

ANALYSIS OF FACTORS IN PRISON LEADERSHIP

by
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Many new problems have arisen or were accelerated during the 1960's and 1970's to challenge American public administrators. Perhaps one of the most problematic and certainly one of the most controversial is that of prison discontent and its end result, the prison riot. Invariably, each new prison disturbance, from San Quentin to Attica, prompts the question: "Why have United States prisons been exploding?"

The isolation of the proper factors is naturally critical to determine why our penal institutions have failed. For the most part, prisons are explained as ineffective therapeutic agencies in terms of inadequate treatment facilities, inferior qualifications of administrators, the criminogenic characteristics of inmates, and a general breakdown of discipline in the community (e.g. Fred T. Wilkinson, "We're Reaping a Harvest of Permissiveness," *U.S. News & World Report*, September 27, 1971, p.22). Unfortunately, the social climate of the prison and the interpersonal relations among the inmates have received less attention. Failure to investigate more thoroughly the dynamics of interaction among prison inmates, in the opinion of this researcher, may be a serious theoretical and methodological omission in criminological research.

This investigation confines itself to only one aspect of that inmate interaction, that of leadership phenomena. More specifically, it looks at the relationship between the violent nature of an inmate's crime and the prison leadership he displays.

The researcher's reasons were two-fold for choosing this aspect of prison intercourse. First, he wanted to satisfy a personal curiosity that was born from one of his observations. The question was conceived while employed by the Pennsylvania Bureau of Correction during the summer months of 1971. One convicted murderer, with whom the researcher became acquainted, seemed to exercise a charisma over his fellow inmates, and the question naturally arose: "Was it due to his label 'murderer'?"

That idea was perpetuated by a class discussion of the functions that a leader performs. Is it the leader who makes the rest of the group jump through hoops or does the group make the leader do the jumping? Accepting George Homans' precept that a "leader is the man who comes closest to realizing the norms the group values highest", and using the premise that prison inmates typify the antisocial elements in society as a springboard, it is conceivable that prison leaders might very

well be the ones who are committed for the most violent crimes. (See George C. Homans, *The Human Group*, p.188)

The second reason for looking at the leaders in a prison and their criminal acts was the possible utility it might serve for prison administrators. If they could recognize the leaders in a prison population and know beforehand that their leadership could wield a negative influence, might it not be advantageous to segregate them administratively?

Thus, the researcher's hypothesis became: "If an inmate is committed to prison for a crime of a violent nature, he is more likely to be a leader in the prison community than if he has a criminal record of a lesser nature." Upon further reflection, the researcher decided to look at his assumption in six dimensions.

Leadership Characteristics Probed

The first dimension that he decided to examine was whether convicts are prone to choose a leader because they are aware of a particular inmate's violent criminal record and consequently admire him for it. The determination was made that a violent crime would be one of force that was perpetrated against a person.

The second dimension arose because of a dilemma. If the finding was made that prison inmates are more likely to choose a leader convicted of violent crime, might it be because he was serving a longer prison sentence and knew the system better than anyone else?

A third dimension was whether the prison inmates intrinsically respect physical violence and force rather than the violent crime for which a person is convicted? If that was the case, then the least prestigious criminal in the criminal offense hierarchy could conceivably rise to the top.

Fourth, in an attempt to provide a more predictive study, the researcher faced the challenge of whether a leader can best be ascertained by his traits or whether leadership is specific to the particular situation under investigation. If the situational theory holds up, then the prison leader should be the one who can obtain contraband items for the rest of the group or be the one able to manipulate the prison administrators to the extent where he can operate virtually unhindered as a leader.

Fifth, the researcher examined whether an inmate is influenced in his choice of leadership by the homogeneous grouping to which he belongs, whether it be race, age or intelligence.

Last of all, the researcher probed the darkness of the trait theory, that approach which attempts to split leadership ability into its components by identifying the traits of character and personality that mark a leader. More specifically, he looked at the assumption by Ernest Dale that there are three essential

traits for leadership: Intelligence, Self-Confidence, and Initiative. (See Ernest Dale, *Management Theory and Practice* p. 429)

The study was pursued at the State Correctional Institution at Camp Hill, one of eight correctional facilities maintained by Pennsylvania's Bureau of Correction. Two tests were run; one, a pre-test to determine a good test structure on February 29, 1972, and the other on March 2, 1972, the data from which the compilations were taken. Both samples were chosen randomly by dividing the number of inmates to be tested (15 in the first test and 30 in the second) in the total population. The multiples of the quotient were then counted and extracted from the Control Desk listing of the total population.

Test Results

The test were administered at the Educational Building inside the prison walls. They were prefaced by the researcher's statement:

"This test is being administered as part of a Pennsylvania State University research effort. In order to complete it, you will need to think of a person in the prison population whom you consider to be a leader. You do not have to name the person whom you are thinking of nor do you have to put your own name on the paper."

The question that was raised most often by the inmates was, "What do you mean by a leader?" The researcher's answer at the pre-test was, "one whose orders you would follow." However, after consultation with sociologist, Dr. Carolyn Dexter, Pennsylvania State University, the researcher decided to answer the question in the second test as, "one to whom you would go for help and advice."

The number of responses that the researcher utilized in his study was 27; two inmates walked out because they said they did not know any leaders and a third inmate's questionnaire had to be invalidated because he checked all the blanks.

Looking first at the idea that inmates choose a leader because they respect the crime for which he was committed, 27 or 100 percent said that they were at least somewhat aware of the leader's criminal record and 10 inmates or 37.04 percent said that they knew it exactly. A full third replied that the leader they were thinking of was convicted for murder; 25.94 percent for robbery; 7.4 percent for rape; 7.4 percent for assault and battery; and 25.94 percent for offenses that were not perpetrated against a person by force. When the inmates were queried as to whether they would choose a leader because of the violent nature of his crime, 23 inmates or 85.19 percent replied not at

all or indicated that it made no difference, while 7.4 percent responded "probably" or "absolutely."

Examining the length of the violent criminal's stay in the prison population, 11 inmates or 55 percent replied that the leader they were thinking of had been in prison for more than two years; five inmates or 25 percent responded between one and two years; two inmates or 10 percent said between six and twelve months and two inmates or 10 percent reported between one and six months.

Exploring the trait theory of leadership versus the situational theory and concurrently examining whether physical strength and violence is indicative of leadership, the data are depicted in Table 1.

Whether a person was likely to choose a leader from his homogeneous grouping was looked at from the aspects of race, age, and intelligence as was mentioned previously. Accordingly, 14 inmates or 51.86 percent said that they would rather often or nearly all the time choose a person of the same race as leader; 8 inmates or 29.62 percent replied that they would sometimes; and 5 inmates or 18.52 percent responded that they would never or rarely do so. A total of 48.14 percent representing 13 inmates, reported that they never or rarely were likely to consider a person of the same age a leader; 12 inmates or 44.46 percent said sometimes; and 2 inmates or 7.41 percent answered never. The final homogeneous grouping, inmates of the same intelligence, saw 51.85 percent or 14 inmates of the sample answering that they sometimes would pick a leader of the same intelligence; 7 inmates or 25.93 percent responding rather often or nearly all the time; and six inmates or 22.22 percent reporting never or rarely.

Finally, the researcher's examination of what factors inmates rank as the most important in choosing a leader are illustrated in Table 2.

Results of this study, of course, cannot be generalized to other institutions until similar investigations are made elsewhere. Tentatively, however, this researcher concludes that leadership in prison is not determined solely on the basis of respect for a crime of violent nature. It does appear, however, that the vast majority of inmates are picking leaders who have been committed for violent crimes. Though not conclusive, this may very well be due to the fact that a large majority (80 percent) of those leaders committed for a violent crime had already been in the prison population for at least one year.

An observation of whether prisoners admire physical force and violence per se as a leadership attribute, seems to prove false. An overwhelming 70.38 percent indicated that they never or

rarely took it into account, and only 3.7 percent considered it nearly all the time in choosing a leader.

Prison Leaders Also Considered Leaders on Street

When one looks empirically at those inmates who felt that the person they had in mind would be a leader on the street or in prison, it would appear again to give the trait theory the edge. A large portion, 47.05 percent reasoned that their prison leader would be a leader on the street; only 17.65 percent justified it due to the particular circumstances in which the leader might find himself.

A tentative deduction might be then that if a prison leader arises because of the particular situation under investigation, it is because he exhibits intelligence, confidence and initiative -- those attributes which Ernest Dale feels are basic to every leader. Nevertheless, this logic is subject to a flaw. It assumes that all "street" situations are identified in which the prison leader might project himself. The prisoners thus may labor under the thought that their leader exhibits all of Dale's traits inside the prison walls and consequently will do so when released. This researcher questions whether all the varied street situations would find the prison leader as endowed.

The relationship between homogeneous groupings and leadership appear to be rather tenuous in respect to age and intelligence and rather strong in respect to race. The ranking of leadership factors as indicated in Table 2 seems to signify that the one factor that prisoners consider most important in choosing a leader is intelligence, not physical strength and violence as was hypothesized.

In conclusion, this researcher would like to point out that any study of leadership in the prison community is exceedingly complex because the overt behavior of the men is controlled by rules and regulations and because the population is ever-changing.

Moreover, there are admittedly some weaknesses in the research itself. First, the smallness of the sample may limit its applicability. Second, the questionnaire assumed that everyone that took it was literate. The researcher's impression was that they all were; however, he could have been mistaken.

Finally, a seventh and probably very important dimension was not proved, namely: do prison inmates equate violent crimes with intelligence? It may very well be that, in the eyes of a criminal, murder or robbery requires more intelligence to plan and execute than, for example, automobile larceny. Examination into this hypothesis may prove to be another illuminating page in the investigation of prison leadership phenomena.

Table 1
Leadership Indicators

Indicator	N	Percent
Knows what to do when in trouble	12	44.44
Knows how to avoid a bad court punishment	9	33.33
Knows how to get cigarettes, drugs, and movement information	6	22.22
Knows how to push a cause, like Black Power, to his best interests	9	33.33
Has great physical strength and can exert his will upon you	0	0.00
Inmates not answering	3	11.11

Table 2
Ranking of Leadership Factors

Leadership Factors	No. 1 Importance		No. 2 Importance		No. 3 Importance	
	%	N	%	N	%	N
Intelligence	81.5	22	0.0	0	3.7	1
Confidence	0.0	0	55.56	15	14.83	4
Ability to get things started	3.7	1	7.4	2	33.33	9
Physically strong	0.0	0	0.0	0	25.93	7
Same age	3.7	1	0.0	0	0.0	0
Same race	7.4	2	14.82	4	11.11	3
Same intelligence	0.0	0	3.7	1	3.7	1
Knows what to do in tough situation	3.7	1	18.52	5	7.4	2

THE DIAGNOSTIC AND
CLASSIFICATION CENTER FOR
JUVENILES AT CORNWELLS
HEIGHTS:
BASIC CONCEPTS AND GOALS

by
Ellis S. Grayson

Editor's Note: The following paper was written shortly after the State Department of Public Welfare opened its first Diagnostic and Classification Center for Juveniles at Cornwells Heights (Bucks County). The author then served as its first Director. Meanwhile he was appointed Director of Staff Development for the Bureau of Correction, State Department of Justice. Even if written some time ago, the article, because of its excellent description of the basic concepts of such centers, deserves publication in our magazine, which due to lack of space could not present it to its readers in an earlier issue. Ellis S. Grayson has been a frequent contributor to THE QUARTERLY.

Frank's eyes danced wildly one moment, then became set in a fixed stare the next. His speech became a fragmented series of half-completed thoughts that tumbled out in mangled words and sentences. His skin was the color of bleached flour. His lips were two tense bluish lines. He was thin, even for his narrow-boned frame. Several times, he climbed out of bed to talk to "persons" in the room or under his bed - but nobody was there. He argued with these imagined tormentors who existed only in his brain which became a fountain of hallucinatory experiences, most of which heightened his feelings of terror. He couldn't hold down either liquids or solids: he was dehydrating rapidly, and symptoms indicated the onset of severe electrolytic imbalance. Frank had "rainbowed" by ingesting all manner of pills before he arrived at the Diagnostic and Classification Center at Cornwells Heights. On February 16, 1971, the Center opened officially. Frank was the first juvenile to be committed for study, assessment and treatment planning. Our first case.

Within days our capacity of fifty-six was reached, and each case contained elements, circumstances or factors which were highly extraordinary, serious, exotic or even bizarre. George, a seventeen-year-old and huskily-built lad, stood accused of sexually assaulting his stepmother. One set of examining psychiatrists had diagnosed George as being a "paranoid schizophrenic." Another, and equally gifted set of psychiatrists found no pathology. What, indeed, was George's condition, the court wished to know. What should or could be done by way of commitment, treatment and program services? Similar questions arose about youngsters who had demonstrated

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