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Human Relations 1994; 47; 953
DOI: 10.1177/001872679404700805

Human Relations, Vol. 47, No. 8, 1994

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Renewed calls for democracy make it imperative that we understand the nature of democratic leadership. Existing definitions of democratic leadership are inconsistent and inadequate, so this essay provides a clear definition that applies to social groups both large and small. As defined herein, democratic leadership is conceptually distinct from positions of authority; rather, it is defined as the performance of three functions: distributing responsibility among the membership, empowering group members, and aiding the group's decision-making process. Many, most, or all members of a group serve these functions, regularly exchanging the roles of leader and follower. A limited number of practical and moral considerations are identified for assessing the appropriateness of the democratic leadership model for different groups. In addition, the National Issues Forums program is used to illustrate the model, and suggestions are made for future research on democratic leadership.

KEY WORDS: democratic leadership; democracy; participation; decision making; facilitation.

INTRODUCTION

Across the globe, the tumultuous political events of the past 3 years have raised hopes for the creation and revitalization of democratic institutions. In some countries, dictatorships have crumbled and new governments have crawled from the rubble. In others democratic opposition movements have gained strength, courage, and international recognition. Emboldened citizens in China, Czechoslovakia, Namibia, El Salvador, and elsewhere have organized to promote democratic social change, and new political par-

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0018–7267/94/0800–0953$07.00/1

ties and organizations in the West are striving to make their nations' political systems more democratic.[3]

Social scientists should respond to these international calls for democracy, because high-quality theory and research can aid those who seek to create democratic groups, communities, and nations. In fact, there already exists a substantial literature addressing the philosophical and empirical issues surrounding democratic governments, economies, and societies (e.g., Bellah et al., 1991; Dahl, 1989).

The dynamics of democratic leadership, however, are not well understood. In fact, there is no clear and well-developed *definition* of the term within academia. In a classic review, Gibb (1969) lamented the fact that "the basic psychological meaning" of democratic leadership had "nowhere been spelled out" (p. 258). Twenty years later, Miriam Lewin (1987) agreed, repeating Kurt Lewin's earlier "call for a better understanding of the detailed nature of democratic leadership and followership through social science research" (p. 138). A recent meta-analysis reached similar conclusions, finding that conceptual ambiguity and operational inconsistency has clouded the findings of the last four decades of research on democratic and autocratic leadership (Gastil, in press).

Since leadership plays a vital role in democratic movements and democratic governance, it is essential that researchers address this issue. Ultimately, this entails empirical investigation of the practice of democratic leadership, but a necessary first step is creating a useful definition of the term itself.

PREVIOUS DEFINITIONS OF DEMOCRATIC LEADERSHIP

In his comprehensive handbook on leadership, Bass (1990) provides a general definition of leadership:

> Leadership is an interaction between two or more members of a group that often involves a structuring or restructuring of the situation and the perceptions and expectations of the members. . . . Leadership occurs when one group member modifies the motivation or competencies of others in the group. Any member of the group can exhibit some amount of leadership . . . (pp. 19-20).

[3]The successes and failures of democratic movements are discussed in several periodicals, including recent issues of the *Journal of Democracy* and *Current History*. For general overviews of the prospects for democratization around the globe, see Barber and Watson (1988); for a more academic review, see Dahl (1989). There also exist many regional reviews, such as Decalo's (1992) appraisal of the potential for democratic change in Africa, and there are numerous writings on new democratic organizations, such as the Greens (Dobson, 1990, 1991) and the New Party in the United States (Pope and Rogers, 1992).

This is essentially the definition of leadership adopted in this essay. The only exception is that herein, leadership is viewed as constituting only *constructive* behaviors aimed at pursuing group goals. This defines leadership as "an instrument of goal achievement" (Bass, 1990, pp. 15-16).

This definition gives "leadership" a positive connotation. This normative aspect becomes greater still when one speaks of "democratic" leadership. Literally hundreds of authors have not so much described as *advocated* democratic, participatory, and similar "alternative" styles of leadership, contrasting them with authoritarian, supervisory, charismatic, and other conventional modes of leadership (for partial reviews, see Anderson, 1959; Bass, 1990; Gibb, 1969; Hollander & Offerman, 1990).

According to these advocates, undemocratic leadership styles result in a variety of undesirable outcomes: dependent and apathetic followers (Barber, 1984; Heifetz & Sinder, 1987; Manz & Sims, 1989; White & Lippitt, 1960), low-quality policies coupled with inefficient implementation and constituent support (Gibb, 1969; Heifetz & Sinder, 1987; Maier, 1952), the mystification of the decision-making process (Edelman, 1988), and in some cases, social strife and aggression (Lewin, Lippitt, & White, 1939; Starhawk, 1986). In addition, undemocratic leadership undermines the pursuit of ethical ideals, such as self-determination, personal development, and democratic decision making (Barber, 1984; Sashkin, 1984).

While criticizing existing leadership styles, authors have called for alternative styles of leadership, such as "group or educational leadership" (Busch, 1934), "participative management" (Likert, 1961), "servant leadership" (Greenleaf, 1977), "nonconstitutive leadership" (Tucker, 1981), "transformative leadership" (Burns, 1983), "responsive leadership" (Starhawk, 1986), "public leadership" (Mathews, 1988), "superleadership" (Manz & Sims, 1989), or "values leadership" (Fairhorn, 1991). The most common name for alternative leadership styles may be "democratic leadership," which has appeared repeatedly during the last 70 years (e.g., Abse & Jessner, 1962; Barber, 1984; Gibb, 1969; Haiman, 1951; Heifetz & Sinder, 1987; Kutner, 1950; Lassey, 1971; Lewin, Lippitt, & White, 1939; Maier, 1952; Nagel, 1987; NACLO, 1984; Smith, 1926; Tead, 1935; Whitehead, 1936).

Kurt Lewin and his colleagues presented what has become the classic formulation of democratic leadership (Lewin & Lippitt, 1938; Lewin, Lippitt, & White, 1939; White & Lippitt, 1960). They distinguished democratic leadership from autocratic and laissez-faire styles, arguing that democratic leaders relied upon group decision making, active member involvement, honest praise and criticism, and a degree of comradeship. By contrast, leaders using the other styles were either domineering or uninvolved.

Unfortunately, Lewin and his colleagues never developed their definition beyond this rough sketch, leading some critics to find undemocratic implications in their ostensibly democratic model of leadership. Kariel (1956) argues that Lewin's notion of democracy is somewhat manipulative and elitist, and the exchange between Barlow (1981) and Freedman and Freedman (1982) suggests that Mao's "mass line leadership" in China used a model like Lewin's to mask coercion under the guise of participative group processes.

More directly, Graebner (1986) documents how the ideas and techniques of "democratic engineers," such as Kurt Lewin himself, were used for undemocratic purposes in the first half of this century. For example, the Foremen's Clubs relied upon a "democratic" style of discussion leadership to manipulate foremen. The meetings were supposed to appear participatory, yet they were "designed to modify attitudes, and to convince foremen, a group increasingly tempted to unionize, that their natural allegiance was to capital rather than labor" (p. 139). Although such criticisms might overlook Lewin's obviously democratic intentions (Lewin, 1950; M. Lewin, 1987; Lippitt, 1986), it is the ambiguity of his definition that made such interpretations plausible (Graebner, 1987).

Despite the inadequacy of the Lewinian definition, the empirical research on democratic leadership conducted 50 years later continues to employ this model either explicitly (Meade, 1985; Wu-Tien & Hsiu-Jung, 1978) or implicitly (Kipnis, Schmidt, Price, & Stitt, 1981; Kushell & Newton, 1986). As a result, research on democratic leadership continues to base itself upon an unelaborated and potentially misleading definition. The absence of a clear definition may have also contributed to the decreased amount of research on democratic leadership in the last decade (see Bass, 1990; Gastil, in press).

A DEFINITION OF DEMOCRATIC LEADERSHIP

Despite this lack of conceptual precision, Lewin and others have identified the central element of the term: democratic leadership is behavior that influences people in a manner consistent with and/or conducive to basic democratic principles and processes, such as self-determination, inclusiveness, equal participation, and deliberation (Dahl, 1989; Fishkin, 1991). What is missing is a systematic elaboration of this basic idea.

Integrating and supplementing existing theoretical writings on democracy and leadership will put flesh on the bones of this skeletal definition of democratic leadership. In turn, this section discusses the relationship between authority and leadership, the functions of democratic leadership, the distribution of leadership, the roles of democratic followers, and the settings in which the democratic model of leadership is appropriate.

Authority

Leadership and authority are conceptually distinct (e.g., Gibb, 1969; Heifetz & Sinder, 1987; Hollander & Offerman, 1990), so leadership "should not be confused with the occupant of a formally established position in a hierarchical structure . . ." (Fisher, 1986, p. 201). Democratic authorities do not necessarily serve as democratic leaders, and democratic leaders sometimes lack formal authority, as was the case with Mohandas Gandhi (Heifetz, Sinder, Jones, Hodge, & Rowley, 1991; Tucker, 1981).

A given democratic group or body, called the *demos* (e.g., Dahl, 1989), confers administrative and, in some cases, legislative authority to specific individuals, all of whom are subject to removal by the membership. As Kutner (1950) explains, "Leaders need authority . . . but the delegation of authority in a democratic group is never a mandate for any leader to employ authority without the eventual approval of the group" (p. 460).

To the extent that they have a measure of authority or power, democratic leaders must be accountable for the decisions they make as individuals and the roles they play in the demos (Starhawk, 1986; White & Lippitt, 1960). Their position in the network of power relations also makes these leaders responsible for making "lines of authority, power, and decision making clear and visible." They must keep "their agendas and motives . . . open and visible, not hidden" (Starhawk, 1986, p. 272; also see Graebner, 1986).

Finally, democratic leaders must try to "prevent the development of hierarchies in which special privilege and status differentials dominate" (Krech, Crutchfield, & Ballanchey, 1962, p. 435). They must frequently ask themselves if existing power inequalities are necessary, and they should be extremely reluctant to increase the concentration of power.

Leadership Functions

Once again, the members of a demos can act as leaders even though they have no formal authority. Leadership is behavior, not position (Bass, 1990), and this is certainly true of the democratic method of leadership. Nevertheless, it is not so much the behavior as the *function* of the behavior that is crucial. Following Cartwright and Zander (1968), leadership can be viewed "as the performance of those acts which help the group achieve its preferred outcomes. Such acts may be termed *group functions.*" In this view, leadership functions encompass "all member actions that help the group achieve its desired states" (p. 304). In democratic groups, this amounts to behaviors that sustain the democratic process.

A review of previous conceptions of democratic leadership identifies three primary functions: (1) distributing responsibility within the demos, (2) empowering the membership, and (3) aiding the demos in its deliberations.[4]

Distributing Responsibility

The first function of democratic leadership is the distribution of responsibility. "The democratic leader," explain Krech et al. (1962), "seeks to evoke maximum involvement and the participation of every member in the group activities and in the determination of objectives." The leader "seeks to spread responsibility rather than to concentrate it" (p. 435). Whitehead (1936) insists that a democratic society is characterized by "the wide diffusion of personal responsibility . . . . The essence of democratic leadership is that it shall . . . promote opportunities for the fitting initiative of those within the society, and in the manner the latter desire" (p. 256).

If a democratic leader has received or taken on a responsibility that should go to the demos at large, then the leader should deputize or distribute responsibility among the membership (Busch, 1934; Gibb, 1969). For example, elected officials often have excessive public responsibilities. To act as democratic leaders, they must "re-engage the public in the resolution of public problems" (Morse, 1991, p. 4). Within organizations, this amounts to maintaining structures that widely distribute and clearly delineate decision-making responsibilities (Likert, 1961).

In some situations, however, leaders are not held responsible for finding a solution to an existing problem. In these cases, leaders must ask the members of the demos to take on a newly identified responsibility. Nagel (1987) goes farther, arguing that democratic leadership should not merely *ask* members to take on responsibility; at times, "the democratic leader must be demanding in reminding people of their collective responsibilities." Some members may be less than enthusiastic to do their share, and "leaders who allow free riders to exploit fellow citizens do not serve their communities well" (p. 79).

[4]Each of these functions applies to both large and small social groups. When an example is provided that pertains to a particular social scale, the reader should not infer that this is the only relevant scale. For instance, "aiding deliberation" may sound relevant to only smaller groups, and some authors have discussed it solely in terms of such groups (e.g., Busch, 1934; Haiman, 1951; Maier, 1952; Starhawk, 1986). Nevertheless, those who focus on larger social scales argue that democratic leadership plays a role in community-wide and nationwide policy debates and deliberation (e.g., Barber, 1984; Heifetz & Sinder, 1987; NACLO, 1984). There will be differences in the actual behaviors of those guiding a small group discussion and those facilitating a nationwide debate, but these different behaviors serve a similar function.

Empowerment

Asking fellow members of the demos to take on responsibility is one of many ways in which leaders can help develop members' decision-making capabilities (Gibb, 1971). This is a vital function, for democracy requires a politically competent membership (Dahl, 1989). The members of the demos must become skilled at a wide variety of tasks, such as speaking, thinking, and organizing (Evans & Boyte, 1986), and they may fare better in the political process if they develop a healthy sense of self-esteem or political efficacy (Pateman, 1970; Sniderman, 1976).

Democratic leadership can augment members' skills by setting high but reasonable standards and asking members to challenge themselves (Tead, 1935). Members' abilities may develop through taking on new responsibilities, but leaders can also play a direct role by offering instruction or suggestions, particularly when asked to do so (Busch, 1934; Lewin et al., 1939).

Leaders can also help develop members' emotional maturity and moral reasoning abilities. Wilkins (1986) calls such leadership political mentorship. He illustrates this aspect of democratic leadership with the case of Wayne Morse, a former Oregon Senator. According to Wilkins, Morse challenged many Americans, forcing them to examine their views on the Vietnam War. His insistence that each American think critically and carefully "forced many to begin to develop the moral and ethical depth characteristic of the political adult" (p. 53).

To speed members' psychological development, leaders should also avoid behaviors associated with the "great man" model of leadership. Conventional leader–follower interaction consists of "the transference of parental dependency, of vicarious satisfaction through unconscious identification, of reduction of guilt by the usurpation of the individual conscience by the projected image of the leader, and of the wish for transformation" (Abse & Jessner, 1962, p. 85). Democratic leaders show genuine care and concern for the members of the demos (Desjardins & Brown, 1991; Starhawk, 1986), but not in a way that makes them into a substitute parent or guardian. The democratic leader must never "manipulate the masses through shrewd exploitation of their mentality. What is needed is the emancipation of consciousness rather than its further enslavement" (Adorno, 1950, p. 421).

Most of all, democratic leaders must seek to make members into leaders (Theilen & Poole, 1986). If a demos has few leaders, it is imperative that they seek to broaden the leadership base, distributing leadership responsibilities and making themselves replaceable. Good leaders "can

expand their ranks by becoming 'role models' to change novices from 'followers' to leaders" (Baker, 1982, p. 325).

Aiding Deliberation

Democratic leaders must distribute responsibility appropriately and empower other group members, but they must devote the bulk of their time and energy to ensuring productive and democratic decision making. Deliberation is the heart of democracy (Barber, 1984; Cohen, 1989; Fishkin, 1991; Gastil, 1992a,b, 1993a; Mathews, 1988; Yankelovich, 1991), and high quality deliberation requires effective democratic leadership (Busch, 1934; Haiman, 1951; Maier, 1952; Mathews, 1988; Morse, 1991; White & Lippitt, 1960). Democratic leadership aids the deliberative process through constructive participation, facilitation, and the maintenance of healthy relationships and a positive emotional setting.

Constructive participation means defining, analyzing, and solving group problems through deliberation. Many authors have stressed this aspect of democratic leadership in its many forms. Political problems must be identified and defined or framed (Heifetz & Sinder, 1987; Sheeran, 1983; Tucker, 1981). Problems must be carefully analyzed, bringing out all relevant information and perspectives (Maier, 1952; Smith, 1926; White & Lippitt, 1960). Possible solutions must be generated and assessed through creative reflection and critical evaluation (Heifetz & Sinder, 1987; Lassey, 1971; Tucker, 1981), and careful listening and the respectful acknowledgement of others' views can help move discussion forward (Morse, 1991; Starhawk, 1986). A particularly important form of listening, sometimes called "discernment" (Sheeran, 1983), consists of carefully listening to group members' ideas and values, then tentatively attempting to identify the "public voice" or the solution that best represents the group's collective interests (Busch, 1934; Mathews, 1988; Nagel, 1987; Sheeran, 1983). (For detailed discussions of constructive participation in small and large democratic groups, see Barber, 1984; Gastil, 1992b, 1993a; Haiman, 1951; Maier, 1952.)

Facilitation is conceptually distinct from constructive participation in that it is a form of meta-communication (i.e., communication *about* the group's deliberations). As Haiman (1951) explains, "The democratic leader . . . determines *how* the members of the group will think and decide, not *what* they will think and decide . . . ." The leader "is the group's methodological agent" (p. 33, emphasis in original). For example, a small group facilitator might point out that the group is running overtime. The comment

is not so much part of the discussion of the problem at hand as it is a comment regarding the discussion.

Like constructive participation, there are many facets to facilitation, three of which deserve emphasis. First, effective facilitation involves keeping deliberation focused and on track (Maier, 1952). In a small group discussion, this includes interrupting unnecessary digressions and untangling terminological difficulties that are unduly complicating an issue.

Second, facilitation involves the encouragement of free discussion and broad participation, which sometimes amounts to discouraging verbosity and drawing out shy or marginalized voices (Barber, 1984; Maier, 1952; Sheeran, 1983). In a community, democratic leadership of this variety might mean reaching out to an isolated or ignored social group that belongs in an ongoing public debate. More generally, leaders can serve as a communicative link between different groups within a community (Rose, 1968) or organization (Likert, 1961). In a larger demos, leaders might use modern communications technology to set up televised public debate (Arterton, 1987).

Third, leaders can facilitate deliberation by encouraging members to observe the norms and laws that the demos has adopted. In the case of egregious or repeated violations of rules, this can amount to enforcement (Sheeran, 1983; Starhawk, 1986). In a large, parliamentary group, for instance, the chairperson might keep the group within the version of *Robert's Rules of Order* that the group has adopted. (For a more extensive discussion of facilitation, see Anderson & Robertson, 1985; Arnold et al., 1991; Center for Conflict Resolution, 1977; Haiman, 1951; Lakey, 1976; Maier, 1952; Kettering Foundation, 1990.)

Maintaining healthy emotional settings and member relationships is a similar and equally important function of democratic leadership. It may seem far afield from democracy, but democratic deliberation requires (or, at the very least, is greatly aided by) positive member relationships and a prevailing spirit of congeniality (Barber, 1984, Barber & Watson, 1988; Gastil, 1992a, 1993a; Mansbridge, 1983; Mathews, 1988).

Groups with good member relationships are replete with leaders who appreciate this often neglected dimension of deliberation. Some leaders may take the initiative to introduce and assimilate persons new to the group (Starhawk, 1986). For example, a leader in a neighborhood council might visit or send an invitation to a family that moves into the area. Leaders can also help strengthen or repair existing relationships among members of the demos (Desjardins, 1991). In a small group, this could mean tactfully bringing up conflicts that are gradually building up group tension (Lakey, 1976; Starhawk, 1986) or mediating a conflict that has come to the surface (Sheeran, 1983).

Democratic leaders can sustain the emotional health of a demos by trying to create a sense of excitement or vitality in the group (Tead, 1935). On a national level, a leader might deliver a moving speech that sparks a public's willingness to deliberate upon and solve a pressing social problem. Democratic leaders can also contribute to the development of a warm, permissive setting conducive to open and honest communication (Desjardins, 1991; Haiman, 1951; Maier, 1952; White & Lippitt, 1960). In the case of a newly formed small group, leaders could ask each group member to introduce themselves for a minute before beginning deliberation, relaxing more anxious group members by accustoming them to speaking in the group.

At this point, it should be apparent how these functions relate to the creation and development of democracy, but it may be helpful to review these connections. The distribution of responsibility relates to notions of a citizen's rights and duties. For instance, if a community takes responsibility for its own welfare, its members affirm their right to self-determination, and they simultaneously accept their duties as citizens to devote a portion of their energies to the governance of their community. Member empowerment makes citizens or group members stronger — more capable of participating as equals in politics and the other spheres of their lives. Finally, a strong demos requires collective deliberation, and democratic leadership plays a crucial role in ensuring productive discussion and open debate.

The Distribution of Leadership

No single leader could possibly perform all of these functions, and since all functions must be served within a fully democratic group or organization, it is necessary to have multiple leaders (NACLO, 1984). One might argue that diffusing leadership functions in this way would make a group leaderless, but as Starhawk (1986) explains, "Such groups are not, in reality, leaderless." Instead, they are " 'leaderful' — everyone in the group feels empowered to start or stop things, to challenge others or meet challenges, to move out in front or to fall back" (p. 270; also see Counselman, 1991). In the ideal demos, more than one person serves every leadership function, no individual does an inordinate amount of the leading, and every group member performs leadership functions some of the time.

Sometimes, different leaders play different roles, with some inspiring the demos and others moderating its discussions and debates (Barber, 1984). In most cases, it is possible to rotate leadership functions among the membership so that individual members become capable of serving a variety of leadership functions (Brown & Hosking, 1986; Starhawk, 1986). For example, in the housing cooperative where the author resided for 2 years, the responsibility of facilitator is rotated biweekly among all resi-

dents. By the end of a given year, almost every resident has developed the ability to facilitate a small democratic meeting.

Democratic Followers

Even when leadership is widely distributed and roles are regularly reversed, some members lead while others follow at any given point in time. "Leadership and followership are linked concepts, neither of which can be comprehended without understanding the other" (Heller & van Till, 1982, p. 405; also see Hollander, 1992). Therefore, it is necessary to specify the responsibilities of democratic followers.

First, as a complement to the first function of democratic leadership, democratic followers must be willing to take responsibility for the well-being of the demos. Counterbalanced with freedom is an "emphasis on the responsibility of the individual to cooperate with the group" and ensure its welfare (White & Lippitt, 1960, p. 2). Democratic followers do not blindly accept burdens given them by leaders, but they remain open to leaders' requests that they take on greater responsibility.

Second, followers must be accountable for their actions and decisions (Mathews, 1988). For example, members of a democratic community might disagree with a collective decision. Although they might feel free to continue to speak out against the decision, only in the case of conscientious objection would they obstruct or violate a democratically established policy (Barber, 1984; White & Lippitt, 1960).

Third, followers are ultimately responsible for maintaining their autonomy. Undemocratic leaders might remove followers' freedom against their will, but freedom can also be given away or taken for granted (Fromm, 1965). Followers must regularly exercise their liberties and recognize, cherish, and guard their autonomy (Barber, 1984; Lassey, 1971; Tead, 1935).

The fourth responsibility of a follower is to recognize the ways in which they can function as leaders. They should strive to develop their leadership skills, viewing themselves as citizens capable of both leading and following others. In an ideal demos, follower and leader are roles that individuals constantly exchange by the minute, month, or year.

Finally, when playing the role of follower, members of the demos must be willing to work with those who are leading. Rejecting individual leaders due to their incompetence or undemocratic behavior is justified, but entirely rejecting the notion of democratic leadership can undermine the democratic goals of a group (Baker, 1982; Freeman, 1975; Kowalewski, 1983; Mansbridge, 1983; Nagel, 1987). At the same time, followers should avoid exploiting or adulating democratic leaders (Nagel, 1987). The demos should be appreciative and supportive of leaders who make valuable con-

tributions to the group (Smith, 1926; Starhawk, 1986}, but "to remain truly democratic," the demos must also be "the watchdog of its own leadership" (Kutner, 1950, p. 462).

Appropriate Settings

Having defined democratic leadership and followership, it is necessary to state more precisely when and where this model is appropriate. When is this form of leadership appropriate for an international association, a nation, a corporation, a public university, a neighborhood, or a social group? As Verba (1961) argues, "There is no one best leadership structure. What structure is best must depend upon the group setting, task, and membership — in short, upon the total situation" (p. 243).

This notion parallels contingency theories of leadership effectiveness. Contingency or situational theorists seek to identify the variables that determine which of a variety of leadership modes is most appropriate in a given situation (Fiedler, 1967; Fiedler & Garcia, 1987; Field, Read, & Louviere, 1990; Hersey & Blanchard, 1975; Vroom & Jago, 1988). This section does not propose a rigid contingency theory, but it does presume that certain moral and pragmatic issues are relevant to deciding whether or not to pursue democracy and democratic leadership.

As for the ethics of democracy, Dahl (1989) argues that the democratic process is morally justified if one presumes that "the good or interests of each person must be given equal consideration" and "all members are sufficiently well qualified" to make collective decisions on their behalf (or, at least, none are definitely more qualified to do so) (pp. 85, 97-98, 100). Focusing on democratic management in business, Sashkin (1984) suggests that participatory decision-making process is an ethical imperative when it is at least as efficient and productive as more autocratic methods and workers desire a participatory process. It is justified over equally efficient processes because it uniquely satisfies basic human needs — power, achievement, and affiliation — that are essential for the physical and psychological health of workers.

Some situations, however, do not call for democratic methods of decision making and leadership. Heifetz and Sinder (1987) acknowledge that the democratic process is inappropriate when a problem is clearly defined and has a straightforward technical solution. The authors use a medical analogy to illustrate their point. In the case of a broken wrist, "the patient's expectations that the doctor can provide a solution are realistic and the problem situation can be defined, treated, and cured using the doctor's expertise and requiring very little work on the part of the patient" (p. 185).

Nevertheless, Heifetz and Sinder demonstrate that few large-scale public problems are so straightforward and technical.

Haiman (1951) also identifies types of problems that make a democratic process unnecessary. The author explains that there are times the demos should turn to an executive or a judge. "The function of the executive-leader, or administrator, is to translate verbal policies into action" (p. 66). This may mean implementing a policy or enforcing a law enacted by the demos. Of course, the demos has ultimate authority over the actions of the executive, but even a small, direct democracy will frequently assign the implementation of a task to a particular member or committee, giving them a measure of executive power. Judges serve the demos by interpreting the details of the decisions of the demos. Like executives, they must remain accountable, but just as individual citizens sometimes agree to binding arbitration, so might a democratic society give provisional power to judges and juries.

Finally, Maier (1952) points out that the democratic process is not appropriate "if the group is indifferent to a problem or its solution" (p. 198). Also, the problem under consideration must be within the jurisdiction of the demos. This latter consideration is more complicated than it appears on first glance. It asks whether the existing democratic unit is more justified than any other possible unit. This is a thorny question in almost any setting, for a group's decisions almost always affect people outside the group, revealing the interconnection of all existing (and hypothetical) political units. (For a straightforward attempt to address this issue, see Dahl, 1989.)

Figure 1 integrates these considerations into a decision-tree, listing and ordering the questions one must ask in determining the appropriateness of democracy and democratic leadership. Starting at the trunk of the decision tree, one first assesses the nature of the problem. If the problem involves only one person, an autonomous decision can be reached. While one might wish to consult others, a collective decision-making process is not necessary.

If the problem involves merely implementing or working out the details of a previous decision, an executive (or judicial) decision-making process is in order. If the problem is of no concern to group members, an executive decision might be in order.

However, note the question within the first oval, "Might the problem matter to group members if they discussed it?" This question asks one to consider the possibility that members of a group would care about a problem if they had the information or insight required to understand It. This question (like the other two questions within ovals) views the decision-making process as a means for changing the mindset or character of the

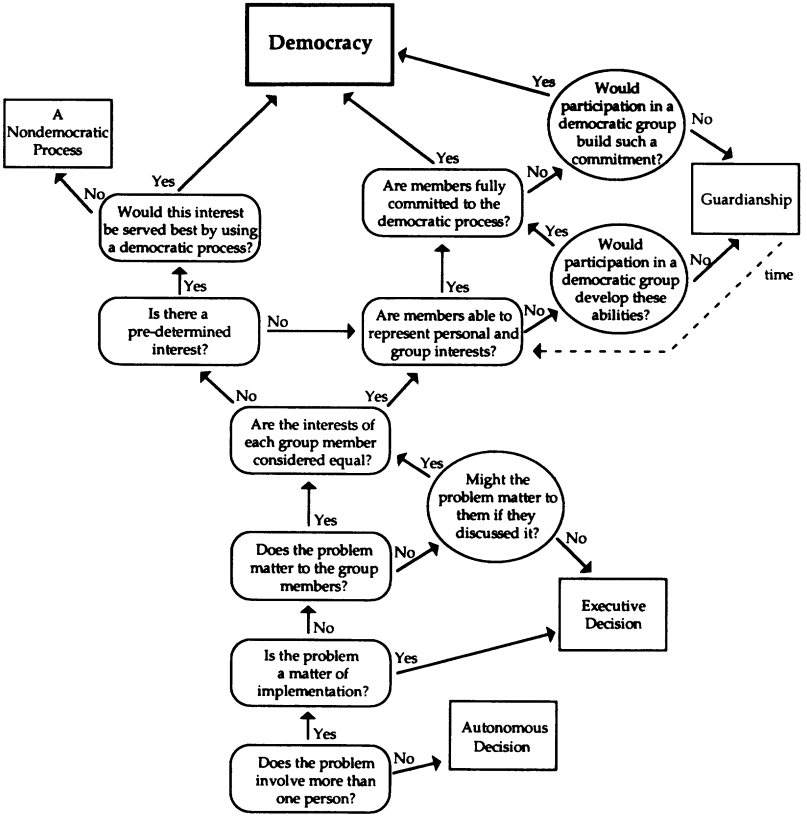

Fig. 1. Decision tree for democracy and democratic leadership.

membership. It asks one to take into account the dynamic quality of the discussion process (see Barber, 1984; Fishkin, 1991; Yankelovich, 1991).

If one determines that the problem is a serious matter of concern to the group as a whole, the decision-tree then poses the most difficult question: "Are the interests of each group member considered equal?" This is not a factual question, but a moral or ethical one. A *no* answer to this question implies that for some reason, certain members' interests should be favored over others' . A *yes* means that each member's interests should be weighed equally in making a decision. Does a factory worker have the right to play a role in management or earn a share of company profits? What rights do students and parents have to shape public school curriculums? Are the interests of family members considered equal for all family decisions? Questions such as these are often difficult to answer, but they

must be addressed (e.g., Cohen, 1988; Dahl, 1989; Gutman, 1987; Pateman, 1970, 1983).

If the interests of group members are considered unequal, the individual with exclusive authority might still have no pre-determined interest. If a pre-determined goal *does* exist, one simply employs the decision-making process that best realizes that goal (on the productivity and satisfaction of democratic leadership, see Bass, 1990; Gastil, in press).

When the interests of all group members are considered equal, different questions arise. If group members are not, at present, the best representatives of their own interests or incapable of effectively participating in democratic deliberations, one must consider whether participation in democratic decision making might develop the requisite deliberative competencies (Barber, 1984; Pateman, 1970; Warren, 1992).

If group members cannot "learn by doing," guardianship may be the best form of decision making (see Dahl, 1989). The term "guardian" is more commonly used in the case of minors or mentally incapacitated individuals — people who may require an adult to take responsibility for seeing that their best interests are served (for a critical view, see Iris, 1990).

More generally, groups have goals other than democracy, such as member satisfaction, cohesion, and productivity at some group task. If a group holds one of these goals above democracy, it might choose to appoint a group member or hire a non-member to make a particular decision for them. In effect, the group decides that a provisional guardian will better serve their interests than they would if they acted as a democratic group.

In the event that guardianship is considered optimal, it important to note the dashed line on the decision tree that moves away from guardianship. This line suggests that with the passage of time, one needs to reexamine the characteristics of the membership. Ideally, a system of guardianship develops the skills and character of its members. This idea underlies the guardian authority of teachers and mentors, many of whom strive to make their students or apprentices fully capable and independent.

If group members are capable of democratic activity but do not value democracy, there is still the danger that they might subvert the democratic process, willfully or carelessly using it to pursue undemocratic ends. Again, one needs to ask if democratic values might emerge through participation in democracy. If one decides that such values could emerge, it is important to gauge whether they would develop *in time* — before the process was subverted. If the danger of subversion remains too high, guardianship may be more appropriate.

If these questions lead one to conclude that democracy and democratic leadership are appropriate, the last question is whether or not time permits deliberation. If time pressure requires an immediate decision, the

group can quickly vote, but such a situation is far from optimal (Gastil, 1993a). If time permits deliberation, then the group can go through a fully democratic decision-making process, eventually arriving at a decision.

AN ILLUSTRATION: THE NATIONAL ISSUES FORUMS

At this point, it may be useful to illustrate the above model of democratic leadership. This is done through a description of the National Issues Forums (NIF), an excellent case study in democratic leadership. NIF is a program developed by the Kettering Foundation that aims to revitalize the political system in the United States, making it more democratic through improving the quality of public deliberation. A summary of qualitative research on the Forums suggests that they have proven somewhat effective at changing both individuals and communities (Dedrick, 1991).

Across the country, hundreds of convenors (individuals and private or public organizations) use "issue books" created by the Kettering Foundation that present three or four policy directions or "choices" on current national issues. Convenors distribute these booklets and other materials to organizations or community members, then hold large forums or small study circles to discuss the issues. NIF provides citizens an opportunity to engage in national policy debates, often changing the way they view their role in politics, their relationship with other citizens, and their views on national issues (McAfee, McKenzie, & Mathews, 1991).

A number of individuals and organizations involved in the NIF program have served as democratic leaders at various times. At a national level, the Kettering Foundation has encouraged citizens to take responsibility for setting the direction of national policies on issues such as health care, drugs, and affirmative action. The Foundation has told citizens (and policymakers) that only the citizenry can provide "public knowledge"—only "the people" can tell us "whether issues have been framed so as to engage what really concerns the public" and "*why* the public thinks what it does" (McAfee et al., 1991, p. 30).

NIF convenors, and those who assist them, are also serving an empowerment function by encouraging citizens to develop their political abilities and take on leadership roles. Those attending forums are expected to participate constructively, providing ideas, information, critical thinking, and moral insight. Participants are asked to facilitate themselves, discussing challenging and emotionally-charged issues in a thoughtful and respectful manner. After forums, enthusiastic participants are sometimes encouraged to go a step further, leading other forums or conveying the fruits of forums to policymakers (Kettering Foundation, 1990; McAfee et al., 1991).

The convenors and forum moderators also serve the facilitative function of democratic leadership. They serve as community-wide facilitators by bringing people together and setting up a framework for public discussion, and the one or two individuals who moderate each forum facilitate the face-to-face discussions themselves. These moderators also attempt to maintain a healthy relational and emotional atmosphere, for one of the purposes of NIF is to improve the relationships that exist among citizens (Kettering Foundation, 1990).

The democratic leadership involved in NIF is widely distributed among organizations and individuals, and efforts are made to increase the number of leaders. The leadership that makes NIF successful often originates in people who are already strong leaders in various capacities, but the Kettering Foundation and regional NIF convenors hold a series of Public Policy Institutes designed to develop the knowledge and abilities of potential NIF convenors and moderators. Locally, former NIF participants are sometimes trained to become moderators of future forums. Within the forums and study circles themselves, all participants are encouraged to play brief but essential leadership roles by encouraging one another and actively participating in discussions (Kettering Foundation, 1990).

Those who follow these leaders do so in a democratic manner. The relationship between the Kettering Foundation and the NIF convenors is one of respect; it is not characterized by rejection, exploitation, or adulation. Convenors take responsibility for conducting the forums themselves, cherish their autonomy, and take on leadership roles. Convenors generally appreciate the work of the Foundation, but they assess its materials and ideas critically and usually adapt them to suit their own purposes.

Taken all around, the different levels of the NIF program illustrate the different facets of democratic leadership and show the model's applicability to a wide range of social scales.

QUESTIONS FOR FUTURE INQUIRY

The definition presented in this essay is useful by itself, as it suggests a clear model of leadership for both theorists and practitioners. Nevertheless, important questions regarding democratic leadership remain: What is an adequate *operational* definition of democratic leadership? What are the effects of democratic leadership? What are the obstacles to democratic leadership? And how do we overcome or confront these barriers?

The first question acknowledges that the definition outlined in this essay is a "nominal" definition, as opposed to an "empirical" or "operational" definition (Chaffee, 1991). This essay has taken an essential first step, but it does not provide the level of detail necessary for making reliable

observations regarding the presence/absence of democratic leadership or the amount present in a given setting at a given time.

As for the second question, a large body of experimental and field research exists on the effects of various definitions and operationalizations of democratic vs. autocratic leadership (Anderson, 1959; Bass, 1990; Gastil, in press; Gibb, 1969). Based on these studies, one might guess that the model of democratic leadership presented in this essay will prove both satisfying and productive, but these conclusions are speculative due to conceptual and methodological inconsistencies in past research. What previous studies unambiguously demonstrate is that investigators should carefully select their operations, measures, and study settings. Doing so will make their conclusions more persuasive and, ultimately, facilitate the integration of their findings.

The third and fourth research questions also correspond to a set of suggestive data. Since democratic leadership and democracy go hand-in-hand, obstacles to the latter are obstacles to the former. Previous writings on democracy suggest that the democratic model of leadership surely faces political, economic, and social barriers that exist in the status quo (e.g., Barber, 1984; Cohen & Rogers, 1983; Dahl, 1989; Gastil, 1992b, 1993a,b; Herman & Chomsky, 1988; Mansbridge, 1973; Pateman, 1970; Rothschild-Whitt, 1979; Schwartz, 1986).

Previous writings on democracy and democratic leadership suggest that people often reject this form of leadership for at least four reasons. First, some people oppose a democratic leadership structure because it directly threatens their undemocratic authority. Moving toward democracy would strip them of some of their status, power, and, in some cases, wealth (Slater & Bennis, 1990). Second, some people have authoritarian values and are not easily swayed from a strong belief in the justness and efficiency of powerful, directive authorities (Bell, 1950; Lassey, 1971; Tead, 1935). Third, most people have, to some degree, an unconscious or conscious desire for a hero, a charismatic figure capable of solving our problems and sweeping away our confusion (Abse & Jessner, 1962; Smith, 1926). Finally, some reject the notion of democratic leadership for the opposite reason, having no faith whatsoever in leaders of any kind and no belief in their necessity (Nagel, 1987; Tead, 1935).

Overcoming these barriers to democratic leadership requires changing the way people think about themselves and leadership. It is difficult to cause people to change their undemocratic attitudes and behavior patterns (Smith, 1926). Changing views and habits requires nurturing the sense of self-responsibility and self-confidence that give rise to a desire for, or acceptance of, democratic procedures (Gastil, 1992c; Heifetz & Sinder, 1987; Lassey, 1971). People must develop a greater sense of trust in themselves

and others (Lassey, 1971) and come to believe that all people are potential leaders (Tead, 1935). Respect for critical inquiry must flourish, with citizens seeking the better argument rather than the better orator (Slater & Bennis, 1990; Smith, 1926).

Structural changes might also lead to the development of more democratic values and behaviors. Democratic leadership, like democracy itself, grows better in some social, economic, and political environments than in others. Democratic leadership may flourish where there exists a free press, a relatively egalitarian family structure, a relatively prosperous economy, and a wealth of personal freedoms (Dahl, 1989; Slater & Bennis, 1990; Tucker, 1981).

In conclusion, there is reason to believe that the democratic style of leadership may become more widely understood and practiced. In the last quarter century, democracy has witnessed both progress and regression (Slater & Bennis, 1990), and democratic leadership may experience similar cycles. More directly, Lippitt (1983) identifies a number of promising trends in the 1970s and early 1980s that are probably still present today: expectations of shared power and responsibility are increasing; there is a greater degree of collaboration and communication; and people have an increasing awareness of the need for organizational openness and flexibility.

Although other trends may go against democratic leadership, the prevailing winds are favorable. Moreover, if democratic leadership spreads through economic, political, and cultural networks, it may make people even more prepared for democratic social change, making democratic leadership increasingly viable. Of course, this will not come to pass without the efforts of the millions who believe in the value of democratic leadership. It is the hope of the author that this essay might inspire some readers to become one among those millions.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The first draft of this essay was made possible by a research assistantship at the Kettering Foundation, and I would like to thank the Foundation staff for its assistance.

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