**Relations industrielles
Industrial Relations**

Participative Decision-Making in a Consultative Committee Context
Le processus de la participation aux décisions dans les conseils consultatifs

Malcolm Warner

See table of contents

Explore this journal

Cite this article

Article abstract

This paper attempts to look at consultative participation, in a British setting, of bodies on which trade union « representatives » sit at the national level, together with committee members from other industrial interest-groups, government departments and independents.

Participative Decision-Making in a Consultative Committee Context

Malcolm Warner

This paper attempts to look at consultative participation, in a British setting, of bodies on which trade union « representatives » sit at the national level, together with committee-members from other industrial interest-groups, government departments and independents.

INTRODUCTION

A recent paper has observed that « no system has achieved effective participation at *all three levels* of the industrial system, i.e. below, within and above the plant. Only in Britain has consultative participation been firmly established at the industrial and national levels, but little progress is being made in this direction in Yugoslavia, and not much has been accomplished in West Germany » (King and Van de Vall, 1969 : 17).

This paper attempts to look at *consultative participation*, in a British setting, of bodies on which trade union « representatives » sat at the national level, together with committee-members from other industrial interest-groups, (such as employers' trade associations), Government departments and independents. Equal numbers of these four categories were involved, plus an independent chairman who was in all cases *not* a trade union figure. (These were about the same size as the average for Workers' Councils in Yugoslavia, to which passing reference will be made). The British consultative committees studied, operated at national industrial level and consisted in most cases, of twenty three members, which was « between 20 and 22 » (Blumberg, 1968 : 198). The organization set sampled, comprised of *twenty-one* committes and

WARNER, M., Professor, The Joint Graduate Programme, The Administrative Staff College & Brunel University, England.

additional working parties. The researcher directly observed the preceedings of *nine* committees, but data from observations in most of the other committees' meetings was available and was incorporated into the research findings. Anonymity of sources had been preserved throughout, as promised to the respondents : in addition, it was agreed that specific ratings or score would not be reported for individual participants or committees, for reasons of confidentiality. It is hoped that this paper will be useful in suggesting ways in which group cohesion may be improved in the representative bodies involved in industrial enterprises, *and* at other levels above the firm (say at national level) where participative consultation takes place. We hope to shed light on the questions of numbers involved in participative consultation sitting on committees and the degree of *representation*, and *conflict-resolution*, and how far this can be affected by *different leadership-styles* of Committee Chairmen.

The study of effective group processes has taken into consideration a wide variety of committees in recent experience. A degree of conformity to group norms might be considered necessary for smooth functioning, but what are the necessary conditions for group cohesion, and how are these specifically applicable to *participative consultation*, in a public setting ? Integration, one view has suggested, is a very important aspect of the problem : —

> « The necessity for integration in any social system arises from the differentiation among its various elements. Most importantly there is a differentiation among subgroups and among individual positions, together with the roles that flow therefrom.
> A committee faces the problem, how shall these diverse elements be made to mesh together or function in support of one another? No political system (or subsystem) is perfectly integrated; yet no political system can survive without some minimum degree of integration among its differentiated parts.
>
> Committee integration is defined as the degree to which there is a working together or meshing together or mutual support among its roles and subgroups. Conversely, it is also defined as the degree to which a committee is able to minimize conflict among its roles and its subgroups, by heading off or resolving the conflicts that arise. A concomitant of integration is the existence of a fairly consistent set of norms, widely agreed upon and widely followed by the members. Another concomitant of integration is the existence of control mechanisms (i.e. socialization and sanctioning mechanisms) capable of maintaining reasonable conformity to norms. In other words, the more highly integrated a committee, the smaller will be the gap between expected and actual behaviour ». (Fenno, 1962: 310-324).

The question of integration cannot, however, be separated from the problem of group size which can be very relevant to the decision-making processes involved. We shall firstly briefly consider its relevance, before developing our analysis of consultative committee interaction. It has recently been argued that the « greater effectiveness of relatively small groups — the 'privileged' and 'intermediate' groups is evident from observation and experience as well as theory ». (Olson, 1965 : 53). Indeed « organizations so often turn to the small group ; committees, sub-committees, and small leadership groups are created, and once created they tend to play a crucial role ». (1965 : 53) We would hypothesize that the larger and less homogeneous the group, the greater the problem of achieving group integration and/or effectiveness, whatever the goals involved. Earlier research had suggested that « action-taking » groups and sub-groups tend to be much smaller than their « non-action-taking » counterparts. (1965 : 54). In one sample cited, the average size of the « action-taking » sub-group was 6.5 members, whereas the average size of the « non action-taking » counterpart was 14. (1965 : 54) It has also been suggested that performance in group of 5 was better than in those of 12 — and that « small, centripetally organized groups usually call on and use all their energies while in large groups forces remain much oftener potential ». (1965 : 54)

It does not follow, however, that larger committees are necessarily at a disadvantage because of their size, which is greater than that pointed out in the research above for action-taking, because they can often divide into working parties and sub-committees. These are always smaller than the total committee, and the size of the larger committees may reflect the fact that they are not designed to carry out executive functions themselves. We would hypothesize that formal sub-grouping assists group integration, at the very least, where large committees are involved, and where the representation of broad interests produced membership bloc heterogeneity, which may hold for the bodies studied, and indeed also for the governing councils of self-managing enterprises.

SIZE AND GROUP FUNCTIONING

There is a good deal of evidence that groups larger than a handful of individuals cannot take decisions promptly, even though this may be in their mutual interest. On the whole, the size of consultative committees we reasoned (as we began our field-work), seems to be governed by two requirements which pull in opposite directions. First, that they

should be sufficiently representative of the interests involved and, secondly that their membership should be such as to give them access to the « organized channels of communication ». A drastic reduction in the size of the committees would probably cut them off from some important sources of information, lead to the charge that they were no longer representative, and make them dependent on fewer, and possibly less effective, means of communication.

The current research reported here on the twenty or so committees examined suggests that consultative bodies of the type studied are too large to effectively carry out detailed work, and it is presumably for this reason that the working party system has developed (c.f. on Yugoslav Workers' Commissions, see Gorupic & Paj, 1970 : 13). As Fenno notes : « If one considers the main activity of a political system to be decision-making, the acid test of its internal integration is its capacity to make collective decisions without flying apart in the process. Analysis of committee integration should focus directly, therefore, upon its sub-groups and the roles of its members ». (Fenno, 1962 : 363).

Working parties and such sub-groups it can be argued give the benefits of the division of labour, concentration on a specific task, small size, greater flexibility of membership, selection based on expertise, in addition to which their members often give up considerably more time to work than a member who is not involved in a working party and simply attends the meetings of the full committee. This does not mean, however, that the committees are simply « rubber stamps » giving a formal seal of approval to whatever their working parties produce. They have a number of important functions. Logically, the first function of committees is to decide upon a programme of work. No matter how an issue is raised, before any action is taken the committee must assess its priorities and make a decision about the type of problem it thinks worth takling. That this is a real decision is indicated by the diversity of such problems which the committees examine and the work they do. A second function, following from the first, is to decide how to takle the problem, whether by a desk study carried out by staff, by a working party drawing on experts from « outside » as well as from inside under the direction of a steering committee.

Whichever method is chosen, there is an obligation for consultative committees as a whole to monitor their progress. Finally, the committee must receive a report, consider it, decide whether to approve it or not, and then decide in what form it should be « made public » and to whom

its contents should be communicated. We must next, therefore, look at
the decision-making process itself.

CO-ORDINATING COUNCILS AND CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEES

A recent study of Coordinating Councils at the urban level in U.S.
setting has developed a theoretical framework which is directly relevant
to the present analysis of consultative committee meetings. (Mott, 1968).
The relationship between the organizations represented on the Council
were a mixture of co-operation, competition and conflict. The strategy
adopted by the Council to secure greater coordination was to identify
and deal with areas of mutual interest and to avoid as far as possible
areas of conflict. The Council proceeded according to a « norm of
unanimity ». (Feno, 1962 : 367). The relevant hypothesis to be extracted
is that this strategy and *modus operandi* developed because the conse-
quence of internal conflict for the work of the Council would have been
very damaging and might even have threatened its survival. (1962 : 367).
There is clear similarity between this theoretical model and the way
in which consultative committees function. The latter are also involved
in securing cooperation among diverse bodies which are usually inter-
dependent. *They depend for their effectiveness on voluntary cooperation
and persuasion, because they have neither the resources nor the au-
thority to secure compliance.* (Here there is a contrast with councils in
self-managing enterprises). Manifest conflicts occur surprisingly infre-
quently, and when they do even the most trivial incidents are dealt with
in the most circumspect way. The implication is that the group members
feel that if they are to move at all, they must move together and they
fully recognise the likely effects on the committees of incautiously tack-
ling controversial questions. Of course, conflict cannot be completely
eliminated or precisely anticipated and, since it cannot be suppressed
if it does arise, there must be some way of relatively controlling and
channelling it. In effect, the search for consensus by the Chairmen
allowed the norm of unity to function meaningfully. (Edelstein & Warner,
1971 : 179-188).

Conflict is regulated in two ways, by the intervention of the Chair-
men, and by the acceptance by all participants of the « norm of unanim-
ity » mentioned earlier. When a Chairman intervenes in a meeting to
mitigate conflict, he often does this by using arguments which embody
the values underlying the consultative process. It is sometimes argued
that committees should face up to conflicts directly, rather than approach

controversial questions in more round-about ways. What this argument overlooks is that the context does *not* provide the conditions for conflict resolutions ; there is no basis of joint-control either (c.f. the Yugoslav case described in Rus, 1970, 148 : 160). This, has been argued, requires the intervention of some external authority or a recognition by the participants of overriding mutual interests which can form the basis for bargaining among them. (Boulding, 1962). Of course, areas of mutual interest are often not immediately apparent. The views of group members must be discovered, and the measure of their support for work in this area must be gauged before embarking on a study. Subsequently, their interest and involvement in it must be maintained and, finally, their commitment will influence the degree to which the outcomes are accepted. Discussion of topics such as these inevitably raises questions of leadership and participation, to which we will next turn as crucial factors in the group integration process.

LEADERSHIP STYLE AND COMMITTEE INTEGRATION

A systematic discussion of leadership necessarily requires a clear analytical framework and a precise concept of what leadership involves for a wide range of cases. Recent research on leadership styles provides a possible approach. (Fiedler, 1967 : 498-503). This defines leadership as « a personal relationship in which one person directs, co-ordinates and supervises others in the performance of a common task » ; it suggests that the « style » in which leadership functions may be performed varies between two extremes. At one extreme the leader may « tell people what to do and how to do it ». At the other extreme he may «share his leadership responsibilities with his group members and involve them in the planning and execution of the task ». (1967 : 498-503). There are, of course, various degrees of leadership style between these two extremes, and there is research evidence which suggests that in some circumstances each style is associated with appropriate group performance. The crucial question is how to identify the specific *situations* to which different leadership styles are suited. It has, in fact, been suggested that there are three major situational variables which affect the ease or difficulty of securing cooperation from a group ; leader-member relations, task structure and the leader's position power (1967 : 498-503). Leader-member relations are considered to be the most important variable. It would certainly be useful if someone carried out empirical work on a range of self-managing enterprises to see how far these factors affected decision-making in Workers' Councils, although

Adizes (1971) has looked at the leadership variable in two Yugoslav firms. The degree to which group members trust and like the leader, in Fiedler's view, has a strong influence on how willing they are to accept guidance and initiatives from him. *Observation of meetings suggests that consultative committees range fairly widely from those which have relatively good leader-member relations to those in which the relations are relatively poor.* In some committees there appeared to be few reservations about allowing the chairmen and officials discretion to initiate action.

The next most important relevant variable we studied is the degree of « task structure », the degree to which the task of the group is clearly defined and the means of achieving its goals. A task which can be presented to members as clearly defined enables the leader to exert influence more effectively than a vaguely defined or ambiguous task. Again, the committees which we observed varied in the degree to which their tasks were « structured ». At different stages of its development or in different areas of its work, the tasks which committees face may vary in the degree to which they are clearly specified. One of the reasons for this is that to a considerable extent consultative committees are *within limits* « self-governing », and it was evident in the meetings that it is sometimes difficult for them to decide on the areas in which they should work and how to tackle the problems. When they have made up their minds what to do, the tasks are then more clearly specified. Third, the powers associated with the leader's position itself have an impact on his influence. If a leader has the power to decide on the membership of his group or the power to allocate resources on behalf of the group, he is in a stronger position than one who does not, for example. Consultative committee Chairmen were observed to have few powers of this kind, and in general their « positive power » is low. The leader also operates as a gate-keeper, and may be instrumental in building a *consensus*. Indeed, a « major problem is that while some voluntary associations, such as unions, use formal voting systems in committees, many business and administrative organizations (such as consultative bodies) do not, and prefer to use informal ways of seeking consensus. These have the virtue of simplicity, speed and scope for the leardership of the chairman or leading clique. In this sense, they are probably less democratic.

The informality of a voting system may be broken down conceptually into the decision-making and the pre decision-making phases. When the criteria for when a decision has been reached are well established

and invariably applied, the informal electoral system merges with one of the recognised formal systems and the effects of informality as such would seem negligible. However, in practice informal decision-making involves variable criteria, or perhaps ideal norms of majority rule or consensus with the point of attainment interpreted by a leader functioning as gate-keeper over the group process. At worst, there may be a manipulation of the group through false reports of group sentiment. In the normal course of informal group decision-making, one would expect numerous instances of misperception by group leaders in the direction of their own points of view.» (Edelstein & Warner, 1971 : 185-186).

Formally, the leaders of committees are in fact *independent* Chairmen, in so far as they are expected to have no material interest in the area of problem-solving with which their committees are concerned. In practice the formal position is modified first, because Chairmen are usually only appointed after very extensive soundings and consultations have been carried out to find people who are acceptable to all the sub-groups of the committee. Second, by the fact that in a few cases the Chairmen are, or have been, involved in some capacity in their own relevant organizational contexts. (In the self-managed enterprise, these would always be intra-organization). It sometimes seems that because of the difficulties involved in finding a man who does not arouse objections in one quarter or another, *acceptability rather than independence is the operative selection criterion.* Nevertheless, the process of appointment does give the Chairman some independence of his committee because it establishes his right of access to outside authority on behalf of his committee, should he think it necessary. From what has been said above, it would be mistaken to expect that a single leadership style would be appropriate to all consultative committees or even to the same one at different times. In practice, Chairman were observed to adapt their leadership styles to suit the conditions which prevail in their committees. It was not uncommon for Chairman to explicitly shift from a directive, active leadership style employed when dealing with relatively routine business, to a non-directive, conciliatory style in dealing with more important matters when there is a need to carry the members with him.

The leader's role was observed to be very flexible even in the *most* formal part of the pre-meeting « soundings out » of members or groups of members : « The peak of formality during the discussion phase of decision-making may be very informal indeed. There may be no pre-

arranged time or place for meetings, and once under way the discussion
may be subject to few if any rules, implicit or otherwise. In an organi-
zational society there are ordinarily rules which, if held in abeyance,
may nevertheless be appealed to ; for example, the rudiments of parlia-
mentary procedure. However, these are frequently not applied by what
is presumably mutual consent, again as interpreted by the group process
gatekeeper. One common semi-formal variant of parliamentary procedure
involves a Chairman who focuses discussion, recognizes discussants, dis-
courages digressions and lengthy discourses (presumably impartially)
all without encouraging formal 'motions' (formal proposals by individual
members for group action). The presentation of proposals is of key
importance, since it is difficult for the group to recognize what may
only be a speaker's passing thought (perhaps stated apologetically).
Thus, it would appear that the absence of rules for the calling of
meetings or the regulation of discussion would ordinarily favour the
policies and tenure of an established leadership, or at least of whœver
happened to be in control at the meeting ». (Edelstein & Warner, 1971 :
185-186). It is clear that many trade union executive committees for
example, overcome this by the use of very specific standing orders.

At a more general level, an attempt was made to assess the
predominant leadership styles adopted by Chairmen, and make an as-
sessment of the group-task situations to which they related. (Fiedler,
1967 : 498-503). Following this analytical framework outlined earlier,
marked variations in the predominant leadership styles in different
committees were not observed to be homogeneous, some being more
active and « directive », others « non-directive » and conciliatory. In
fact, there is a general but not invariable tendency towards a « non-
directive » conciliatory style of leadership in consultative committees.
This could be seen as being more appropriate for group integration. It
could be argued that some Chairmen do not adopt the leadership style
which was most relevant, but the fact that the « *discrepancies* » *are*
almost all in the same direction seem to rule out this explanation.
However, there is another reason behind the tendency of the Chairmen
to adopt « non-directive » conciliatory leadership styles, even when they
are « inappropriate ». This explanation is based partly on the way
consultative committees are composed and partly on the way they
operate. Because consultative committees consist of individuals drawn
from a variety of organizations and backgrounds, and because their
usefulness is conditional on keeping them together and integrated, there
is inevitably a need to be sensitive to differences that might emerge.

Moreover, Chairmen must take account of leaders of sub-groups in the committees. (Fenno, 1962 : 363). However, in some committees the pattern of leadership on all sides is reasonably easy to identify.

This pluralistic leadership pattern seems somewhat to simplify the task of Chairmen in managing the committee, and it was very evident in those meetings where the normal pattern of sub-group leadership breaks down that the Chairman feels unable to press the committee members to reach a decision.

The character of the committee leadership observed is reinforced by the way the work of the body is done. Not only are the leadership functions of planning, policy making etc., shared between the Chairman and the committee officials, but they are also shared with the Chairmen of Working Parties. (In Yugoslav firms, this would also be a common phenomena on the panoply of representative bodies). Because the independent members of the committees are often appointed to these positions, an extra dimension is added to the leadership structures of the committee. *Even if it might seem a more directive, controlling style of leadership would sometimes be more appropriate to the group-task situation in which a consultative body finds itself, it is clear that the pluralistic leadership structure common to all and deriving from their composition and method of working often constrains Chairmen to adopt a non-directive style.* (c.f. Adizes, 1971 : 48-49 on organizational pluralism in Yugoslav self-managing enterprises).

The analysis suggests that popular discussion of ways of increasing the « effectiveness » particularly of consultative committees by appointing « more dynamic » Chairmen is *seriously misleading.* It is misleading first of all because it does not take account of the processes of selection involved, which give the organizations associated with a consultative committee the opportunity to influence the final choice. But, more importantly it does not take account of the distribution of leadership functions within the committee itself, among the chairmen of Working Parties and between the officials and the Chairman. If the committees are to have a « consultative » role, then « integration » and not crude « effectiveness » is the key variable to be considered. « Participation » and « integration » are also inextricably related.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

A common criticism of consultative committees of the type observed is that they are too large and unwieldy to be *effective* problem-solving

instruments. As the ones described in this paper were the same size as the average Yugoslav Workers' Council this point could also be levelled at them. Research evidence suggests that smaller groups are indeed more efficient vehicles for complex detailed work. But to accept the criticism would be to misunderstand the nature and functions of the committees. Their size is determined by their *quasi-representative* character. (See Malles, 1971 : 17). Their functions include deciding on a programme of work, selecting ways of tackling specific problems, monitoring the progress of Working Parties and considering whether to accept their reports. *To satisfy these goals, adequate consultation and consensus are necessary conditions, and group integration is a prerequisite of both.* While, in practice, much of the detailed work was observed to be handled by Working Parties which are much smaller and more specialised than the full bodies, it would be wrong to conclude that the committees merely « rubber stamp » what their Working Parties produce.

One of the most interesting features of consultative meetings is the seriousness with which any signs of overt conflict were treated, and this is a very relevant point of comparison with earlier work. (Fenno, 1962 : 366-367). Even though the frequency of conflict was low, great care was taken to deal with trivial incidents openly and sympathetically. (c.f. Adizes, 1971 : 126-127). The implication to be drawn from this is that the participants regarded any sign of conflict as damaging to the performance and stability of the committees. It can be suggested that because they depend on voluntary co-operation, they must ensure that they approach controversial subjects with caution.

If this is so, then the argument that they are merely extensions of the bargaining processes is false. The context does not provide the conditions required for imposing or negotiating binding decisions in conflict or bargaining situations. Where broad inter-organizational integration is involved, unlike the United States Congressional Committee context, there is a greater need for intra-committee quiescence. The more heterogeneous the committee, the less it can sustain conflict bargaining.

Consultative committee members appear to accept a « norm of unanimity » whereby disagreement or controversy, when it does occur, is not reported either to the public or to a committee if it occurs in a Working Party. In this way the integrity of the committees is safeguarded against the effects of unproductive conflict at the price of limiting, to some degree, the areas in which they work.

It is often argued that consultative committees would benefit from more « dynamic » leadership. Observation of consultative bodies suggests that the dominant leadership style is conciliatory, supportive and non-directive (in all, reinforcing group integration) rather than active, directive and structuring, even though it might appear in some cases (at first sight at least) that the latter would produce better results. Apart from the fact that consultative committees are diffident about dealing with areas of conflict, this argument overlooks the degree to which leadership functions are usually shared. One may compare the above with an account of the Workers' Council meetings in a Yugoslav firm where an « appropriate » leadership style used by both the President of the Council (and the Director) produced consensus (see Adizes, 1971 : 127).

The broad conclusions, which other observers have reached about committee behaviour, seem to have been borne out in our observation of consultative committees. (see Fenno, 1962 : 366-367). Committee integration seems to be the key variable involved and this paper has attempted to link it to leadership style, a relationship not developed as fully in previous work.

The problems of committee integration involved are far greater than in the legislative context previously discussed. One common point, however, is that one of the consequences of high integration is that individuals and specific sub-groups have relatively restricted power to influence decisions, although they may have varying observed degrees of influence. (c.f. Adizes, 1971 : 249 concerning the Director's actual behaviour in Governing Board meetings in Yugoslav enterprises). The price of integration and the consensus (see Malles, 1971 : 33). For which it is a prerequisite, is to circumscribe « effectiveness » perceived in any « simpliste » manner. *Organizational maintenance is a primary, if not manifest, goal in the context.* Integration, as had been pointed out elsewhere, is a « stabilizing force » (Fenno, 1962 : 380). But consultative committee have less of a problem with respect to organizational survival from endogenous variables than from the exogenous ones, but the discussion of the latter is, however, beyond the boundaries of this paper.

One of the consequences of high integration is that individuals and specific sub-groups have relatively restricted *power* to affect decisions, although they have varying degrees of influence. If « effectiveness » is contingent on integration, then no group participating must feel ignored

or suppressed in any significant way. But this means that say the trade unions become a *de facto* « veto-group ».

In the type of participation discussed in this paper, any *one* sub-group can define the parameters of discussion and even possible decision-making. The « leader » can influence the degree to which this is done it is true, and the more conciliatory the Chairman say, the better.

The fact that workers' representatives sit on any kind of consultative or participative machinery *in itself* ensures that they can exercise a latent (or indeed manifest) function as a « veto-group ». This generalization would hold for the type of participative consultation discussed in this paper, (at one end of the spectrum) to that existing in say, a Yugoslav self-managed enterprise (at the other). Whether or not, the workers' representatives can *initiate* much is another question. The type of role the unions exercised in the committees studied was workers' « *control* » only in the French sense of the word, meaning to « check » things, (see Blumberg, 1968 : 192). The avoidance of conflict and the « norm of unanimity » however meant that they kept within mutually agreed parameters of discussion and decision-making.

Participation is not however necessarily a good thing *in itself*. It depends on who participates, where, how and on what terms. If trade unions are to participate in any social system, they must decide if the terms of reference of the committee will allow them to best achieve their goals. If they cannot impose or negotiate binding decisions in conflict or bargaining situations, then they may be doing no more than participating in a « talking-shop ». This may do little harm, and they may even exercise « veto-group » power in effect : — but it is not real participation. Anyway, participation is a necessary but not sufficient condition of « real » control. Nonetheless group integration is a pre-requisite for any kind of problem-solving, even for an effective « talking-shop ». Any kind of participative committee requires it, and there is an appropriate leadership style that best promotes it.

Thus, the conclusions regarding the group processes and leadership style discussed here would be very relevant to the effective functioning of consultative committees *at any point* along the spectrum of participation, whether in one socio-economic system or another, whether at plant, industry or national levels.

REFERENCES

ADIZES, I. (1971) *Industrial Democracy: Yugoslav Style. The Effect of Decentralization on Organizational Behaviour.* Graduate School of Business, Columbia University, and the Free Press, New York.

BLUMBERG, P. (1968) *Industrial Democracy: The Sociology of Participation,* Constable.

BOULDING, K.E. (1962) *Conflict & Defense: A General Theory,* Harper. New York.

EDELSTEIN, J.D. & WARNER, M. (1971) « Voting & Allied System in Group Decision-making », *Human Relations,* Vol. 24, No. 2, Spring 1971, pp 179-188.

FENNO, R.F. jr. (1962) « The House Appropriations Committee as a Political System », *American Political Science Review,* Vol. LVI, No. 2, June, pp. 310-324.

FIEDLER, F.D. (1967) « Styles of Leadership », in Hollander, E.P. and Hunt, R.G. (eds), *Current Perspectives in Social Psychology,* (O.U.P., New York).

GORUPIC, D. & PAJ, I. (1970) « Workers' Self-Management in Yugoslav Undertakings », paper read to Second World Congress, International Industrial Relations Association, September (Geneva).

KING, C.D. & VAN de VALL, M. (1969) « Dimensions of Participation in Managerial Decision-making », paper read to the Annual Meeting, Industrial Relations Research Association, December (New York).

MALLES, P. (1971) *Economic Consultatives Bodies: Their Origins and Institutional Characteristics,* Ottawa, Economic Council of Canada.

MOTT, G., (1968) *The Co-ordinating Council,* University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh.

OLSON, M. (1965) *The Logic of Collective Action,* Harvard, U.P. Cambridge, Mass.

RUS, V. (1970) « Influence Structure in Yugoslavian Enterprise », *Industrial Relations,* Vol. 9, February, pp. 148-160.

Le processus de la participation aux décisions dans les conseils consultatifs

L'auteur étudie dans cet article le processus de la participation aux décisions dans les conseils consultatifs institués dans l'industrie en Grande-Bretagne, mais, au cours de son exposé, il se réfère souvent à l'expérience des conseils ouvriers en Yougoslavie et à ce qui existe aussi aux États-Unis.

Il s'agit ici des conseils consultatifs industriels anglais, mieux connus sous le nom de conseils Whitley, dont font paritairement partie des représentants des

employeurs, des syndicats, des ministères intéressés et du public sous la direction d'un président indépendant. Ces conseils comptent de vingt à vingt-trois membres et l'étude a porté sur une vingtaine d'entre eux.

La première exigence à laquelle les conseils doivent répondre pour fonctionner normalement, c'est l'intégration de leurs membres, même s'ils viennent de milieux différents et d'organismes qui sont naturellement en conflit. Comment des éléments aussi divers peuvent-ils s'engrener? Aucun système politique ne peut être parfaitement intégré, mais aucun système politique ne peut survivre sans un degré minimum d'intégration de ses différentes parties. Il faut découvrir la formule qui permette au comité de restreindre au minimum les conflits et de résoudre ceux qui se soulèvent.

D'autre part, on ne peut séparer la question de l'intégration de l'importance numérique du conseil. De l'analyse qui a été faite, il ressort qu'un conseil est d'autant plus efficace que le nombre de ses membres est moins considérable. Un conseil fonctionne mieux s'il compte cinq membres que s'il en compte douze. Il ne s'ensuit pas nécessairement qu'un conseil soit désavantagé à cause de ses dimensions, parce qu'il est toujours possible de le subdiviser en sous-comités.

Il paraît évident que des groupes nombreux ne peuvent pas prendre des décisions aussi rapidement qu'une poignée d'individus. Au fond, les dimensions d'un comité doivent répondre à une double exigence: être suffisamment représentatifs des intérêts en jeu et être en mesure de donner accès aux divers canaux de communication. Une réduction draconienne de l'importance numérique d'un conseil peut le couper de ses sources d'information au point de lui enlever tout caractère vraiment représentatif.

Il découle, toutefois, des études qui ont été faites que les conseils consultatifs comptent trop de membres pour s'occuper des questions de détail et qu'il est nécessaire d'instituer des sous-groupes.

Les sous-groupes profitent des avantages de la division du travail; ils permettent à un nombre plus restreint de membres de consacrer leur activité à un travail précis et spécifique et d'y donner davantage de temps. Ceci ne veut pas dire que le conseil lui-même est inutile. Il peut remplir plusieurs fonctions dont la principale est assurément de tracer le programme de travail. Les autres consistent à cerner les problèmes, à suivre le cheminement du travail et, finalement, à étudier les rapports soumis par les sous-groupes, à les approuver et à décider s'ils doivent être communiqués au public.

La deuxième partie de l'article traite du processus de décision lui-même. Le système de relations qui s'établit à l'intérieur des conseils consiste en quelque sorte en une mixture de coopération, de concurrence et de conflit, d'où la nécessité d'une bonne coordination afin d'identifier les questions d'intérêt commun et d'éviter autant que possible les zones de conflit.

On applique généralement la règle de l'unanimité, cette stratégie permettant d'éviter les conséquences néfastes de conflits internes qui pourraient aller jusqu'à mettre la survivance du conseil en jeu. De fait, les conseils fonctionnent vraiment suivant cette théorie. Ceux-ci visent aussi à promouvoir la coopération parmi les

divers organismes qui sont habituellement interdépendants. L'efficacité des conseils dépend de la coopération volontaire et de la persuasion, parce qu'ils n'ont ni les moyens ni l'autorité de faire obéir les participants. De fait, les conflits manifestes sont fort rares et s'il s'en produit, on en dispose avec beaucoup de discrétion. Les organisations qui en font partie se rendent compte que si elles veulent exercer une action valable, elles de doivent d'agir ensemble.

Comme, cependant, tous les conflits ne peuvent être prévenus ni supprimés, il faut trouver des moyens de les contrôler et de les canaliser. Il y a deux façons de les régler, soit par l'intervention du président, soit par l'acceptation par tous les participants de la règle de l'unanimité. Généralement, le président fait appel aux raisons mêmes de l'existence des conseils pour atténuer les conflits, parce que les centres d'intérêt mutuel ne sont pas toujours apparents au niveau des discussions. Il importe donc de découvrir les points de vue des groupes en présence et d'apprécier l'intérêt qu'ils peuvent avoir pour un sujet avant d'en entreprendre l'étude.

Ceci soulève évidemment des problèmes de direction et de participation. Une définition du concept de *leadership* exige nécessairement une analyse approfondie de la structure des conseils. On peut définir le *leadership* comme un ensemble de rapports par lesquels une personne dirige, coordonne et supervise le travail d'autres personnes en vue de la réalisation d'une tâche commune. Le style de direction peut donc osciller entre deux pôles. À un extrême, le chef peut simplement dire aux gens quoi faire et comment faire; à l'autre, il peut partager ses responsabilités avec les participants et leur confier la planification et l'exécution de la tâche. La question capitale, c'est l'identification des situations particulières auxquelles peuvent se prêter différentes formes de *leadership*. On a décelé trois types de situations principales qui sont de nature à influencer la coopération à l'intérieur d'un groupe: les relations entre le directeur et les membres, la tâche à accomplir et les pouvoirs du chef.

Le degré de confiance des membres envers le chef a une grande influence sur l'acceptation de ses directives et de ses initiatives. L'observation des réunions permet de se rendre compte qu'il y a une différence marquée entre les conseils consultatifs dans lesquels les relations entre la direction et les membres sont bonnes et ceux où ces relations laissent à désirer.

Vient ensuite la question de la tâche à accomplir qui touche la façon dont celle-ci est définie et les moyens dont on dispose pour la mener à bien. Lorsqu'une action est présentée aux membres du conseil d'une manière limpide, elle permet au directeur d'exercer une influence plus efficace. Évidemment, les tâches à accomplir ne présentent pas toutes le même degré de clarté. Certaines apparaissent plus ou moins précises, plus ou moins nettement délimitées. La raison en est que les conseils consultatifs sont autonomes et qu'il est parfois difficile de choisir les questions qu'il convient d'étudier et de les bien cerner.

Enfin, les pouvoirs qui sont accordés à un chef ont un impact certain sur son influence. Si celui-ci a une autorité sur son groupe, s'il peut répartir les ressources au nom des membres, sa position est meilleure. On a observé que les présidents des conseils consultatifs ne disposent pas de pareils pouvoirs, ce qui

signifie que leur prestige est assez bas. Ils jouent un peu le rôle de garde-barrières. Contrairement à la procédure syndicale où l'on peut recourir au vote, les conseils consultatifs cherchent plutôt à trouver un consensus. En un sens, il s'agit d'un processus moins démocratique et il peut parfois exister une manipulation des conseils par l'exploitation des sentiments de groupe. Officiellement, les présidents des conseils sont indépendants du fait qu'ils n'ont aucun intérêt matériel dans les problèmes qui sont étudiés. En pratique, leur situation est bien différente, parce que les présidents sont désignés à la suite de sondages et de consultations de manière à découvrir des candidats qui soient acceptables à tous les groupements qui forment le conseil. En réalité, c'est souvent l'acceptabilité plutôt que l'indépendance qui est le critère déterminant de sélection.

En règle générale, le président adapte le style de son leaderschip aux conditions particulières des divers conseils. Les présidents agissent avec souplesse sans s'en rapporter à des règles de procédures strictes, ce qui ne les empêche pas d'orienter la discussion, de couper court aux digressions sans pour autant exiger des propositions formelles de la part de membres pris individuellement. La soumission des propositions est une affaire d'importance vitale, car il est toujours difficile à un groupe d'accepter ce qui ne peut être que l'expression d'opinion d'un membre. L'absence de règles fixes relatives à la convocation des assemblées et à la conduite des débats a tendance à favoriser l'installation d'un pouvoir permanent au sein de l'assemblée.

En résumé, on peut dire que c'est une forme d'autorité exercée par conciliation et par consensus qui prédomine, mais il y a une certaine variation d'un conseil à l'autre. Cette formule favorise l'intégration du groupe, et ceci s'impose d'autant plus que les conseils sont consultatifs et constitués de personnes qui appartiennent à des organisations disparates et parfois opposées. Dans bien des conseils, cette forme d'autorité pluraliste semble faciliter le rôle du président. De l'analyse qui a été faite, il ressort que la désignation de présidents plus dynamiques serait une erreur, parce qu'elle ne tiendrait pas compte du système de sélection utilisé et, surtout, de la répartition des fonctions entre les parties constituantes.

Que faut-il conclure de cette analyse? D'abord que les conseils consultatifs comptent trop de membres et qu'ils sont trop maniables pour être un instrument efficace de règlement des problèmes. Des conseils moins lourds seraient mieux placés pour abattre de la bonne besogne, mais ne serait-ce pas là se méprendre sur la nature et la fonction des conseils? En outre, même si l'on a observé que les conflits étaient peu nombreux, on ne peut s'empêcher de remarquer que la crainte d'avoir à affronter des situations explosives incite les conseils à aborder avec beaucoup de prudence les sujets controversés, ce qui laisse sous-entendre que l'opinion selon laquelle ils ne seraient qu'une extension des comités de négociation est fausse. D'autre part, plus un conseil est hétérogène, moins il lui est facile d'aborder les questions controversées. Et lorsque quelques-unes d'entre elles viennent à la surface, on s'efforcera d'éviter qu'elles transpirent dans le public. L'intégration joue un rôle important. C'est pourquoi les individus et les sous-groupes n'ont pas beaucoup de possibilités d'influencer les décisions, quoique l'on puisse noter des variantes considérables entre les différents degrés d'influence. On remarque enfin que les représentants des syndicats y exercent en pratique un quasi droit de veto.