Why Struggle?

Group Forces at Work
and Some Animal Analogies

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W henever and wherever people come together, things happen. These happenings present themselves in the "at once apparent," in the "occasionally apparent or implied," and extend to the "oft insidiously disguised." Of the many phenomena which become observable and operative in group interactions, it appears to me that struggling possesses the qualities of the alpha and omega.

By what means does struggling become perceived, inferred, or intuitively sensed? Before this question can be considered in its total context, struggling must be defined as it pertains to the forces and counter forces present within a group when its members attempt to relate themselves to each other and to the situation within which they find themselves. Struggling may be said to be present:
1. When opposing forces, external and internal, exert pressures of varying degrees and intensities in respect to preferred courses of action,
2. When contentions arise consciously or unconsciously,
3. When controversy, discord, conflict and strife are displayed in words, expressions, feelings or other responses within a group.

Struggling is produced when group members, individually or in small groups, compete with each other in vying for authority, prestige, and recognition as they attempt to surpass or conquer others. It is also produced when group members become obstinate, resist, or obstruct others in their efforts to alter, deter, or control group action.

Within the confines of this definition, I believe that a structured frame of reference can be drawn in which two basic elements are identified:
1. The *situation* (the time, place and conditions under which the members of the group come together.)

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2. The *people* (those who come together with purposes and intents.)
These two elements are mentioned here simply to indicate that they both serve as energizing agents in what is to follow. They become the bases for the pulls and tugs, jolts and jerks which are at play when interaction with others occurs in a specific situation. It will be my purpose here to go beyond them and to cite a few specific features which I have observed and which I believe to be instrumental in the creation and development of struggling.

The Situation

The situation in which a group attempts to function takes form according to the many variables that are introduced into it and become influentially operative within it. The group is the situation in one sense and it makes the situation in another. The situation is fluid not fixed. It continues to change as the result of and in response to the elements introduced by those constituting the group. Within these states of flux, countless opportunities are afforded to stir up differences of opinions and create clashes of "wants" and "don't wants." More importantly, however, they produce varying intensities of feelings and expressions about what should or should not be.

Group members invariably bring personal experiences acquired in previous group situations with them to the present situation. These experiences become the sparking agents in the current grouping. All too frequently, assumptions are made that these experiences are infallible resources upon which to draw and from which clues may be taken as to what will be appropriate and effective in meeting the demands of the current group situation. Herbert A. Thelen

in his book "Dynamics of Groups At Work" asserts that these assumptions are erroneous. He proposes that each group is unique in its own right and that an attempt to carry over previously experienced successes into a current group situation only serves to contaminate it. It is within this state of contamination, when frequent use is made of the inappropriate, that the group asserts its own uniqueness by evidencing "what was so there, may not be necessarily so here." The group does this by exerting pressures and counter pressures upon its members reminding them of their present group's uniqueness.

Only a few of the many variables present or introduced within a group will be illustrated here. These variables are capable of producing states of stress which require expenditures of physical, mental and emotional energies to reduce or balance the stresses produced.

Physical Setting

One variable, the physical setting of a situation, is capable of producing a struggle for physical comfort as soon as a group comes together. A comment from a male member, "It's too hot in here" as he pushes up the window, is often countered by a comment from a female member of the group by, "well I'm cold" as she draws herself together, shivers, and reflects her coldness by icy stares. A struggle for physical comfort has been introduced with the control of temperature becoming the focal point of contention.

Unfortunately, the principals become subject to the pitfall of generalizing and their disagreements spill over into other facets of group interaction. Several alternative interpretations may result with none of them proving adequate to resolve the struggle:

(He may remove his coat and close the window to please her, but inwardly he may resent his own condescension to her for he may feel that in accordance with social propriety, "the gentleman wears his coat in public.")

(She may put on her coat if the window remains open, but inwardly she may fume at his lack of consideration for her comfort, and what she may erroneously perceive to be the comfort of the entire group.)

Struggle for Power

A second variable may be identified as a struggle for power. Some members want power and strive endlessly to get it and maintain it. Although autocratic leadership has long since fallen into ill repute, there are still those whose very makeup propels them to seek power and control over others. These we may call the "independents." On the contrary, some group members don't want power and they try to project, thrust, and force it upon others. These members make up the "dependents" who are prone to throw the power back into the lap of a group centered leader who earnestly tries to vest the power in the group. Finally, we have the "interdependents" who look to each other for support, prestige and recognition while they indirectly attempt to control the others.

Not all within a group feel the need to dominate. Some feel the need to be dominated. Fortunately, these differences exist for without them group struggling would be destined to intensification. Their presence, however, only reduces and does not remove the element of struggle. These opposing forces produce a battleground which can be identified as follows:

1. The "independents" feel the urge to take control, but are aware of the risk of alienating themselves from group acceptance; they inhibit their urges.
2. The "dependents" wait in a state of anxious longing for someone or some happening to direct them in a course of action.
3. The "interdependents" are seemingly uninvolved for they are too discreet to expose either their strengths or their weaknesses.

When these forces appear dormant, group interaction appears at a standstill. On the surface, the prevailing silence may well create the impression that "all is well" but within group members themselves, tensions are mounting and subterranean currents are on the move.

Tolerance for Silence

For some group members the level of tolerance for silence is greater than it is for others. Outward behavioral manifestations as to inner irritability are not as pronounced in members with high levels of tolerance as they are among members with low levels of tolerance.

I have personally observed that the following demonstrated behaviors in group settings reflect varying levels of inner unrest:

1. Crossing of legs or arms in assuming more rigid posture—tension positions.
2. Eye glances at others and the perceived leader as if to say, "why don't you say or do something?"
3. Doodling with the pencil—the urge to do something but doesn't know what to do—withdrawal from the situation to a state of detachment from the group into a state of day dreaming.
4. Shifting of positions in the chair—as though the seat were getting hot.

(These outward evidences of inner

stress and struggle give clues to frustrations of the group members as they respond to what they feel the need for the situation to be like as contrasted to what they are actually experiencing in the situation.)

Sub Groups

The third variable to be selected for comment here becomes operative when the size of the group is large enough to permit a splintering off into identifiable cliques. This splintering or fracturing permits, and actually creates, the "in-feeling" or "out-feeling" which is capable of permeating the total atmosphere of the group situation. These alliances produce the spawning area for the development of hostility. Factions, the "ins" and "outs", line up. Barriers are erected which in some respects become almost unsurmountable as far as effective interaction is concerned. The "likes" and "dislikes" take shape and evidences of hostility and aggression squirt out at unexpected and inappropriate times. Each such demonstration reaffirms a present remoteness of group solidarity.

Formations of sub-groups are predisposed by many factors—some apparent and others disguised. Those most readily identified include age, sex, common interests, and mutual aspirations. When attachments to, or identifications with these commonly recognized factors occur, a cleavage or cohesiveness is produced between the sub-group members whose appraisals, feelings, and reactions are in communion with each other. Responses to incidents occurring within the group are then often governed by this cohesiveness. When a sub-group's cohesiveness has sufficiently jelled, it frequently brings its personal agenda to the total group situation, and struggles persistently to gain acceptance of the entire group in adopting the agenda of the sub-group.

These three variables: preconceived notions as to what the situation should be like, clamoring for power, control and recognition, and the formation and interference of sub-groups are in no sense an all inclusive list. They are only representative of many. When group members are "in tune" with what is actually transpiring in their group situation, these variables and their associations become less poignant and, therefore, may be held more constant.

The People

The people, as the second basic element in the frame of reference, bring personal accouterments with them to the group setting. These personal dressings, real or unreal, take forms of multiple styles of changing behavior. They receive and react to stimuli within the group. Their reactions may be correctly perceived and interpreted by others in the group but more often than not, they are not. Misunderstandings which result in erroneous impressions become the order of the day and are freely received and exchanged. Within the acts of not actually knowing, and in their stead, substituting the act of assuming, discrepancies and distortions in perceptions are certain to occur.

Since our responses to people and reactions to things are largely determined by our interpretations of them, opposing viewpoints are prone to lead to confrontations. Verbal confrontations in which a group member attempts to convince others in the group that his viewpoint is "the only viewpoint" result in the struggle of "argument." This becomes the form of struggling inferred as the omega, for no one ever really wins an argument.

Three types of personal activity in

a group situation require attention in reference to the phenomenon of struggling:

1. *Participation in group effort.* (This requires that the group member experience encounters with other members by talking or listening to them.)

2. *Communication* — (This requires that the member express congruence or incongruence with others through words and more importantly, actions.)

3. *Perception*—(This requires that the group member look into and beyond what appears on the surface.)

These three may be thought to have a cyclical relationship in group interactions for participation and communication depend upon perception if they are to operate effectively, and perception depends upon participation and communication for its information.

Communication

Let it be supposed that all members in a group desire to participate in group endeavors. Such a supposition immediately introduces the element of struggling for individually-felt barriers to participation are injected. Some in the group feel personally inadequate, others fear evaluation in competition, some fear rejection if failure claims them, while at the opposite end of the continuum are still others who become almost consumed by an overwhelming craving for ego-centered participation.

If a similar inference is made relative to the desire to communicate, again some group members will feel no stress when communicating verbally or non verbally—they "like" to talk and listen to themselves. Others in the group may find it difficult to express themselves as they wish, if at all. Both types of communicators of-

ten communicate the very impressions they do not wish to communicate.

Various levels of interpretation are attached to the meaning of communication within the group. Some members believe that to communicate, one must talk, others feel that they communicate by listening to the talkers and reflecting what they understand, and others feel that a mere nod of the listener's head is sufficient to indicate that the speaker's point is understood. Let it suffice to say here in this area of confused meaning, that many talk and don't communicate, and many hear and don't listen.

Listening

This brings us to the area of "listening to understand" as an element of struggle in the communication process. Frequently, group members do not listen to understand but rather to refute what is being said. They use their interpretive processes to prepare rebuttals and disprove, if possible, the points being made. On the contrary, listening to understand leads into the area of how as listeners we perceive the ideas of others to be from what we hear them say or hear them not say. Admittedly, perceptions become the most distorted of all experiences in the group. The perceptual process becomes the "gray area of interpretation." Within it, we cannot be certain that we are correct, but we are tricked into perceiving things in the way that is most meaningful to us; in the way that seems right according to our own value systems.

Animal Analogies

I believe that a perceived analogy can be drawn between the struggling behavior of group members as they interact, and certain implied counterparts in the animal kingdom as they interact. At the risk of appearing dis-

tasteful to some in comparing human behavior with animal behavior in such a pointed fashion, it is significant to note that any such distaste dispels itself when it is determined whether it is the perceiver or the perceived who is reacting.

Before dealing in greater depth with the analogy, it is important to indicate that three facets of the perceptual act must be identified and operative in seeing the analogy per se:

1. It includes not only WHAT the members say and do in a group, but also HOW what they say is interpreted by those who hear and see them do it.
2. It includes not only the intentions, desires, pleasures, and sentiments of those perceived but of the perceiver as well.
3. It involves the exchange of feelings produced by contacts within the group which become injected and reinjected into the group atmosphere.

During my many years of experience in working with groups, I have perceived ten characteristics of group behavior from which I have drawn these analogies:

1. *Quarrelsome*—(The Bull Dog) The group member who always wants his own way, and will fight if necessary to get it. He monopolizes the time of the entire group to accomplish his own determined purposes. His energies are expended and his efforts directed much of the time into the veins of pure argument from which nothing constructive has been known to emerge. He serves as an obstructing force in group interaction. The group's purposes would be better served if he were to check his determination and obstructionism in the "hat room" before entering the group situa-

tion.

2. *Positive*—(*The Mule*) The group member who stubbornly holds to his own opinions considers his own viewpoints and ideas to be the only ones of value. While he may listen to what is going on in the group, he does not listen to understand. The mule moves when he wishes and balks when he wishes. The group member who holds rigidly to his own tenets restricts his participation in the group to those movements which coincide with his own thinking.

3. *Know It All*—(The Monkey) The presence of a monkey character within a group produces two extreme reactions within a group—neither one of which furthers the purposes of the group. First, "the know it all" conveys the impression that he has a corner on the market of all worthwhile ideas and is so perceived by the group. The result is seldom conducive toward enlisting a state of total group effort. Secondly, if the "Know It All" is perceived to have all the answers and indirectly all the brain power, what purposes could the other group members serve? This implication can, and often does, dampen any remaining spontaneity within the rest of the group.

4. *Talkative*—(The Bull Frog) The constant croaking of the frog and the "yak-yakety-yak" of the talkative group member who talks all the time and says nothing of value, change neither the pond nor the group situation and becomes only a factor in maintaining the status quo. The talkative group member talks at the slightest opportunity and pauses only long enough to gulp more air to

permit him to continue. The incessant croaking of the frog excludes possible comments of value from other group members and group effort becomes restricted.

5. *Shy*—(The Fawn) Within the expressed quietness of the fawn, and the implied insecurity associated with her, may be valuable bits of information which are never, given an "airing". Group productivity may be enhanced by drawing the fawn out with a "salt lick" if necessary.

6. *The No Sayer*—(The Porcupine) The group member who says "no" to almost every idea presented without properly evaluating it, shoots quills not only into the idea, but also into its contributor. Group members don't like to be "shot down" and when they are, without bonafide consideration being given to their idea, they become reluctant to offer another one. Frequently, the no sayer's objections are not factual but rather they are based upon his own unwillingness to be caught conforming. Fictional responses of the no sayer are not always identified as such by the group. When they are not, they prove to be disruptive, disconcerting, and misleading in group interaction.

7. *Thick-Skinned Uninterested*—(The Hippopotamus) This group member is content to let the waves of conversation just roll over him. It is too much effort to react, and he seldom feels the urge to make a contribution one way or the other. He is complacent and unmoved—couldn't care less whether anything is accomplished or not. If all group members were like him, no action would occur and there would no longer be a need for the group.

8. *The High Brow*—(The Giraffe) In comments and behavior the giraffe infers his self perceived aura of superiority to other members of the group. He attempts to conceal this socially inappropriate form of behavior, and in so doing, his responses smack of condescension to other group members. The speaking over the heads and looking down upon other group members often produces reactions within them similar to those of the "arabs, who silently fold their tents and steal away" from group involvement.

9. *Superficial Thinker*—(The Kangaroo) He jumps from one point to another hardly pausing long enough to barely mention key points of an idea. He nervously hops on to the next idea as if to protect himself from being pick pocketed and it be found that the brain child has been stolen. The superficial thinker serves as a distraction to group effort for the "hop-hop-hopping" from one unexplored idea to another serves only to confuse other group members. The superficial thinker likes the avenues of escape when challenged for he often responds, "It was just a misunderstanding."

10. *The Persistent Questioner*—(The Fox) Questions asked for clarification are necessary, meaningful and important for group understanding, but questions asked merely for the purpose of asking them result in group distractions and produce irritability. Sometimes questions serve as roadblocks and are asked to detour the group from the direction it is taking. At times, the sly fox asks questions to trap another and thereby enhance his own prestige as he perceives himself. His per-

ception of what he does may be phrased by "I made him squirm that time didn't I?"

Summary

We know that in the human sphere, as in the animal kingdom, struggling is precipitated and promoted within the group situation as its members interact. Its oozing, rolling, tumbling nature is dictated by the needs, desires, and wants of the group itself. We believe that certain conditions are likely to produce it, but we cannot be certain that they will, and if we could, we could not know the affects they would create. Finally, we know that people can be both pleased and cursed by struggling, and while it operates to the advantage of some, it operates to the disadvantages of others depending upon its course and intensity. As long as these conflicting properties remain, and as long as people come together in groups, some form of struggling will certainly be found in their midst.

Bethlehem Steel Assistance to Colleges

Checks totaling $655,000 have been presented to 88 educational institutions this year under Bethlehem Steel Corporation's program of financial assistance to privately endowed and publicly controlled colleges and universities, Edmund F. Martin, chairman and chief executive officer of the corporation, has announced.

Since the program was initiated in 1953, a total of $4,721,000 has been granted to 152 schools across the country. This sum is in addition to other payments made by Bethlehem to colleges and universities for research conducted at its specific request or of direct benefit to the steel industry.

Bethlehem's assistance plan grants $5,000 to privately endowed educational institutions and $2,500 to publicly controlled colleges and universities on behalf of each of their graduates who is selected by the company for its Loop Course, management

training program for college graduates, and who remains with Bethlehem for at least four months. Unrestricted payments were made in 1967 on behalf of 170 such graduates from 88 schools (47 private, 41 public) who entered Bethlehem's employ through the 1967 Loop Course.

Bethlehem's assistance program recognizes the fact that a college education costs an institution more than it receives from the student in tuition and fees.

Although publicly controlled colleges and universities had not been included in the original program, they were added in 1967 in recognition of the changes in their financial circumstances.

Bethlehem places no limitations on the way the money granted is spent. It may be applied to scholarships, facilities, or any other purpose that the recipient school believes will best meet its need.