

QUESTION: Sir, would you say that the military organization has more or less democratic leadership than the industrial organization?

DR. SEASHORE: I think it is impossible to give a simple answer, for the reason that the military practices are by no means uniform. I have had a chance to observe some military units where the degree of participative practice was as great as and as effective as any I have seen in private organizations. I do not know whether this is exceptional or whether this condition occurs rather widely or not. Just as in large, private organizations, like General Motors, there are some segments of the organization that manage by practices that have neither the approval nor the knowledge of higher level managers, so in large military units there is some diversity and some occurrence of extreme deviations from the usual practice.

QUESTION: Dr. Seashore, can you help me a little bit with a statement in "New Patterns of Management" on leadership functions? It talks about the characteristics of a highly effective group leader there, and says that he minimizes the influence of his high position. Then it goes on to illustrate this by saying that he is careful never to impose a decision on the group. Now, do we accept this literally, or is this an objective?

DR. SEASHORE: I think my friend, Dr. Likert, occasionally gets carried away by his enthusiasms. "Never" is a strong word. It is my belief that it is a most rare organization indeed where a leader literally never has to impose his will. I think there are times when organizational imperatives require this. I think there are unexpected and unplanned events that procedures of consent cannot handle. I think his point is a valid one, that these events ought to be minimized and that an imposed decision is accompanied by some harm and cost.

STUDENT: May I go on? How is it possible to reconcile the climate that you have for participative decision-making with the club always being available if it has to be used? In other words, you might have the iron fist that is slightly disguised.

DR. SEASHORE: I think we all live in a rather hazardous world and in any organization people at all levels will be aware that there are others who can seize the club and use it. They will learn from their experience how likely this is and they will act accordingly.