

SOME ORGANIZATION LESSONS OF THE WAR¹

BY

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MR. PRESIDENT, Members of the Society, and Guests: I know that not all here are members; that some are guests. I trust that before the meetings are over all will be members. You see, I cannot overlook a chance to "root" for the Society.

It seems to me that such a gathering as we have here this first night of our renewed Society meetings, promises great things for the future of this movement in which so many of us are deeply interested. I believe the teachings of Dr. Taylor, so well carried on by those who were associated closely with him, are sowing the ground for a future harvest which will mean the best things for this world that it has so far known.

The subject of which I am asked to open the discussion this evening, is: Organization Lessons of the War; lessons chiefly deduced from the experience of those who went across the sea. It seems to me that, as long as we had to have this war, there should be, if possible, no chance allowed for anything good that may have arisen out of it to be lost. What seemed to me as one of the most important lessons, is a comparison of the various forms of organization, in order to try to seek for new ideals as a result of the extreme test to which organization was subjected during the period of the conflict.

In order to place the discussion on a basis of facts, and not of opinion—which, I believe, is one of the principles we must continually live up to—I will try to define "organization". The definition is primarily from

¹Papers presented at the Boston Meeting of the Taylor Society, Friday evening, Oct. 3, 1919.

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Webster's Unabridged Dictionary, which defines organization as "The orderly arrangement adjusted in proper relation and dependence of a union of individuals in a body, whose officers, agents and members work together for a common end."

Taking that as a brief definition of the subject under discussion, I believe that if a common end is sought, coordination must be accomplished regardless of the extent of operations. In this there is a great deal of matter for reflection. That is, in order to attain a common end, coordination is necessary, regardless of the size of the organization which may be seeking that end.

The first indication of the importance of this thing, one which left an indelible impression upon my mind, was when General Foch assumed command of all the Allied forces in opposition to the common enemy. Up to the time of the placing of the direction of British, French and American forces under him, the individual commanders were working independently in their opposition to the activities of the coordinated enemy. At the time when General Foch was placed in command a break between the French and British troops was imminent, and, I am very sure, was saved only by quick action in getting together under a common general. The result of the coordination at that particular time, I feel sure, prevented the complete rout of the forces, first of the British and then of the French.

In that particular case, the coordination was accomplished through the channels of administration. I speak of that because I wish to bring out a thought that there is a possibility of establishing coordination in a better way than through the direct line of administrative authority.

Coordination should be attained as far as possible without disturbing the administrative functions. This may best be accomplished through established standards. If standards of very limited duration only are

obtainable, or if even limited standards seem unobtainable, then coordination may well be accomplished through channels auxiliary to those of the administration. This auxiliary service will provide for advice or direct instruction to the administrators respecting such matters as bear upon the common purpose. For the latter condition, if the operations of the organization are extensive, the coordination group may be functionalized in such a way that specialists control each chief function as it threads through the organization.

The first organization of the A. E. F. general staff provided for the transmitting of the functions of operation through the administrative channels. There was a technical staff, and operating staffs of the army, reporting to the general staff. The operations of those organizations were carried on by direct orders, through the commanders. That was the first form of organization, before our troops were even in action.

That was very soon changed to a type developed by the British army, in which the general staff was divided into four groups, "G 1," "G 2," "G 3" and "G 4." Those groups plan for and instruct in transportation service, administration, service of supply, etc.

To transmit the intelligence of these groups to the operating forces and to get it into direct contact with their commanders, each organization group also had a "G 1," "G 2," "G 3," and "G 4" corresponding exactly with the groups of the general staff, and fulfilling the same functions as those of the general staff. Those staffs were independent of the operating administrative organization, and it was through the medium of those staffs that the general orders received from General Foch, through the general staff, and General Pershing, were transmitted rapidly and completely, so as to control the operations of all the forces.

I wish to bring this as an example or as a lesson learned from the war, in which an auxiliary service, having to do with the establishment of operating principles, was organized and put into operation independent of the administrative lines of authority.

In addition to this, the principle of specialization should be applied as far as can be done to obtain a constant maximum return for a given effort. If the amount of work to be done is sufficiently great to entertain an individual or unit of equipment continuously, it should as far as possible be directed to the same individual or equipment. The least amount of work which will provide for such specialized treatment should be segregated under distinct divisions of the organization.

The administrators of the organization may be selected under one of two principles:

- (a) Because of specialized knowledge of product.
- (b) Because of specialized knowledge of the process.

From the extreme form of one to the extreme form of the other, all possible combinations of the two may be indicated.

I think there are few who followed the war closely who did not hear that this, that, or the other organization was altogether too unwieldy; that there was too much red tape, and that it was practically impossible to get anything accomplished. If I see correctly, I see this: that when a specialized group is completely burdened, there is no particular advantage in duplicating that group under the same immediate administration.

If the organization is perfected with a view to a certain principal feature of the process—that is, of a particular function, or process, such as administration, engineering, supply, and so on—and the amount of work which the organization must do on that account is large, as was the case in this war, at times getting beyond the ability of those in charge of the function, no matter how admirable the organization may be, it cannot work to the best advantage.

I believe, therefore, that if there is one lesson that has been learned in this war, which we may take home with us, it is that the gathering together of large activities of a repetitive nature should, as far as possible, be broken into such units as will not lead to unwieldiness.

From the extreme form of one of these to the extreme form of the other, all possible combinations of the two may be effected. For instance, take the supply division of the army. Had one supply officer controlled engineering, ordnance, medical, transport and quartermaster's supplies, and functionalized his organization by according a particular skill to each function, and had full authority over that function, I think our difficulties would have been very much greater than they were with the organization divided as it was, into many branches, each one segregated when burdened with a task sufficient for each to do. Had this principle been carried further so that limited kinds of product were so segregated, we would have had much less difficulty than did occur during the war, in the acquiring, distribution and maintenance of our supplies.