

RESTRICTION OF OUTPUT

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DON'T DISCLOSE IDENTITIES

From the beginning of these studies, the identities of the persons under study have been kept confidential. We look to you to carry on this trust. Please guard the privacy of the persons involved by substituting fictitious names, or code symbols for their names.

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Subject: Restriction of Output

While interviewing a group of workmen recently, my attention was early directed to the problem of restriction of output. In each of the twenty-four interviews thus far taken, there is some direct or implied reference to this phenomenon. The operators' own statements have been substantiated by Professor Anderson's findings in a fatigue study conducted with this group and by their daily production records. Conscious restriction of output shows up in production records in the form of a straight line or a group maximum level of production. This is quite commonly known, as is the existence of restrictive practices. Putting all this to one side, the thing that interested me most in studying this group was the curious and significant fact that some of the workmen do not restrict their output, or, at least, do not restrict it as much as the majority. Equally interesting was the observation that some of the men who complained most bitterly about the practice did, in fact, restrict their production as much as those who tacitly supported the system. A question immediately arose as to why these dissimilarities exist. Why is it that in a working situation, which from a managerial point of view is identical for all the workmen in it, the majority restrict their output, while a few do not? Reflection upon this problem has

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led to the formulation of some general hypotheses which, while in need of added support and verification, I wish to pass on for your consideration.

1. In this group (perhaps in all groups) restriction of output presupposes some sort of group solidarity. By group solidarity is meant that the individuals in the group are held together by common purposes, ideas, or sentiments. It implies that the individual will forego some of his prerogatives in the interests of the group welfare. In most cases I think the workmen are conscious of a group norm or level of production above which they should not go. To go above this level means that one calls down the wrath of the group upon one's head. One may turn out less with impunity. The naive observer might think that the person who is highest in his production would be looked up to and applauded for his unselfish contribution to the group's percentage, but this is not true. One of the fastest workmen in the gang is called "The Slave" and at one time was the object of many disagreeable remarks. He told me that the most popular men are among those who turn out the least work. This, as [redacted] pointed out, is probably due in part to the fact that they spend more time in social intercourse than the hard workers. Another, perhaps primary reason, is that the slow worker in effect ignores the dicta of management. He symbolizes an attitude of resistance which the group as a whole might unconsciously desire to assume and expresses overtly the kind of sentiments around which the group is organized. The man who does not restrict his output is asocial in the sense that he does violence to the group's standard

of conduct. He willingly accedes to the wishes of authority and like teacher's pet becomes the object of scorn and abuse.

2. Whether or not a person will restrict his output depends upon his personality make-up. If he mingles with others easily, has a sense of social obligation, and values the esteem of his associates, he should fit into the system very nicely. A good example of this type is that of a young man in this group whose output has scarcely varied during the last six months. During the interview he talked readily and appeared to be tremendously interested in sports. The section chief informed me that he is "big league stuff." The men call him "Sewer" because he doesn't let a ball get by him.

If, on the other hand, an individual is not mindful of the group's estimate, is not at ease socially, and tends to be somewhat introverted, his personality may not integrate well with the group. Such a person might disregard the standards cherished by the majority. This, I believe, is the answer to the question raised in the first paragraph. Without exception the people interviewed, who are not conforming to the group level of production seem to be of this type.

Here, too, we have an explanation of why some people restrict their output under protest. Only one of the men interviewed reacted this way. He is the only married man in the group interviewed and needs all the money he can get. In addition, he is an excellent workman and confided that he could easily do more work than he does. He is torn between the desire to turn out more work or at least have the

others come up to his, the maximum level, (and of this he is sure they can) and the desire to stand in well with the group. So far the group influence has prevailed but recently, since the lay-off is making severe inroads, I notice his production is mounting. When Professor Anderson was conducting his investigation in this department he induced this man and another to undertake a speed test for a day unbeknown to the others in the department. Up until two o'clock in the afternoon both men averaged well over one hundred per cent efficiency. About this time the other workmen begin to slow up. The two men in question became increasingly aware that they were attracting attention. They kept on for a time but became increasingly embarrassed. Finally they looked at Professor Anderson, blushed, and deliberately slowed down. This incident is cited to show the effect of the group upon individual workmen who are amenable to its influence.

Unquestionably, there are other forces at work in a situation like this which tend to produce the same results. For example, an unpleasant personality always arouses antagonism. Instead of striking back directly such a person might do so indirectly by turning out more work than the group considers right. There appears to be some support for all of these views in the interviews I have so far taken. They need to be verified by more exact study and experimentation.

3. If it is true that restriction of output is dependent upon a group solidarity it follows that anything which promotes this

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solidarity promotes restriction of output. This statement would not hold true in the absence of apprehension or fear on the part of employees, but the fact that such feelings of distrust are widespread indicates that it might be quite generally true.

Group solidarity would seem to result from two general types of forces which might be designated as coordinating and subordinating influences.

Coordinating influences are those which result spontaneously from the association of one individual with another. They are not imposed upon the group by someone possessing authority but arise naturally from the association of people in groups. These forces tend to socialize the individuals in the group. The functions of the Hawthorne Club as well as many which have not been formally organized fall in this category. These coordinating factors only serve to create a situation in which restrictive practice can be more easily carried out. In the absence of other forces which arouse employees' fears restriction would not necessarily follow.

Subordinating forces are those which owe their existence to some act of management and serve to create a consciousness of kind in the group - not positively, by promoting spontaneous cohesions, but negatively, by marking the group off from other groups and committing it to certain acts which indicate its subordinate position. Management says, in effect, "You are shop people, therefore, you shall report to work at 7:30 A.M., take only forty-five minutes for lunch, furnish your own towels, etc." To another group it says,

"You are office people, and therefore you shall come to work one hour later, take fifteen minutes more for lunch, etc."

More important than these petty distinctions, I believe, are those practices which tend to accentuate the difference between managers and managed. Rate setting, cost reduction, and allied investigations fall in this category. Cost reduction investigations, for example, are interpreted by workmen as a direct menace to their welfare. Wherever it takes place, the workmen, irrespective of their individual differences become apprehensive. They therefore band together for protection. It is this banding together which is facilitated by the coordinating influences mentioned.

In a sense, then, these systems defeat their purpose. A good example of how a managerial practice might serve purposes the opposite of those for which it is intended is afforded by the practice of posting each individual's efficiency on a bulletin board. The ostensible purpose of these charts is to foster competition. As a matter of fact they serve a further function. They inform everyone where each person stands in relation to everyone else and if anyone is out of line he can be checked by the group. In the absence of group solidarity this would not be true, of course.

4. If it is true that people who stand highest in production in a group piece work department do so largely because of personal and social difficulties it follows that there is no necessary relationship between actual performance and capacity to perform. This is an

important factor to consider in making follow-up studies of dexterity and similar tests. It also points to the conclusion that scientific selection of workmen, however meticulously performed, does not necessarily insure greater productivity unless these other hindrances are first eradicated.

Incidentally this factor should also be considered in a lay-off based upon performance. It might lead to the dismissal of many workmen of high potential effectiveness. A further observation along this line is that in a gang piece work department a lay-off based upon output will tend to eliminate the more socialized individuals first. This would tend to break up the group solidarity and lead to rivalry in production by those individuals who obey yet resent the group's influence. A lay-off based on efficiency in such a situation tends to select those who are less social.

5. From the above it follows that supervisors chosen from the highest producers would tend to be somewhat asocial. One would expect them to be supervisors of the driving, hard-boiled type. They would be incapable of appreciating the sentiments cherished by the group and might use their own efficiency as the measuring rod for the group. The tactics one might expect of them would only serve to strengthen the group solidarity and opposition, thus further promoting restriction of output.

While this selection probably takes place there are counter-active forces at work which tend to select supervisors from the "in-group." Ability to get along with people is coming to be looked upon

as a prerequisite for supervisors and as we have seen these people fit in with restrictive practices. Again, the gang boss and section chief in a gang piece work department are just as interested in preserving favorable rates as the workmen themselves. Their earnings depend upon the gang percentage. Unconsciously, perhaps, they side with the gang in restriction of output. If the supervisors in a department are of this type it follows that the individuals singled out by them for promotion would have the worker's point of view. They would tend to be the tolerant, easy-going type of supervisor. The group's organization would not be disturbed and the status quo would be preserved as far as restriction of output is concerned.

We have here a vicious circle. Regardless of the supervisory tactics employed restriction of output continues to persist as a major employee defense mechanism. The problem therefore is not one to be dealt with as an isolated phenomena. It is beyond the control of the individual workman and certainly is beyond the supervisor's control. Clearly, restriction of output serves a function in our industrial organization. It follows that those people who are responsible for the organization of industry are, indirectly, perhaps, responsible for this practice which they condemn.

6. Ask an employee why he restricts his output and he will give you a number of reasons. "The rate will be lowered." "The job will be shipped out." "There's no use turning out more because I won't make any more money." etc. etc. All in all he will construct a fairly sound argument in support of his actions. From his point

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of view they are both logical and adequate. His logic is rooted in which Professor Mayo has described as a generalized apprehension of authority. He feels that if he commits any one of a number of acts he will, in some way, be taken advantage of. If this apprehension can be dispelled it is believed that production might rise twenty to thirty percent. We have toyed with the idea that interviewing might be the way to this end. I believe, however, that interviewing can never accomplish this goal by itself - we must consider management's role.

To the statement that employees are apprehensive of authority, of the company they work for, should be added that management, likewise, suffers from a suspicion of its hire and that this mutual distrust has resulted in and serves to perpetuate a collocation of practices and policies which tend to keep efficiency lower than it need be. There appears to be a fundamental antithesis in what I would like to call "the logic of management vs. the logic of employee." I further believe that these antithetical points of view are crystallized in our wage payment structure - especially the group piece work system - and that this system with all its ramifications might well be taken as the focal point for research in this significant area.

In saying that management suffers from a suspicion of its employees I do not mean that individuals "A", "B", "C", "D", etc. are consciously aware of a deep and abiding distrust of their subordinates. One of the remarkable things about organizations as

large as this is that one cannot put one's finger on a certain spot and say, "This area constitutes management." Management seems to be a function participated in to a greater or lesser degree by every supervisor. Yet we find as a result of interviews with the supervisory group that they themselves are apprehensive of "management." In seeking a "logic of management" therefore it would seem best to avoid the question of what constitutes management altogether and look instead at the basic assumptions, or "logic" if you will, which underly and support policies and practices which owe their existence to someone in authority. In other words the "logic of management" is implicit in its acts and must be abstracted from them if it is to be made explicit. At a later time I hope to undertake a statement of the presumably antithetical logics above mentioned.

The function of restriction of output, to sum up, is to protect the worker from management's schemes. It galvanizes the worker's apprehensions into action. Management, failing to understand the problem, feels that the worker is lying down on the job, trying to get something for nothing. It therefore concocts new schemes or applies old ones with renewed vigor. Mutual distrust is intensified and production is controlled more than before.

The relay assembly test room affords evidence of what might be done with this problem. In the first place the operators were assured that their individual earnings would be commensurate with their performance. This I think is fundamental in any reform program.

Secondly cajoling, brow-beating methods of supervision were entirely dispensed with. This, too, is important because most workmen have some consideration for their fellows and if slower operators are constantly goaded or penalized because they are not working fast enough the faster men will desist. In the test room suspicion and distrust was gradually dissipated partly by supervision but largely, I believe, because managerial practices common to the shop, were inoperative. The result was a spectacular improvement in production, earnings and employee morale.

To conclude, then, I believe our major problem for the time being is that of devising some method by which each individual will feel free to work at his utmost capacity without fear of rate reduction or jeopardy to his fellow men. With this of course must go intelligent supervision. When these major preoccupations are removed we will be ready to examine some of the factors in unconscious restriction of output.

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