems and their relationships to each other, but the informal or emergent system is often more difficult to discern.

Refer back to our initial diagram. If we think of a team or group as an entity, then the same diagram applies to the group as it does to an individual. A team or group will filter and evaluate (perceive) data relevant to the team's or group's tasks and subculture and this will affect its behavior. Conversely, it will filter out data it does not see as relevant and will thus not have a behavior toward this aspect of its environment. Let's look at the ways in which the group behaves in terms of the integrated approach.

The major factor affecting an individual's perception of his or her environment are his or her self-image, sets of expectations, personal characteristics, motivations, and life experiences. When we start to analyze the team or group, it becomes obvious that there are similar factors affecting the perceptions of the team or group. There are many factors shared by the team or group including expectations, experiences, norms or values, sentiments, required and emergent activities, roles and social ranking, and the way the group sees itself. From all of these factors emerges a team or group culture¹² which has a potent impact on perception and resultant behavior.

We said that an individual has a set of factors which influences his or her behavior in a manner consistent with his or her perceptions of the environment and these factors. The factors influencing a team or group may be different than the factors influencing the individuals which make it up, but certainly the cultural factors of the team or group influence individual factors and vice versa. At the very least, there seems to be a need for a group to survive and prosper. A philosophical argument as to whether or not the team or group as an entity can have any influencing factors apart from those of the individuals who make it up, however, is not germane to our discussion. The team or group obviously operates to satisfy dominant subcultural factors which are important to members, and the degree to which it does this will influence the closeness or unity of the team or group. We call this "cohesiveness".

One final factor with which we must deal is social or informal structure. When two people get together they begin to develop a social structure. Even when not formally required, leaders emerge, a ranking of members occurs, and subgroups develop. Anyone who wishes to understand a team or group and to influence it must deal with these elements. Therefore, if we are to expand our integrated approach from the individual to the team or group, we must add subcultural factors, cohesiveness, the team's or group's ability to satisfy individual members' dominant factors, and the informal internal social structure.

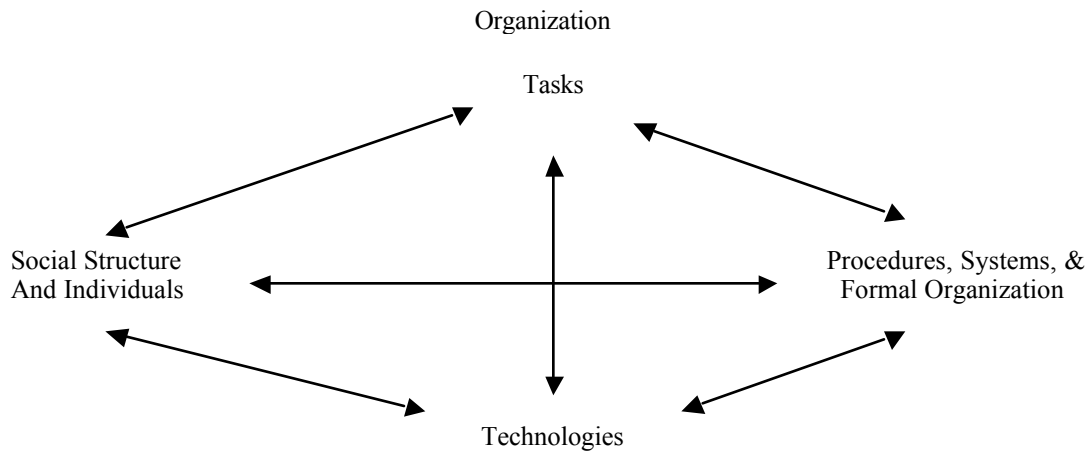
When we wish to look at inter-group relationships, we must analyze differences in social structure, subcultural factors, and cohesiveness within and between the teams or groups, to see if they are compatible or likely to lead to conflict. Let's look at one example which is fairly typical: Research groups tend to have a dominant expectation which says that decisions are to be reached in accordance with scientific knowledge, and the one with the most technical knowledge in a specific area makes the decision. Production organizations tend to have a dominant expectation which says, "You can offer your opinion, but the boss is the boss." Decisions are made by the person highest in the hierarchy. It is easy to see the conflict likely to occur when a young research scientist is sent to a meeting of production managers and the group is required to solve a processing problem. The scientist feels as though he or she should have substantial influence because of his or her technical skills, while the production people see a person who isn't even a manager trying to tell them what to do.

Let's again expand our integrated approach and consider two departments' interacting. Obviously, individuals have the perceptions and respond with the behaviors; what they perceive and the way they behave is greatly conditioned by the cohesiveness, social structure and subcultural factors of their organizational entities, groups and/or teams.

We have developed an integrated approach to the study of individual behavior, the leader's role, and inter-group cooperation. As we progressed from each level to the next, we found that the same basic kinds of variables had to be considered, but we had to simplify and group our variables. If we were to analyze a group of eight people with our integrated approach to individual behavior, we would end up with so much information it would be almost impossible to organize it. As we look at the organization as a whole, we will again simplify and expand.

The Total Organization [As seen fifty years ago and today –though the words now have different connotations.]

Until now, we have dealt almost entirely with the human elements in organizations. There are many more elements than just the human ones. If we are to develop a total integrated approach, we should deal with some of these. Again, it is important to keep in mind that our total organization is in contact with an environment and that it is influenced by and influences that environment. Let's try to expand our diagram to include the total organization:



Given the highly competitive, fast moving global environment of today, what do we mean by the terms in the diagram¹³?

Task refers to the organizational raison d'etre including its core values and strengths. The production of goods and the generation of all types of services is included. In many cases, we are talking about intermediate services or goods which go into a final product. Customer service centers or help desks are examples of such a task.

Procedures, systems and formal organization refers to all of the formal systems designed and implemented by management to organize, coordinate and control a firm. Included in this are the formal hierarchy or authority patterns, information systems, pay systems, work shifts, task teams or groups, coordinative or integrative structures and most formal personnel policies.

Technology includes all of the scientific and engineering specialties as well as the tools and techniques used by members of the organization to complete their tasks. Main frame computers, servers, PCs, tape-controlled machine tools, and other generalized equipment or processes would all be included in this category. In addition to physical tools, techniques such as six-sigma, PERT, Markov Chain Analysis, Linear Programming, and Stochastic Analysis are also included.

Social structure and individuals refers to all the individuals, groups, teams and emergent informal horizontal communications patterns and structures discussed earlier.

It is almost impossible to overstate the interdependence of the above categories. If a firm is in the business of selling programming services to industrial firms (task), it will usually be formally organized into small teams (formal organization), which will use high-speed digital computers (technology). The individuals will feel that technical excellence should be rewarded and that the informal leader of the group should have the most skill (social structure). Similar examples can be developed using organizations with other specific tasks. A major problem with this is that many modern organizations are extremely complex and are simultaneously completing many tasks which are significantly

different, and demand different formal and informal organizations and technologies and have different formal and informal social structures.

The most important task of top operating management is to determine how the total organization should be differentiated into units which can deal with all of the tasks of the firm. After this has been done, management must then find ways to integrate¹⁴ all of these diverse units into an effective, functioning organization. We are all familiar with the fact that modern organizations face complex rapidly changing environments and must manage transitions, innovations and change effectively including team based flatter organizational structures if they are to grow and prosper. It therefore becomes quite important, if we are to complete our integrated approach, to find a way to include the environment of the firm, and to discuss how leaders can bring about change in complex organizations.

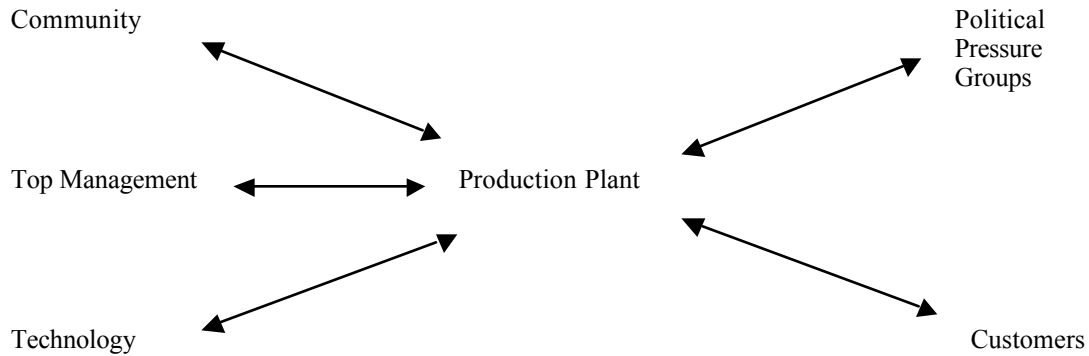
The Environment and Change

When we are discussing the environment, we must first decide what are its critical components and who are the stakeholders. That is, what are the important parts that management must closely follow and analyze? The answer to this question varies with the particular industry or firm being studied, but we can develop a general list which has wide applicability.

For purposes of discussion, let's select a major segment of a large organization, say, a production plant, rather than the total organization, as our unit for study. We can diagram the relationship as shown in Exhibit 4.

It is important to keep in mind that everything we have discussed up to this point is included within the items shown. Some of the impacts of these factors are very straightforward and easy to understand. Almost everyone is aware of the tremendous impact of technology on the organization. It is important to keep in mind, however, that technology has not only led to new products, and therefore changes in task, but has also had an impact on the formal organization, (e.g., coordinative team based organizations), and the informal social structure (e.g., the highly mobile computer specialist, engineer or scientist with primary allegiance to his or her profession rather than the organization).

Exhibit 4



The pressure of inner environmental elements in other areas is almost as obvious. The problems of the city (community) are becoming increasingly stronger in their influence on business. Customers with increased sophistication are becoming much more demanding. Political pressure groups, leading to such changes as credit disclosure, safety and pollution control devices, and benefit programs are becoming more pervasive and powerful. All of these pressures are coming to bear on the organization and are demanding change. The production plant faces exactly the same set of factors as the organization as a whole, but it must also deal with a top management group which applies additional demands.

We could spend a great amount of time dealing with the problems of measuring these forces and forecasting future ones. However, it is more important to say that the production plant must formally organize in terms of these critical areas to ensure an awareness of the direction of the change and to guarantee responsiveness. Once management determines that change is needed, what techniques are available to effect that change?

Any effort to change a firm must deal with our four primary interdependent variables: task, technology, formal organization, and informal social structure. Let's take the last of these first. We can change social structure by three basic techniques: we can train people, we can provide external or internal consulting assistance, and we can do research to provide the organization with data which will facilitate change. However, it is important to note that in all cases we can only help. People within the organization bring about change in this area. Our other three categories are more straightforward and easier for leaders to handle. Management can select and assign teams to new tasks, it can set up alternative organizations, and it can introduce new technologies. This may be the reason management often changes these variables, even when it is not very efficient, and then deals with the problems of informal social structure.

In summary, what has been provided here is a road map which, in a sense, explains where we are trying to go. New concepts have been introduced but at the center of our integrated approach is the fundamental concept that if leaders are to be successful, they must understand what makes an individual do what he or she does, i.e., what causes his or her behavior. We have shown that this is a very complex question and we have no simple, atomistic answer. We must use concepts to lead our thinking into the analysis of complex systems and ultimately improve our inherent response in leadership situations.

Questions for Reflection and/or Discussion

1. What are the differences and similarities between the behavior of individuals, teams or groups and organizations?
2. What are the differences and similarities in expectations, self-image and personal characteristics between the behavior of individuals, teams or groups and organizations?
3. What are the differences and similarities in the role of external and internal environments on individuals, teams or groups and organizations?
4. What can leaders do to influence individuals, teams, groups and organizations more effectively?

FOOTNOTES

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- ¹ Sternberg, R.J. (1985) Beyond IQ: A Triarchic Theory of Human Intelligence, NY: Cambridge University Press
 - ² Katz, Robert L., "Skills of an Effective Administrator", Harvard Business Review, January-February 1955.
 - ³ "Expectations" is a term often used in management literature, e. g., "Pygmalion in Management" by J. Sterling Livingston, Harvard Business Review, July/August 1969, that originally derived from Pygmalion in the Classroom by Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., New York, NY, 1968.
"Psychological contract" is a term often used in psychological literature and more recently, management literature, e.g., p 75 in Managing Human Assets by Michael Beer, Bert Spector, Paul R. Lawrence, D. Quinn Mills and Richard L. Walton, the Free Press, a division of MacMillan, Inc., New York, NY, 1984. The term apparently originated as a psychological extension derived from A. H. Croust' s article, "Origin and Meaning of the Social Compact Doctrine as Expressed by Greek Philosophers" in ETHICS, October 1946.
 - ⁴ Vroom, Victor H., Work and Motivation. NY: Wiley, 1964.
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 - ⁵ Adams, J. S. "Toward an Understanding of Inequity." Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology 67 (1963): 422-436.
 - ⁶ Hall, Calvin S., and Gardner Lindzey. Theories of Personality. 3rd ed. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1978.
 - ⁷ David C. McClelland, The Achieving Society, D. Van Nostrand Co., New York, NY, 1961.
 - ⁸ Arthur W. Combs and Donald Snygg, Individual Behavior: A Perceptual Approach to Behavior, Harper & Row, New York, NY, 1959, pp. 126-144.
 - ⁹ Shneidman, Edwin S., ed. Endeavors in Psychology: Selections from the Personology of Henry A. Murray. New York: Harper & Row, 1981.
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- ¹¹ Earley, P. Christopher and Mosakowski, Elaine, "Cultural Intelligence", Harvard Business Review, October 2004, p. 139
- ¹² Schein, E. H., "Coming to a New Awareness of Organizational Culture", Sloan Management Review, Winter 1984.
- ¹³ This diagram derives from the one put forth by Leavitt, H. J. in Managerial Psychology, Chicago IL: U. of Chicago Press, 1972, (3rd. Ed.), p. 264.
- ¹⁴ Lawrence, Paul, and Jay Lorsch. Organization and Environment: Managing Differentiation and Integration. Homewood: Irwin, 1967.