

RESTATEMENT OF EDITORIAL POLICY

Human Relations, Vol. 18, 1965

F.E. Emery

THE SPONSORING Institutes and the journal itself arose out of the stimulus given to social science by World War II, and the formative integrative effort of Kurt Lewin. His untimely death was sorely felt, and the postwar developments in social science have by no means followed predictions.

At that time, it had seemed that a trend toward integration of the social sciences was a fairly reasonable expectation. Interdisciplinary teams had made notable contributions in tackling urgent wartime problems, and Lewin had made impressive steps toward a conceptual apparatus for handling both social and psychological data.

This trend toward integration did not materialize to the extent anticipated. The rapid growth of the social sciences in the universities, especially in the United States, ensured that departmental influences predominated. These separate disciplines funneled toward themselves the trained people and the finances. Though the relevance of the social sciences has been more widely grasped in the postwar years, lack of pressure in the problem areas of society has enabled their definition to be much influenced by disciplinary competition. This has not been without justification. The concepts and methods that we have are largely embedded in disciplinary contexts. They make sense in terms of their immediate neighbours, but much less in has been no shortage of relevant problems within the confines of the disciplines.

This is not to say that there have been no advances toward integration, only that these have been less impressive than expected, and less weight than the intra-disciplinary growth. In sample surveys and in some parts of operations research we see very substantial contributions to methodology and research strategies that are interdisciplinary. This is also in social psychiatry. More recently, economics and political science have shown increased interest in interdisciplinary problems, e.g. in the sociological and psychological factors influencing economic growth. As the behavioural sciences have penetrated schools first of business and later of public administration, it has become more common to think of centres of the administrative sciences in interdisciplinary terms and to push ahead with projects concerned with social change; similarly with cross and transnational studies.

Yet 'theoretical progress has hardly kept pace with the development of techniques', as Lewin stated in the first issue of this Journal. In systems theory we have had the growth of concepts that are interdisciplinary. It would be premature to rate the latter

as successful. The applications of systems theory in the social sciences have so far been abstract and tentative. Nevertheless, it is not proven that these defects are inherent, and our policy will be to aid publication of systems analyses that appear to be fruitful. At the same time, there is not sufficient vigour in interdisciplinary research to warrant restriction of the Journal to this area alone. The same end may be assisted by judicious juxtaposition of work that stems from different disciplines, where contributions bear on each other because of common practical or theoretical problems.

To have this mutual relevance, it is necessary that the individual studies have a considerable degree of conceptual clarity. Only if there is sufficient transparency in the concepts can persons in other disciplines see whether the research has bearing on their own interest in the real problem, or whether conceptual distinctions are being made that are also necessary in their own approach.

Though in a more complex and subtle way during the war and immediately postwar period – for many different purposes and in a variety of different patterns – the social sciences in the sixties are once again showing a greater degree of engagement with society. Increasing among social scientists is a concern with major social problems and with the identification of the conditions which will render decision making more apposite and social action more effective. This revives interdisciplinary interest, and is in noticeable contrast to the mood of partial withdrawal and emphasis on separate disciplines that characterized the fifties.

In order to make the Journal better able to reflect that further these developments, the Editorial Committee are seeking to broaden their basis both as regards the disciplines represented and as regards the international character of the membership. This broadening has already reached a point where the British and American Committees are not so closely identified respectively with the Tavistock Institute and the Research Centre for Group Dynamics as they have been in the past. Moreover, the nucleus of a European Committee is now in existence. We mark the year 1965, therefore, by introducing changes in the Editorial Committee which indicate the direction in which we should like to see the Journal develop.

3 Devonshire Street
London, W.1

November 1964
F.E.E
E.L.T

