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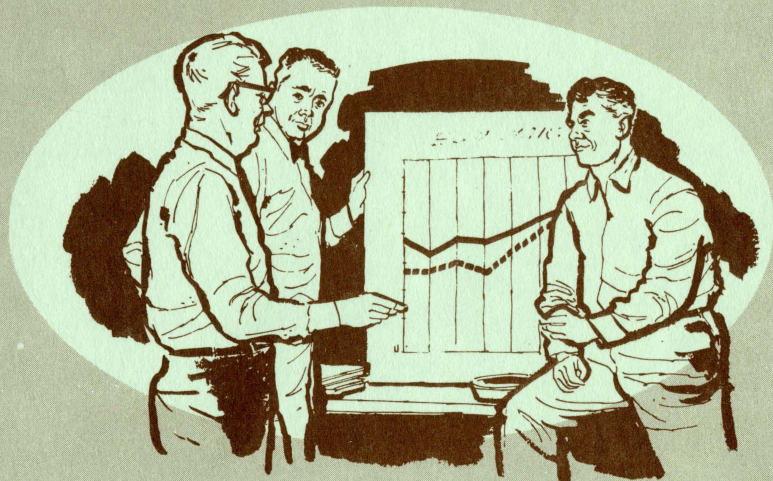
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*Rural organization*



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# Leadership and Decision Making in Rural Community Action

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## SUMMARY

To understand how leadership operates, a study was made of 813 decisions which were made in 41 projects in an open-country community of North Carolina. Some important relationships were found between processes of leadership and each of the following: (1) neighborhoods in which projects occurred; (2) size of decisions which were being made; (3) leadership statuses of persons who were making decisions; and (4) the success of the project.

Neighborhood. Organized action in the community usually took place on a neighborhood basis, not a community basis. Of the four neighborhoods which made up the community, two neighborhoods undertook many projects and were generally successful in them, while two neighborhoods undertook fewer projects and these were not as uniformly successful. The two neighborhoods which undertook many projects were rather highly organized, and each of them had an active Neighborhood Development Club.

Size of decision. The size of decision, as measured by the expected cost of carrying it out, was related to several factors.

Decisions about what was to be done were generally bigger than decisions about how it was to be done.

Proposals for big decisions were usually discussed more times than proposals for little decisions.

There was more disagreement over big decisions than over little ones.

Big decisions were usually made by groups, not by single individuals.

Leadership status. People who had a large part in making decisions usually held many offices and were on many committees. They were also generally thought of as highly influential people in their neighborhoods.

Among lay leaders, the same persons tended to make big and little decisions. The upper leaders of the community usually had a large part in making the little as well as the big decisions.

When decisions were discussed in informal conversations, everybody talked to everybody. The top lay leader in a neighborhood might talk with other high ranking lay leaders, but he would also talk with people who had practically no influence. There was no widespread pattern of upper leaders working through intermediate leaders to communicate indirectly with lower leaders.

By contrast, some professional leaders tended to work through a few laymen to get programs across to the rank and file of citizens.

Residents of the community tended to have somewhat the same leadership statuses as their close kinsmen.

Success of project. Most of the projects achieved about what was originally intended. Some achieved less, and a few achieved more. The following things were related to achievement of the original goal: low cost of the project; backing of a formal organization; careful goal setting and planning; decisions by groups rather than individuals; agreement on decisions; decisions by upper formal leaders; and participation of professional leaders in decisions.

Practical implications. Some of the implications of the study

relate to: (1) identification of community leaders; (2) leadership training; and (3) planning community action.

LEADERSHIP AND DECISION MAKING IN  
RURAL COMMUNITY ACTION\*

By

Charles Freeman and Selz C. Mayo  
Department of Rural Sociology

WHY STUDY LEADERSHIP?

Members of one organization decide that they need a hall for the group. With great enthusiasm they set to work. More volunteers come on work days than had been hoped for, and more money is raised than had been expected. So as the work progresses, the plan grows, and the organization gets a much better hall than they had originally planned for. The community is justly proud of the building. Yet an even better building might have been produced for the same money and effort, if a more careful and realistic plan had been drawn up beforehand.

Several neighbors get together and decide that a roadside picnic place would be an asset to the community. They are quite sure what they want, but not so sure about how to go about getting it. One of the men starts painting a "picnic area" sign before the project is even brought up before one of the organizations in the community for sponsorship. Misunderstandings arise, and people who might have been most interested in

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\* This is an interpretive summary of a study by Charles Freeman entitled Leadership in Rural Community Action: A Study of Decision Making, Doctoral Dissertation, Department of Rural Sociology, North Carolina State College, 1956. The study was completed under the supervision of Selz C. Mayo, Professor of Rural Sociology.

the project hardly know what is being done. The following fall, grass takes over the picnic place.

At the annual planning meeting of one neighborhood organization, it is decided that one of the projects for the year shall be for each farmer to plant at least one acre of improved hybrid corn. There have been many informal conversations leading up to the decision at the meeting. The committee which is appointed for the corn project works through representatives on each road, so that they can get in touch with every farmer in the community. A small prize is offered as an incentive to increase corn yields. Through this rather simple but carefully thought out project, a permanent change is made in one farming practice in the community, and people are more open to other new practices than they had been before.

Why do some community projects succeed and others fail? Why do some develop enthusiasm, while others lead to frustration? Why do some groups seem to know what they can do and do it, while others do not judge their own strength, and miss the mark by either shooting over it or under it?

Can any light be thrown on these questions by seeing the ways different groups make decisions for projects? We would need to know how they go about making different types of decisions, and what arguments they use in support of those decisions. We would also need to know what positions are held in the community by the people who make different decisions. Let us see who some of the men and women were who took part in these three projects.



In recent years Mr. A has taken a growing interest in the one organization to which he belongs. Always recognized as a willing and conscientious follower, Mr. A is now holding his first position of major responsibility as chairman of the committee to erect the organization's hall. The fact that the building program achieved much more than had been originally hoped has enlarged the community image of Mr. A's leadership.

Mrs. B has little contact with organizations in the community, and she does not occupy any formal positions of leadership. When she became interested in the idea of a picnic area, she did not go to any of the organized groups in the community to present her idea. She went to her closest neighbors. In fact, she made some of the decisions for this project simply on her own, without talking with anyone. Was her failure to "talk the project up" part of the reason the project failed?

Mr. C is a member of many organizations in the community, and he holds some office or committee membership in almost all of them. He is generally thought of as one of the top leaders in the community. The successful project to encourage planting of improved corn grew out of a suggestion of his, and he was made chairman of the committee to head it up. He brought in others, so that most decisions were made by the group, not by him alone. Mr. C had a large part in the big decisions for the project, such as the original decision to initiate the scheme. He also had a large part in many of the small details that had to be decided.

Mr. D, a professional leader, happens to be advisor to the organization which undertook the three projects we have described. On the

building project, Mr. D was asked by Mr. A to furnish plans. But the building had already gone so far that the plans could not be used. Mr. D was also asked by Mrs. B whether he did not think a good picnic place would be an asset to any community. He agreed that it would be. But he was never consulted about specific plans for the one Mrs. B had in mind. On the other hand, Mr. D's advice was sought by Mr. C on many decisions in connection with the corn project. He did not have the major responsibility for any of the decisions, yet the information which he gave influenced many of the decisions which others made.

#### PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This is a study of leadership in action. An open-country community in the Piedmont section of North Carolina was chosen for analysis. Emphasis has been placed on leadership as a group process--something which is done--not as a personal quality of certain individuals.\* Without a group, there are no leaders; without leaders, no group. In fact, this can be seen in the definition of leadership which has been used:

Leadership is the process by which an individual influences a group of which he is a member in the making of decisions.

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\* Gibb sums up the interpretation now taken by many students of leadership, when he says: "In fact, viewed in relation to the individual, leadership is not an attribute of the personality but a quality of his role within a particular and specific social system. Viewed in relation to the group, leadership is a quality of its structure." Cecil A. Gibb, "The Principles and Traits of Leadership," Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 42: 267-268, July 1947.

An individual, then, is a leader to the extent that he influences a group of which he is a member in the making of decisions.

And what is decision making? This is the determination of goals or means of action. In group decision making, leadership may be shared by a number of members of the group. Every normal person is a leader at times and a follower at times.

If leadership refers to what people "do" rather than what they "are," then it seems logical to place emphasis on the operation of community leadership through community projects. Furthermore, if the important thing which leadership "does" is related to decision making, then studies should be made of the way that community groups make decisions for community projects.

Accordingly, this study deals primarily with what went on in making decisions for 41 community projects which were innovations--new types of action for the groups which undertook them in this community.\* Each of the 41 actions was made up of a number of decisions--813 decisions in all. Different people who had a part in making these decisions were asked to tell, for each decision: what decision was made; how the decision was made; why the decision was made; and who took part in making the decision.

The main emphasis of the study was placed on the question of who made decisions. Of course, this does not mean just the name of the person, or whether he was tall or short. The study was not dealing in

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\* Methods of study which were used are explained more fully in the appendix.

personalities. Rather, it means the positions that decision makers held in the community. There are many types of positions or statuses a person holds, which have a bearing on whether he will assume leadership and how he will exercise that leadership.

To make it easy to picture, we may think of leadership positions as arranged in a definite "structure," with certain persons having high positions and others having lower positions. In the present study an attempt was made to see the roles of decision making which were played by persons in three types of leadership structures of the community:

Formal lay leadership, or the offices and committee memberships the person had.

Informal lay leadership, or the influence which others in the neighborhood thought the person had.

Professional leadership, for which the person was paid.

Of course, the same individuals usually had positions in two or three of these structures. For instance, a person who was high in the formal leadership structure might have a middle position in the informal leadership structure.

#### THIS IS UNION COMMUNITY

"Union Community"\* is an open-country agricultural community in the Piedmont section of North Carolina. It has a population of approximately 925, 800 white people and 125 Negroes. Seventy-five percent of the

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\* Names of the community and neighborhoods are fictitious.

families are engaged in agriculture full time, while another 10 percent are part-time farmers. There is no center of population in Union, and there are no industries except a small sawmill. Most of the nonagricultural workers commute to work outside the community.

The community of Union is a loose confederation of four very distinct neighborhoods--three white neighborhoods, Center, Farmwell, and Border, and one Negro neighborhood, Smallfield.

There are nineteen agencies and organizations located in the community, plus thirteen suborganizations within the churches. Twelve of the nineteen organizations operate on a neighborhood basis. Organized action in the community, then, usually took place on a neighborhood basis rather than an over-all community basis.

Center and Farmwell neighborhoods were better integrated and more highly organized than the other two neighborhoods. They undertook more community projects, and their projects tended to be successful.

Distribution of Actions Studied by Neighborhood

<u>Neighborhood</u>	<u>Actions</u>
Center	20
Farmwell	14
Border	4
Smallfield	3

Border and Smallfield neighborhoods were in rather peculiar positions. Border was split by the county line. This meant that the children of the neighborhood went to two different schools, and adults dealt with two county agents and two home demonstration agents. It was difficult, if



not impossible, to put up a concerted front for getting some types of services.

Smallfield was also split by the county line. But perhaps more important, it was a neighborhood in transition. It was itself a combination of two former neighborhoods with their separate schools, and it was apparently in the process of integration into a larger Negro community which was centered at the new consolidated school outside of Union Community.

The one type of organization common to all four neighborhoods was the church, with its suborganizations. The two more active neighborhoods, Center and Farmwell, had neighborhood clubs, with clubhouses. These clubs were sponsored by the County Agricultural Workers' Council but operated as locally controlled units with professional leaders as advisors. They had monthly neighborhood meetings and undertook programs on an annual basis in competition with other similar clubs over the county. Each of the neighborhood clubs had, in addition to the usual slate of officers, a committee made up of people from the different areas of the neighborhood, through whom word could be gotten out to every resident and through whom reports on community projects could be made.

Through the neighborhood clubs and other groups in the two more active neighborhoods, a number of new projects were undertaken every year. Many of these projects did not involve great expense, and they were usually carried out successfully. This seems to have been a major factor in the greater activity of Center and Farmwell neighborhoods and in their tendency to succeed in whatever they undertook.

## BIG AND LITTLE DECISIONS

In a community project there are usually a few major decisions to set broad policy, and a great many minor decisions to "spell out" specific tactics. In studying the 813 decisions making up 41 innovations for action in Union community, decisions have been divided into three groups according to the expected cost of carrying them out: (1) little decisions, involving a cost under \$10; (2) medium sized decisions, costing \$10 to \$99; and (3) big decisions, costing \$100 and up. There were many more low cost than medium or high cost decisions.

### Distribution of Decisions by Expected Cost

<u>Cost</u>	<u>Decisions</u>
Under \$10	342
\$10 - \$99	281
\$100 and up	190

Ends and means. Decisions were broken down into several categories--those relating to ends or goals of action, and those relating to means to achieve these goals. Decisions about means of action, in turn, were broken down into those concerning facilities (things which would be helpful to the group or person doing the job) and those concerning persons or roles (getting people to do things).

The relatively few goal setting decisions were on the average larger, in terms of expense, than were decisions relating to means to achieve goals. Decisions allocating roles or persons were even smaller than those allocating facilities. In other words, people in Union tended

to make a few large decisions setting broad goals but many small decisions allocating means for achievement of those goals.

How many times was the proposal considered? After a proposal is made, some time elapses during which it is considered before the final choice is made to accept or reject the suggestion. For some decisions, such as that to erect a building, people may discuss an idea again and again before making up their minds. For other decisions, such as that to put Mrs. X on a committee, the whole process, from proposal to final choice, may take place on one occasion.

The larger the idea is, in terms of the expected cost of carrying it out, the more times it is likely to be considered before a decision is reached.

Percentage Distribution of Decisions by Cost of Decision  
and Number of Times the Proposal Was Considered

No. of Times Proposal Was Considered	Total	Cost of Decision		
		Under \$10	\$10-\$99	\$100 Up
Total No.	783*	332	271	180
Total Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
1 Time	57.9	73.2	57.6	30.0
2-4	24.8	19.9	26.9	30.6
5 or More	17.4	6.9	15.5	39.4

$$C = .49$$

\* The total number of decisions studied was 813. The discrepancy in total number of decisions resulted from incomplete data on some decisions.

How much disagreement was there? In any group, some decisions are made with no division of opinion expressed, either because everyone is in agreement or because nobody cares enough about the issue to raise an objection. Other decisions are made in an atmosphere of division, either friendly differences of opinion or bitter disagreement. Where there is disagreement in discussion, it may be resolved so that there is unanimity in the final decision, or there may be some members of the group who hold out until the end and are finally voted down or disregarded.

By far the majority of decisions in Union community were made with no reported disagreement. There was more disagreement over large decisions than small ones. Furthermore, for the two lower cost categories, division in discussion tended to be "patched up" before decisions were finally reached. For the biggest decisions, on the other hand, whatever disagreement arose usually remained until the decision was finally made.

Was the decision made by an individual or by a group? Some decisions for community action are made by one individual alone, while some are made by groups. They may be made by formal organizations or by several persons who "put their heads together" to think through a problem. It is much more common for little things than for big things to be decided by individuals.

#### WHO MAKES DECISIONS?

Formal and informal lay leadership. What sort of people make decisions for community projects? Are they people who hold offices in many organizations? Are they people who are generally recognized as leaders

in the community? Let us see first what was done by lay leaders--that is, people who were not being paid for their leadership positions. Later we shall see the part played by professional leaders.

Two aspects of lay leadership have been distinguished in the present study--formal and informal leadership statuses. Formal leadership, expressed in a formal leadership score, refers to the holding of office or committee membership in any formal organization which meets in Union. Informal leadership refers to the "community image" of the person's leadership, and is expressed in an informal leadership rank.

These two are related. That is to say, there is a tendency for people who hold many offices to be thought of as important leaders in the community, and for persons who are thought of as leaders to hold offices. But this is not always true. In one neighborhood a very low relationship was found, and in the other three it was not near a one-to-one relationship.

Decision making. People who hold many offices in Union community also generally have a large part in making decisions for community projects. But they do not always have such a part. In the two more active neighborhoods, Center and Farmwell, there was a closer relationship between formal leadership scores and decision making scores than there was in the other two neighborhoods. Could it be that one reason these two neighborhoods take up many projects, and succeed in them, is that many decisions go through the normal channels, i.e. the elected officers of the organization? On the other hand, it may be that the reverse is true, that people are put into offices because they are known really to have a



good deal of influence on what goes on in the community.

Correlation of Formal Leadership Scores with  
Decision Making Scores, by Neighborhood

Neighborhood	No. of Persons		P <
Union Community	210	.49	.001
Center	92	.61	.001
Farmwell	57	.60	.001
Border	40	.30	.10
Smallfield	21	.42	.10

Persons who are thought of as upper informal leaders do have a greater part in making decisions for community projects in Union than do persons who are thought of as lower informal leaders. Here again, the relationship is by no means perfect. Some of the low correlations raise questions as to the adequacy of the method of judges' ratings as a way of locating community leaders.

Correlation of Informal Leadership Ranks with  
Decision Making Scores, by Neighborhood

Neighborhood	No. of Persons	Rank Correlation	P <
Center	31	.35	.20
Farmwell	23	.65	.01
Border	37	.19	-
Smallfield	13	.04	-

Perhaps there are certain types of neighborhoods, similar to Farmwell, in which people realize quite clearly who their real leaders are. In Farmwell a fairly well-knit group, who agreed on basic policies

for community programs, were making most decisions. Some other persons, who were quite capable, had little or no part in community decisions. It may be that, having a small group of major decision makers in the neighborhood, Farmwell people could give a rather accurate rating of leadership.

Perhaps there are periods in the development of a neighborhood when more reliable rating can be obtained. Center had undergone a community crisis in connection with one project, and there was a considerable amount of criticism of persons who were caught up in the controversy. Some very active persons may not have been ranked as high on informal leadership after this incident as they would have been before.

Who makes big and little decisions? Other studies have indicated that in some types of situations there are certain people who have major policy decisions, while different people make minor decisions.\* However, in the open-country community of Union, it was found that the same persons who had a large part in making high cost decisions tended to have a large part in making low cost decisions as well. A correlation coefficient of .55 was found for individuals' scores on decisions costing under \$10 and decisions costing \$100 and up. There is not as much division of labor between makers of major and minor decisions in this rural community as was found by Hunter in a large city or by Barnard in a big business corporation.

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\* For a study of decision making in a large urban center, see: Floyd Hunter, Community Power Structure: A Study of Decision Makers, Chapel Hill, N. C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1953. For a study of decision making in a bureaucracy, see: Chester I. Barnard, The Functions of the Executive, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1940.

Who are these people who are making many of the low cost decisions for projects? They are often the top ranking leaders! Formal leadership scores were almost, but not quite, as highly correlated with scores on low cost decisions as with scores on high cost decisions.

Upper formal leaders had a bigger part in making decisions of all sizes.

Much the same pattern was found for informal leadership. The top informal leaders were tending to make many low cost decisions, as well as many high cost decisions.

Who talks to whom? In the studies by Hunter and Barnard, referred to above, it was found that, along with the distinction between makers of major and minor decisions, there were rather definite patterns of interaction. One feature of these patterns was that the top leaders talked with one another and with middle level leaders, but very seldom talked with lower leaders in making decisions for group action. Middle level leaders talked with top leaders and with one another, and also talked with lower leaders.

In Union, however, top lay leaders (whether measured in terms of formal leadership score, informal leadership rank, or decision making score) were in direct contact with other people all the way up and down the leadership structure. Many examples could be cited of upper leaders discussing community projects with persons who exercised little leadership.

Professional leaders. In the course of this study, twenty-five professional leaders were mentioned as having taken part in decision making for community projects. Laymen recognized a number of these professional persons as key leaders, and several of them rated very high on

decision making. Professional leaders were credited with making the original proposals for fifteen of the forty-one actions which were studied.

The professional leader is in a special position and usually has a role in community action which is different from that of the lay leader. Not only is he paid for his work, but he usually lives outside the community, and he may be connected with it for only a few years, moving on to other areas when opportunities open up. For these and other reasons, his relationship to lay leaders is different in some respects from the relationship of lay leaders to one another.

Some of the professional leaders who were connected with Union community consciously worked through high ranking lay leaders to influence others in the community indirectly. This was in contrast to the way lay leaders operated, which has been mentioned above, talking with both high and low ranking leaders when decisions were to be made.

In connection with some of the formal organizations in Center and Farmwell neighborhoods particularly, professional advisors would usually talk over with chairmen the proposals which were to come up in meetings, and the chairmen often presented the proposals.

#### WHAT MAKES A SUCCESSFUL PROJECT?

Any group wants its project to succeed. In the present study an attempt was made to classify projects on the basis of the extent to which they succeeded--that is, the extent to which the final product was the same as the goal the group had in mind just before they started actual

execution of the project. It was found that thirty of the forty-one projects had achieved substantially what was originally intended, while eleven had not. Of these eleven, eight had achieved less than the original goal, while three had achieved more than the original goal. Of course, the community was especially proud of the projects which had achieved more than had been expected. On the other hand, these projects might have accomplished more for the money and effort if they had been more carefully planned before execution began.

What are some of the factors connected with achievement of the goal of action?

Low cost projects. In general, low cost projects achieved their goals more than high cost projects did.\* This may be one reason that the two more active neighborhoods tended to have successful projects. They undertook a large number of small projects, which tended to be successful. With their experience in small, successful projects, they were able to undertake larger projects and complete them successfully.

Backing of a formal organization. Only six of the forty-one innovations in community action had been undertaken by informal groups without the backing of any formal organization. Yet three of these six were unsuccessful, achieving less than was originally intended. Perhaps the failure to use the resources which community organizations might have offered was partly responsible for the lack of success of these projects. There were projects undertaken by informal groups in Center and Farmwell

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\* Of 18 projects costing under \$500, fifteen achieved the original goal. Of 12 projects costing \$500-\$4,999, nine achieved the goal. Of 11 projects costing \$5,000-up, six achieved the goal.



which might have failed if formal organizations had not taken them up in time. In Border there simply were no organizations to "carry the ball," so some efforts failed.

Careful goal setting and planning. In general, the people of Union community knew quite specifically what they wanted to achieve before they started actually executing community projects. However, they were not always specific in their plans for how they wanted to achieve these things. They sometimes accepted an idea rather quickly, without discussing very far just how practical it was. For Union community during the period of these actions, setting of specific goals was not a major problem as far as goal achievement was concerned. But some projects seem not to have achieved their goals because of lack of exploration of the type of goal which would meet the community's needs, lack of exploration of means and conditions to achieve goals, and failure to set specific plans before beginning execution of projects.

Decisions by groups. In those actions which achieved less than the original goal, there was a tendency for decisions to be made by single individuals rather than by groups, either formal or informal. In those which accomplished the original goal, there was a tendency for decisions to be made by groups. There was a very decided tendency, in the actions which achieved more than originally expected, for decisions to be made by groups. This may be related to the great enthusiasm with which these projects were carried out.

Agreement on decisions. Less division of opinion was reported for the decisions in projects which achieved the goal than for those which

achieved either more or less. Furthermore, what disagreement there was tended to be resolved before decisions were made definite. On the other hand, for the actions which failed to achieve goals as well as for those which achieved more than intended, there were more disagreements which remained unresolved than there were which were settled before reaching a decision.

Why is disagreement related to failure to achieve the original goal? Lack of agreement may lead to failure to achieve goals. For instance, one particular project was simply dropped after it had been going for a few weeks because the person who had been put in charge could not come to an agreement with others about a number of details. On the other hand, the relationship between disagreement may be quite a different one. Disagreements may break out when it is found that the group is not accomplishing what it set out to do. For instance, some of the projects which dragged on and on led to apathy and finally to petty bickering, making it harder for the community to get together on any future project.

Decisions by upper formal leaders. If upper formal leaders take much part in decisions for a project, the project is more likely to succeed. For Union community as a whole, correlation of individuals' formal leadership scores was highest with their scores on decision making for actions which achieved the goal as set ( $r = .45$ ); it was lowest for actions which achieved less than the goal ( $r = .11$ ); and it was intermediate for actions which achieved more than the goal ( $r = .37$ ).

Informal leadership. No definite relationship was found between informal leadership rank of decision makers and goal achievement of

actions. However, for Center and Farmwell there was a slight tendency for informal leadership to be more closely related to participation in actions achieving more than the original goal than it was to participation in actions achieving just what was originally aimed at. This raises the question whether in these two neighborhoods, the "community image" of leaders may be affected more by participation in the few dramatic, sometimes ill-planned actions in which more than the original goal is accomplished, than it is by participation in deliberate, carefully planned actions which achieve the goal originally set.

Participation of professional leaders. In Union community, projects in which professional leaders participated were more likely to achieve the goals originally set. There were twenty projects in which as much as ten percent of decision making was attributed to professional leaders. Out of these twenty projects, eighteen achieved the original goal, while only two achieved less.

It appears that there were two different ways in which lay leaders failed to use the resources of professional leadership. In the case of actions which achieved less than the goal, professional leaders seem to have been consulted on very general goals and plans, but their advice was not sought in making detailed plans for action. On the other hand, in the case of actions which achieved more than the goal, professional leaders' advice seems to have been sought on rather inconsequential matters, not in setting over-all goals and plans.

Amount of participation by professional leaders is not the whole story. The way in which they influence decisions is perhaps more

important. Both of the unsuccessful actions in which professional leaders had a major part were handled in a rather authoritarian manner. In one instance the group in Union community was simply informed that the project had been initiated at the county level and it was assumed that they would take part. In the other instance, a professional leader had not prepared the way by informal conversations before suggesting a project. The layman who was asked to assume leadership did so reluctantly but soon dropped it, and the project failed.

Those projects in which professional leaders participated most were the same ones in which goal setting and planning were done very carefully. It seems probable that professional leaders were encouraging lay leaders to explore possible projects before plunging into them, and that this was one factor in the achievement of goals.

#### LEADERSHIP AND KINSHIP

This study was started on the assumption that leadership is not a quality which an individual possesses, but is a process of group interaction. It is not something that a person "is," but something that he "does" in groups. Community leadership roles are learned, just as other roles are learned, and they are related to the other things which a person does.

It was expected that, in an open-country community such as Union, leadership would be related to kinship--that is, people who are close kin to one another would have similar leadership positions. This does not imply that leadership is a quality which is inherited, as blue eyes are inherited. It implies, rather, that the family is one of the places in

which a person learns to assume leadership. The community expects the son of a community leader to take the lead himself. And the son grows up expecting to be given positions of leadership. He may get from his parents or older brothers and sisters some of the knowledge and skills which will enable him to assume a position of leadership in community affairs.

However, it would not be expected that everyone's leadership positions would be similar to those of their near relatives. There is constant change in family fortunes. In American society a high value is placed upon being able to "rise from the ranks," and our changing economic and social systems demand that people learn to fill new types of positions.

It was found in Union community that individuals usually had leadership positions which were similar to their near relatives' leadership positions. That is, if a person held a high number of offices and committee memberships, most of his brothers and sisters, his parents, his wife, and his children who lived in the same neighborhood would usually hold many offices and committee memberships. If they were low, he was usually low. The same was true for close relatives' informal leadership and for decision making scores.

Kinship, of course, is not the only factor in leadership. There were some people whose leadership statuses did not correspond to that of their near kinsmen. Two such instances occurred in Center. But it does seem that the Union community family relationships are one of the important factors in preparing people to accept positions of leadership, and in influencing the community to put people in such positions.



### SOME PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

A number of practical implications arise from this study--pointers for finding and developing leadership and for planning community action.

Identification of community leaders. Effective work in a community often requires identification of persons who are exercising leadership. The present study would indicate that real leaders are not to be looked for behind the scenes. They are, for the most part, the men and women who are known to take part in community projects and are making not only major decisions but minor decisions as well. If even minor decisions are traced to their sources, it will be found that the people who are making them are also often making major decisions.

On the other hand, the identification of major leaders cannot always safely be based upon the judgment of a few individuals, not even knowledgeable people. In some situations, people seem to know who the decision makers are; in others, they may be mistaken. Laymen's judgments of who top leaders are should certainly be taken into account, but should be checked by other criteria, such as actual participation in decisions for community action.

Where an individual has a major part in decision making, his close relatives will probably also have more part than the average citizen. There are many exceptions, but this is a useful rule of thumb for preliminary identification of possible leaders.

Leadership training. Finding people who are already assuming roles of leadership is only the beginning of the job. It is at least as important to train leaders, both the people who are already in leadership

positions and those who might assume more responsibility in this respect.

The relationship between kinship and leadership need not imply a static situation. It also indicates that a family approach to leadership training may open up undeveloped leadership potentialities. Thus, the fact that one member of a family is accepting decision making responsibilities may be an indication that others in the family could be given more leadership responsibilities. In a community such as Union, there are considerable possibilities for development of leadership, and this may be one of the ways in which it can be done.

Professional leaders need to get across to lay leaders a greater understanding of the relationship between professional and lay leadership. It is evident that laymen in Union understand to a large extent what the resources available through some professional leadership channels are-- especially the ideas for community action which they can get from professional workers. However, a broader understanding of when and how to use these resources should make it possible to plan actions ahead more carefully than is being done in some cases.

In a community such as Union, there is value in upper leaders' having direct contact not only with intermediate leaders but with people in lower positions in the leadership structure. This pattern of broad contacts should not be lightly undermined. However, the demands of efficient community action sometimes make it difficult or impossible for upper leaders to be in contact with a large number of people. This may be a growing problem in communities in which there is an increasing number of community actions. In such a situation, professional leaders can help

lay leaders to think through the implications of delegating responsibility and of establishing indirect contact with a large number of people through intermediate leaders. Professional leaders can show how they themselves have found this indirect contact an effective resolution of the dilemma between "spreading themselves thin" or using authoritarian methods of getting things done. One way to work through intermediates would be to make more use of the existing committees which represent different areas of neighborhoods such as Center and Farmwell.

Planning community action. Leadership training is inseparably connected with community action and means nothing without it. The following suggestions about planning community action may point up this particular phase of developing leadership.

The present study indicates the importance of the neighborhood base of group action. In this particular community, action is almost entirely on a neighborhood basis. Where people of one neighborhood are divided in their loyalty to two communities, little effective action may be expected. County lines do not necessarily coincide with divisions between locality groups. Where administrative lines can be drawn to follow neighborhood and community boundaries, and to make larger communities out of total neighborhoods, it should facilitate community action.

The study indicates some of the resources in a rural community, which are available to professional workers who will use them. The two neighborhood clubs and the churches are among the most active and influential groups in the community. Through them some of the professional leaders have been able to get programs across very effectively. By

comparison, some other professional leaders' programs operate almost entirely through individual contacts, not through local groups. They miss the potential resources of formal and informal community groups, which could help them in carrying out their programs.

Attention to the organizational base of community action should make for more effective programs. Where appropriate organizations exist, action should normally be channeled through them rather than bypassing them. And where there is no organization to undertake certain types of action, it may be more important to develop the necessary organizational machinery over a period of years than to attempt some action which is foredoomed to failure because the resources of the neighborhood cannot be channeled.

It should help, in planning actions, to see each project as a total process. It seems especially important that the interrelationship of goals and plans be understood. The most worthy goal means little until plans are developed for reaching it. Over-all plans as well as over-all goals need to be decided before execution of projects is begun.

In evaluating goal achievement, it is important to realize the difference between achievement of the goal as originally intended and achievement of more than the goal, and to judge most types of action in terms of correspondence of product with original goal--not more, not less. Community groups should realize that achievement of more than the goal may denote poor planning.

Community groups should see beyond the projects which they are working on at any particular moment, to the sequence of actions over a

period of time. Regular planning of actions, usually on a yearly basis, should make for effective use of resources. And a series of related projects over a period of years, each planned as a unit, yet seen in relation to one another, might be an alternative to very large projects which attempt to do more than can be envisaged at one time.

Finally, the experience of the two more active neighborhoods suggests the value of a series of small projects, which depend upon local resources and call for decisions within the neighborhood. With such actions going on all the time, people learn what their resources are and get practice in cooperation, so that when they do decide on a major action, they know how to go about it. They can plan an action realistically, execute it, and come out with a product very much like what they originally had in mind.

#### APPENDIX: METHODS OF STUDY

This is a case study of one community from the point of view of leadership in community action. All data were collected in personal interviews during a seven-month period of 1953-54. Respondents were chosen on the basis of their supposed knowledge of relevant facts--which meant, in practice, largely on the basis of their part in making decisions for the projects which were studied.

The major types of information gathered for the study were:

- (1) general data on the community and each neighborhood, as background information on the situation which acting groups faced; (2) a list of projects which took place in the community during a period of approximately

two years, and detailed information on processes of decision making for new types of projects which were undertaken by any group; (3) information on the major leadership structures--formal lay leadership, informal lay leadership, and professional leadership; and (4) kin relationships within each neighborhood.

Three major summary measures were devised for those parts of the data which relate to the present bulletin: (1) formal leadership score, (2) informal leadership rank, and (3) decision making score.

1. Formal leadership scores were tabulated for each individual in the community on the basis of his formal positions, during a two-year period, in all organizations which meet within the community. Arbitrary weights were given for four different types of positions:

<u>Position</u>	<u>Weight</u>
President of organization	4
Other officer	3
Chairman of committee	2
Other committee member	1

Persons making high formal leadership scores may be referred to as upper formal leaders; those making low scores, as lower formal leaders.

2. Informal leadership ranks are designed to represent the "community image" of the relative parts which a number of selected individuals had in making major decisions for action. Near the end of the period of field work, the interviewer drew up a list of about thirty leaders in each neighborhood. He then asked four persons in each neighborhood, who had broad knowledge of recent community activities, to act as judges. They

were requested to rate the names of leaders in their own neighborhoods according to the part they had in making major decisions for community action. Informal leadership rank was then calculated on the basis of the average rating given by the four judges to each individual.

3. Decision making scores were calculated, for all individuals known to have taken part in decisions, on the basis of data abstracted from intensive interviews concerning certain community actions. Information was obtained on 41 actions undertaken by organizations and informal groups in the community, which were innovations for the acting groups. This information covered: (1) description of action, including total cost; (2) introduction of ideas; (3) decisions; and (4) goal achievement and consequences. For 813 decisions making up the 41 actions, information was obtained, through a series of open-end questions, on what decision was made, how and why the decision was made, and who took part in the decision--that is, what leadership statuses decision makers occupied.

Each decision was reduced to a monetary figure on the basis of the expected cost of carrying it out. The expected cost of any decision included: (1) cash expenditure, (2) money equivalent to donated materials, and (3) man-hours of volunteer work, figured at a dollar an hour. In the analysis of decisions by cost, three categories have been used: (1) low cost of "little" decisions, involving a cost of under \$10; (2) medium cost decisions, costing \$10 to \$99; and (3) high cost or "big" decisions, costing \$100 or more. It was assumed that expected cost of execution is a rough measure of the importance of a decision.

Decision making scores were tabulated for each individual who

was known to have had any part in making decisions for the 41 innovations which were studied during a period of approximately two years. Decision Making Scores took into account: (1) six items of behavior in decision making and (2) expected cost of decisions in which the person took part.

Each individual's score on any particular decision was calculated on the basis of six possible items of behavior, which were assigned arbitrary weights.\* These six items, which were found to distinguish between the first and fourth quartiles of decision makers at the .02 level of probability or less, included information on whether the individual did the following:

<u>Item</u>	<u>Weight</u>
Took any part in decision	1
If decision was considered on only one occasion, took part on that occasion	1
If decision was considered more than once, took part more than once	1
Made proposal	1
Was member of informal group which decided	1
Decided alone	2

Individuals' scores for decisions in each of the three cost categories were calculated separately. And for each individual a total decision making score was obtained by adding his scores on individual

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\* See the following: Donald G. Hay, "A Scale for the Measurement of Social Participation of Rural Households," Rural Sociology 13:285-294, September 1948; William H. Sewell, The Construction and Standardization of a Scale for the Measurement of the Socio-Economic Status of Oklahoma Farm Families, Agricultural Experiment Station Technical Bulletin No. 9. Stillwater, Oklahoma; Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College, April 1940; and William H. Sewell, "The Development of a Sociometric Scale," Sociometry 5:279-297, August 1942.



decisions after multiplying by the following arbitrary weightings for different cost-of-decision classes:

<u>Cost of Decision</u>	<u>Weight</u>
Under \$10	1
\$10 - \$99	2
\$100 or more	3

