XIV

On Communication—I

COMPRISING, as it does, the major part of all human intercourse, communication is a vast field and one of great significance to all administrators, who, perforce, must communicate with their subordinates, peers, and superiors, and in turn receive communication from them, if organizations are to function.

Communication of one kind or another, no doubt, has existed since life on earth began, but only recently has the subject itself been exposed to intensive analysis and investigation. The study of language, through linguistics and semantics, has gone beyond grammar, vocabulary, and rhetoric, to explore the effect of language itself upon the formulation of our thoughts, the development of individual, national, and racial psychologies, and the effect of words and other forms of communication upon our emotions. Symbolic logic has emerged from the more general field of philosophy with an algebra of its own with which to deal with problems of communication. Communication theory has brought concepts of "bits" of information and "noise" which permit mathematical exploration, something called "information theory" has evolved, the role of redundancy has been investigated, communication networks have been subjected to controlled experiment, the concept of entropy has been applied to messages, and a new

word, *cybernetics*, has been coined by Professor Wiener to describe his own researches in communication.[1]

All this sounds more lofty and sophisticated than is intended, as though I know all about these things and could write about them with intelligence and penetration. On the contrary, they have been cited because I do *not* know about them and have neither the knowledge nor the temerity to discuss communication in any but a pragmatic way.

2

Administrators, as I have already said, must send and receive communications if their organizations are to function. In recent years, as organizations have become what might be called more democratic and persuasion has had to replace fiat, administrators have been urged and entreated from all sides to Communicate with a capital C. Workers, it is said, will be happier, more loyal, more productive, more stable, more tractable, if they are kept informed about the organization, its health or sickness, its

[1] Perhaps a personal comment may be forgiven. Being incapable of comprehending it, I have not read Professor Wiener's *Cybernetics* (Cambridge, Mass., Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1948) but did read his *Human Use of Human Beings* (Boston, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1950), which purported to be a presentation of the subject understandable to a layman. This experience gave me the feeling that cybernetics is much less a new field of scholarship than a clever and euphonious new word. Having coined a new word, one is beguiled into believing that something new must be described by it.

I had the same feeling when, in World War II, Winston Churchill urged invasion of "the soft underbelly of Europe." His frequent urging of this finally convinced me that he was persuaded more by his own eloquence than by the feasibility of such a strategy. Having characterized the Mediterranean coast as a "soft underbelly," it had to be that way, easily penetrable by the "spearhead" of an expeditionary force. Conversely, such a "spearhead" would be "blunted" by the impenetrability of "Fortress Europe" along the English Channel.

All of us, I am sure, fall into this trap from time to time.

policies, its progress, its intentions, etc., etc., etc. Communication, we are also told, is a two-way street; there must be upward, as well as downward, communication, and much is made of the cathartic effect of allowing the rank and file to get things off their collective and individual chests. Thus, communication has become an administrative virtue as well as a necessity.

Partly because of this, I suppose, a wide variety of communicative devices, unheard of a quarter century or more ago, have appeared on the scene. Employee-management committees and works councils have been born and have proliferated in industry, in order that management and rank and file may confer face to face. House magazines, which used to be slanted toward customers as institutional advertising, now are directed toward the organization's own family and have become as folksy, with names and pictures, as the old-fashioned country newspaper. Once dry-as-dust corporate reports have been jazzed up with colors, pie charts, bar charts, non-technical language, and photographs, and given wide circulation beyond the customary stockholder mailing list. Public address systems have become only less familiar than the telephone; these give executives the added capability of informing and/or exhorting all of their fellows simply by pressing the switch of the "squawk box" and talking into its microphone.

This is stated with some sarcasm and perhaps a touch of cynicism, which may suggest a belief that communication is not a virtue, that labor-management committees are administratively bad, house organs a form of insincere propaganda, and so on. The intent is not to suggest this but only to lead into a discussion of three fallacies:

1. That administrative communication need consist only of *telling*.

2. That administrative communication need consist only of *listening*.

3. That communication of decisions to subordinates before taking action upon them equates to sharing authority for the decisions themselves.

Admittedly, these are overstated and oversimplified; administrators would disavow all of them, the first and second as untrue and contradictory, and the third as fact and not fallacy. No administrator would admit to a belief in communication as only an act of informing (i.e., telling) subordinates, yet many behave as if this were so. Not so many similarly rely upon listening in a kind of exclusive sense but some have. The belief that communication of decision in advance of action and sharing of authority are inseparable is almost universal.

3

Several years ago I was retained by a small manufacturing company to give a series of lectures on management topics to their supervisory group. A few months afterward, I was invited to be an observer at an "Employee-Management Committee" meeting. This committee had been formed by the president of the company, in the belief that regular meetings of such a body would improve relations between employees and management and enhance morale.

The meeting lasted about an hour in an atmosphere that was, outwardly at least, quite agreeable. The demeanor of the president and his management cohorts was warm and friendly enough but, even so, the four or five employee representatives present uttered not one word until the last few minutes of the meeting. They were told about inventory problems in the store room and tool room, about the

seriousness of current spoilage, and about sales and production prospects of the company. These involved expositions by several management participants, and some discourse between them, but no employee said anything whatever about these topics. Finally, one of the employees did speak, to ask if any decision had been made upon a request, apparently tendered at a previous meeting, that paid vacations be granted for the four week-days following Labor Day. The reply to this inquiry was brief: he was told by the president, in a tone clearly implying negation, that the management was "thinking about it." Just after this the meeting was adjourned.

Such descriptions of situations, in which the bosses do all the talking is so familiar as to be hackneyed. Yet that is precisely why it is important. It describes administrative behavior that is typical and familiar. Again and again and again, the boss *tells* the employees what *he* wants them to know, or what *he* thinks they ought to know. What *they* want to know is not a consideration.

The fact that this is typical and familiar does not make it wrong, of course. It is fair to ask which is better: informing employees about inventory problems, spoilage, and production prospects, or telling them nothing at all? As communication is currently revered as good for its own sake, one would be inclined to say that *any* information is better than *no* information. By forming the committee and telling the employees about various matters, the management may not have communicated in the best way but they have at least done something of value.

But this is not necessarily so, not by any means. Previously, when there was no Employee-Management Committee, employees were not told about the things their representatives now learned. But previously the employees had

not *expected* to be told. When a committee is formed, expectation is aroused; the employees expect not only to be told but themselves to do a bit of telling. If this expectation is only half fulfilled, disillusionment is likely to be severe and may cost more than the gain. Thus, introduction of one-way communication where formerly there was none can result in net loss rather than net gain.

In any event, the tendency for superiors to do most of the talking is both natural and understandable. Without implying an exclusive monologue by the superior, he will be more likely to communicate *to* the subordinate than vice versa because:

1. He will have more to say. He will know more about the enterprise than the subordinate and he is habituated to communicating to him by the usual needs of giving orders, instructions, and information. Ordinarily there is more to be communicated downward than upward in any organizational hierarchy. Administrators possess more information than subordinates, are accustomed to imparting it, and the custom itself will tend to inhibit upward communication to some degree.

2. The superior is a human being and prefers to talk rather than to listen. The subordinate is a human being too and has the same preference, but he is not in the same dominant position—except to *his* subordinates—to exercise it.

3. The superior will be much, much less restrained in the content, nature, and tone of his communications than his subordinates. They, the subordinates, inevitably are dependent to some degree upon the superior for the satisfaction of their wants and, because of this, will temper every communication to the boss, whether by spoken word, written word, gesture, or demeanor, to avoid giving

offense. Only in the heat of anger or provocation, or when protected by something like a labor union, will the subordinate cast this precaution aside.

4

This third reason for executive dominance of communication, for emphasis upon "telling," merits further examination. Consider the Employee-Management Committee meeting and the final, timidly presented question about paid vacations after Labor Day. Superficially, this request seems to contain nothing critical of management; it asks for four days of holiday. This would stop production and cost money, the firm cannot afford the extra cost, therefore the request is denied. All of this is completely temperate, completely objective, completely logical. There is really nothing for management to get hurt or huffy about; there is really nothing for the employees to be timid or restrained about.

Not so. The request for four days' holiday involves production and dollars, to be sure, but more than that, it is also an expression of discontent. And, if the employees are discontented, then the management is at fault. Management has been something less than perfect in administering the firm's affairs; otherwise there would be no complaint.

This is the subtle but inevitable implication of the request; this is why it is hesitantly and timidly made, brusquely and evasively answered—even though neither the employee nor his boss understood or consciously considered their own behavior. This is the inescapable implication of *any* subordinate complaint or demand, in *any* form of organization. Subordinates will stifle some complaints and some demands just to avoid being stigmatized

as chronic complainers but this is a minor blockade to upward communication compared to the obstacles of implied criticism. We scorn and derogate a "yes man" because he says only what he thinks his boss will want to hear. We admire a "no man" for having the courage to speak his own mind. But all of us, every one, are yes men and no men to some degree. We are all governed by the same subtle forces that restrained the employee representative and antagonized his superior.

5

Within a year or so after the meeting just described, the company was organized by a labor union and there was a six-week strike before agreement was reached on the first contract. This was followed by the usual spate of grievances, some of them going all the way to arbitration for settlement.

These expressions of discontent were critical of management too, not subtly like the request for post-Labor Day vacation, but militantly, harshly, and openly, with hostility rather than timidity. Now the employees had no fear of management reprisals; they had their union behind them. The restraints to critical upward communication had been removed.

Burleigh B. Gardner and Charles R. Moore, in "Human Relations in Industry,"[2] have commented upon this apropos of the unique organization roles of labor unions with respect to upward communication. In a very real sense each union is a part of the organization of each establishment under contract. Yet the union stands outside the parent organization, independent of its authority but

[2] Chicago, Richard D. Irwin, Inc., 1950.

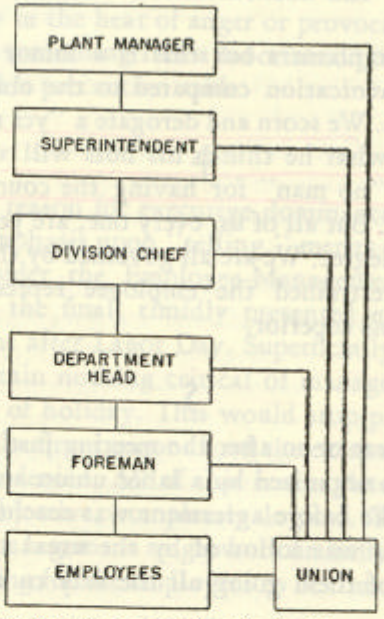

FIG. 8. Organization relationship of a labor union.

with communication access to every level of the hierarchy, without fear of management reprisal (Fig. 8).

The removal of these customary restraints can give management a very hard time. Management wants upward communication and, with a union, gets it with a vengeance. Subordinates are now free to criticize and complain without fear of punishment. And they are also free to give vent to their pent-up frustrations, to rebel against authority, to "spit in the boss's eye," to "singe the management's tail."[8] It is much easier for an administrator to agree

[8] This is a somewhat bowdlerized version of a statement made frequently by the local president of a shipyard union. He usually preceded the statement by saying that he liked nothing better.

philosophically that upward communication is desirable than it is for him to cope with it in reality.

This raises a very difficult question: if free and candid communication up as well as down the organization hierarchy is desirable, should administrators encourage the removal of restraints that inhibit criticism?

It is easy for me, a university professor and dean, to answer this affirmatively, because I am not on the labor-management firing line and can be detached about the whole thing. How, it is more to the point to ask, would I feel about a union of students who could criticize teachers without the restraints they now feel? How would I feel if they spit in *my* eye, singed *my* tail?

Like the industrial manager, I would not like it but I hope that I would regard such a development as a good thing for the organization to which I am attached. Indeed, I will go further and argue that students often need something like a union, not for purposes of collective bargaining, but for the encouragement of candid and critical communication to their superiors.

The relationship between a good teacher and his students is probably the very best element in all of education, but not all teachers can be classed as good. Some are incompetent, incapable of teaching, and some are tyrants, who find the classroom about as convenient as a drill field or even a prison for the exercise of their dictatorial tendencies. The teacher, any teacher who wants to, can rub his pupils' noses in the dirt—and some do.

Like everyone else, I had as a student, both good and bad teachers, and revered the good ones and endured the bad, never having had sufficient provocation to run the risk of complaining about the incompetents or rebelling against the tyrants. But sometimes I would have liked to

rebel and believe that it would have been good for me and good for the institutions I attended if ready means for critical communication of and to my superiors had been provided.

However, I do not espouse the development of such extra-organization attachments lightly or unreservedly, for they sound better than they really are. For one thing—and many would consider this the strongest objection—they are somewhat destructive of executive authority. Certainly labor unions have sharply curtailed administrative power in business and industry, detrimentally some will say. Certainly we would all feel misgivings about militant unions of students, which might bring forth desirable upward communication but also bring anarchy to the classroom. Certainly we would shrink from the notion of a union of rank and file soldiers, who might thus be motivated to refuse the orders of their officers at a critical time.

These objections from the standpoint of those in administration can be supported by comparable objections from the standpoint of the individual.

The industrial labor union and its members do have unrestrained communication access to any level of the parent organization and do not fear executive reprisal. But the union itself is not a box on the table of organization, like that shown in Fig. 8, it is a hierarchy more like that shown in Fig. 9. By belonging to the union, the individual employee has been relieved of fear and restraint in communicating with his employers and superiors but, by the same token, he has acquired a whole new set of superiors and, with them, a whole new set of restraints. Now he can spit in his company boss's eye but, mayhap, not even dare to look into his union boss's eye. What coal

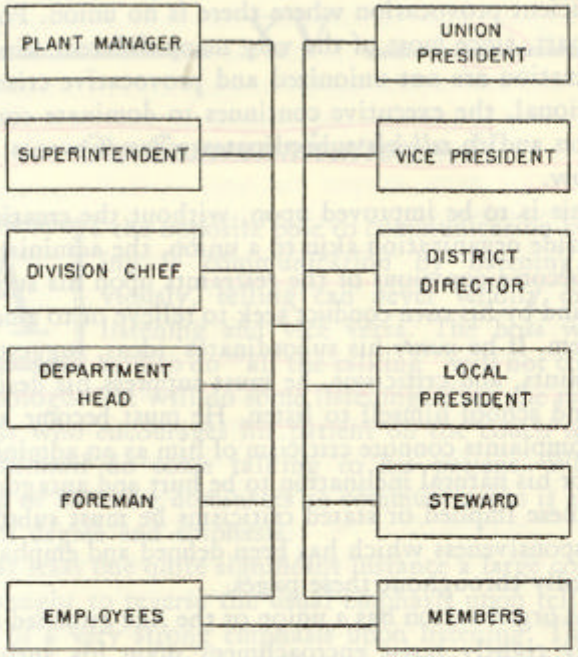

FIG. 9. Organization relationship of a labor union, including the union hierarchy.

miner, to choose an obvious example, would recklessly criticize John L. Lewis? Who knows? Perhaps we shall some day have unions within unions just on this account.

6

Preceding pages have rambled a good deal about the general fallacy of communication à la telling, by exploring the forces conducive to executive dominance of communication and the counter forces that are released when restraints to upward communication are removed. These counter forces become apparent only when organization by some-

thing like a labor union releases them, or under conditions of sufficient provocation where there is no union. For the most part, since most of the very many different kinds of organization are not unionized and provocative crises are exceptional, the executive continues to dominate communication and to *tell* his subordinates what *he* wants them to know.

If this is to be improved upon, without the creation of an outside organization akin to a union, the administrator must become conscious of the restraints upon his subordinates and by his own conduct seek to relieve or to ameliorate them. If he *wants* his subordinates' ideas, suggestions, complaints, and criticisms, he must suppress his desire to talk and school himself to listen. He must become aware that complaints connote criticism of him as an administrator. For his natural inclination to be hurt and antagonistic from these implied or stated criticisms he must substitute the responsiveness which has been defined and emphasized repeatedly throughout these pages.

If his organization has a union or the like attached to it, he may rightly resist encroachment upon his authority but this does not mean that he cannot seek to utilize the valuable communication channels now provided for him. And finally, if he is devoted to the welfare of the individuals under his direction, he will be conscious that their union, or whatever the extra-organization may be, can impose just as many restraints as he once could himself. He may not be able to alter such a situation but, being perceptive, he may oppose it and perhaps exert desirable influence on behalf of his own people.

XV

On Communication—II

AT the opposite pole to communication by telling is communication by listening. Obviously, telling can never wholly exclude listening and vice versa. The boss who is said to do "all the talking" will not conduct a monologue but will do some listening. Even the psychoanalyst who encourages his patient on the couch to talk will himself do some talking to his patient. Whether telling or listening dominates in communication is a question of degree and emphasis.

In at least one quite significant instance a large corporation sought to reverse the usual emphasis upon telling in favor of a very strong emphasis upon listening. The corporation, the American Telephone and Telegraph Company, did this without the compulsion of a labor union, deliberately and voluntarily, as a consequence of research done at the plant of a subsidiary, the Hawthorne plant of the Western Electric Company in Chicago.[1]

At Hawthorne two investigations of the effect of working conditions upon productivity were undertaken in 1927, jointly by a group from within the company and from the Graduate School of Business Administration of Harvard University. In a room devoted to the wiring of telephone

[1] See F. J. Roethlisberger and William J. Dickson, *Management and the Worker*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1940; North Whitehead, *The Industrial Worker*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1938; and Elton Mayo, *The Human Problems of an Industrial Civilization*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1933.

banks by wiremen, soldermen, and inspectors on group piece-work, an observer remained for many months studying the "informal organization" among the rank and file, the social forces at work within the group. By this means he came to perceive that the wage incentive did not motivate as it was supposed to. Instead of seeking to earn more by producing more, output was very carefully controlled by the operators themselves at a level which they, rather than the industrial engineers or management, had set. Strong sanctions were imposed by the group upon the "chiselers" who produced below the group norm and upon the "rate busters" who produced above—even though these faster workers increased the wages of their fellows.

In another room, devoted to the assembly of relays by girls also on group piece-work, meticulous measurements of output were kept during control periods and again after changes had been made in lighting, working hours, rest periods, and the like. Large increases in output were achieved and it was believed that these gains derived from the improved working conditions. The final step, however, disproved this belief: working conditions which had prevailed at the outset were restored but output remained at the experimental high level.

Thus the researchers were confounded by each investigation. Results of study in the bank-wiring room disproved, or at the very least tended to disprove, that wage incentives motivate as is commonly believed. Studies of the relay-assembly room at first indicated that productivity is dependent upon favorable working conditions and then seemed to disprove this because high output was sustained when original, less favorable conditions were restored.

Since the relay-assembly girls were on the same kind of

group piece-work as the bank-wiring men, and had been before assignment to the test-room, it could be reasoned that the increased production of relays was not due to motivation from the wage incentive. Since it was not due, either, to the various improvements in environment, to what was it due?

Reexamination of the entire experimental procedure led to the conclusion that the carefully controlled experiments had not been controlled at all. Lighting in Period A could be changed to different and presumably better lighting in Period B; the difference in lighting could be measured and related to measured differences in output between the periods, while all other variables were held constant. Then improved production could be related directly to improved lighting. This was the reasoning.

But all other variables were *not* held constant. The most important variable of all, the emotions of the operators, could neither be controlled nor measured.

Realization of this finally led to the conclusion that it was the changes themselves, not their physical nature but the *facts* of change, and how the changes were introduced, that had raised production, and had kept it high when the old conditions were restored.

To take a girl out of a huge relay-assembly department and invite her into a test-room is to notice her and her test-room companions. To ask for opinions about a rest-period before introducing such a change is to invite participation in decisions close to the operators' working lives. To do this repeatedly, while a research observer becomes a friend and confidant and at the same time is not a boss, is to raise production. This is what had happened.

Much of this was a matter of communication—upward communication. The girls were *asked* if they would go into

the test-room, *asked* if they would be willing to work under brighter lights, *asked* if they would try a ten-minute rest period each morning and afternoon, *asked* if they would go back to the old, less pleasant conditions at the very end.

The asking, moreover, was quite different from the kind portrayed in the cartoon, where the boss eyes his employees balefully and says, "Any comments from those who expect to resign?" No doubt the girls were influenced in some degree by the usual superior-subordinate restraints, no doubt they sometimes acquiesced because they thought they were expected to, but these tendencies were offset by the research itself, by the fact that their opinions were elicited by investigators rather than bosses, and by continued responsiveness to what the girls said.

Thus the results achieved were in substantial measure due to enhanced upward communication.

2

As a consequence of this and also because of other, related experiences, a vast upward communications program evolved and spread into many A.T.&T. units throughout the country. The basis of this program was the employee interview, not the kind of interview which takes place in the employment office, nor like that between a worker and his boss, but a special kind of interview with a special kind of interviewer, trained carefully in the techniques of eliciting the employee's thoughts, in getting him to "open up," to "get things off his chest."

More specifically, training was given to a considerable number of "industrial relations counselors," whose missions were to interview the employees who volunteered for their services. It was understood that all disclosures would be kept in strict confidence; if an employee reviled

his boss—or for that matter his wife—his revulsion was not disclosed to management or to anyone else. If all of the employees from a given department, independently but unanimously reviled the boss they shared in common, this too would be kept secret and presumably the detested and reviled executive would stay at his post.

Thus the therapy, somewhat like psychoanalysis and the Roman Catholic confessional, was intended to be catharsis. In effect, management said, we will not devote ourselves to giving information to our employees, we will elicit it from them. To do this, we must establish conditions of confidence favorable to freedom of expression and candor, and this requires that we learn nothing of what the employees disclose and take no action upon such complaints as they may voice. By this means, however, we shall relieve the pent-up frustrations of our workers and thereby improve motivation, morale, and production.

There followed a vast listening campaign. In one plant, if memory serves correctly, some 40,000 interviews were conducted, some of them of two hours' duration and some repeated with the same employees, as might be expected. Some successes were reported. One employee, for example, complained about the food in the cafeteria and then, in the next interview, expressed gratification over the improvement, although nothing had been done. There were other instances of the same kind and, for a time, enthusiasm for the counseling program was high.

As in the case of the Employee-Management Committee, it is fair to ask if this program of listening was not better than no upward communication at all. Undoubtedly many of the interviews did yield beneficial catharsis and did raise the morale and loyalty of some employees. But, again, there must have been many, many others who

wanted more than catharsis, who wanted to see their complaints and frustrations acted upon, whose frustrations must have been aggravated rather than relieved by the confidential, do-nothing policy. Entirely apart from the very considerable cost of interviewing, it is quite possible that the program resulted in a net loss. In any case, whether because of high out-of-pocket cost or inadequate results, the program has virtually been abandoned. Optimum communication is more than telling—and also more than listening.

In fairness to the researchers and to the sponsoring corporation, no one else quite knows what to do about the Hawthorne results either, although their significance is widely acknowledged. Some executives, as I have already said, have latched on to communication as a cure-all virtue and some have gone in for employee "participation" and something called "human relations" as a kind of gimmick to keep workers happy and raise production. Any such approach misses the essence of the relay-assembly room research.

The Hawthorne experiments did not set out to manipulate people into being happy or to do more work, either by talking to them or by listening to them, or by tossing them a bone of token participation. Both the communication and the participation were genuine and sincere, without ulterior motive; there was an essential "togetherness" about the whole thing. When organizations and the administrators who lead them are capable of achieving that spirit, then the results of the relay-assembly room may be duplicated. Until then, as long as communication is told only to guide or direct, or heard only as catharsis; as long as participation is invited only to motivate, the potential of the experiments will not be realized.

3

To examine the third fallacy, that communication of decision prior to execution equates to sharing of authority, it is necessary first to establish certain conditions.

First, there is no conflict between what has previously been said about participation and this discussion about advance communication and the sharing of authority. Participation and sharing authority are parts of the same thing, to be sure; one cannot have participation without giving a share in decision making. But this does not say that *communication* of decision in advance of action is to share the power to decide. That is what so many believe, or at least behave as though they do.

With this in mind, suppose that the administrator of an organization—any organization, or any segment of an organization—decides upon a course of action known to be esteemed or desired by all. In such cases, announcement of intention is likely to be in advance of action and involves no challenge of authority, since there is little possibility of conflict. If an army officer decides to give extra leave to his men, he does not hesitate to give them the welcome news in advance. If an industrial or business executive decides to redecorate the cafeteria or locker rooms, he is likely to announce his intentions to his employees, in fair certainty that they will be pleased. If a teacher decides to cancel a previously announced examination, he can be reasonably sure that his students will not dispute his decision. No question of rank and file or subordinate challenge to authority is involved in the advance communication of glad tidings.

This is not true when the news is bad. Let the officer cancel leaves which previously have been granted and the

response from his men will be quite different. Let the executive decide to eliminate an existing cafeteria in order to cut down monetary loss and the response of the rank and file will be anything but jubilant. Without warning, let the teacher spring a quiz on his students; they may not openly rebel, but their displeasure will be clearly apparent and they may in some degree challenge the teacher's authority to give the unannounced examination.

Between the better and the bitter kinds of decisions which must be communicated there are blends of each. The better kinds do not arouse resistance or objection, the bitter kinds do. In the latter case, how shall this resistance be met? What kind of communication, transmitted when, will effect the best transition?

Again, we may discuss extremes. At one extreme, communication may be postponed until the moment of action: the soldier is packed and ready to go when his leave is canceled, the employees learn of discontinuance of cafeteria service when dismantling begins, the students find out about the quiz when it is handed to them. At the opposite extreme, the same decisions are made but are promptly communicated, not deferred. What is the relative net economy of these different approaches?

From the administrative standpoint the moment of action kind of announcement has certain attractions. It permits postponement of both bad tidings and conflict and gives the executive a chance to indulge in procrastination, a temptation very dear to everyone. Moreover, this kind of action seems to preserve both speed and authority. The executive makes his own decision and proceeds to carry it out, there is no delay for communication or for argument. Communication, when it comes, is of a *fait accompli* kind; the rank and file may protest, even violently, but their

protest will be at the *nature* of the action and not at the *right* of the administrator to decide as he did.

However, deferred communication has negative attributes as well. Expressions like, "You could at least have let me know," "Why didn't you tell me?" and "You might have given me a little notice," are heard frequently in and out of organization life and are indicative of the resentments we all feel upon getting last-minute information. I do not think I have ever heard deferred communication described as discourteous but there is in such situations a failure to consider the feelings of others, an element of incivility, which probably accounts for much of the resentment aroused.

Resentment also has more practical causes. Subordinates tend to suspect the motives of their superiors' decisions and failure to communicate the reasons for intended action often results in misunderstanding. Advance communication at least offers the possibility of making clear the reasons for decision and prevents erroneous and damaging assumptions.

Then, too, people tend to make plans of one kind or another and these are more likely to be disrupted by last-minute news than by earlier information, which may give time for change and adjustment. I have seen employees disgruntled even at good news on this account: "If I had only known about this holiday in advance, I would have planned a trip to the sea-shore."

Deferred communication also loses for the administrator the chance of receiving and responding to improvements in the decisions he has made. A decision to eliminate a money-losing cafeteria may be quite sound but that does not preclude the possibility that some rank and file employee can suggest a better way to retain some measure of food service without monetary loss. Such ideas have much

more value than their own merit; they involve chances for executive responsiveness, employee participation, identification with the enterprise, enhancement of communications per se, and contribute largely to morale.

This is a negative value of deferred communication and, correspondingly, a positive value of advance communication. In each case, whatever the news to be imparted, this value can and often does exceed all of the others. It alone can tilt the scales in favor of communication of decision in advance of action.

4

If advance communication is so much better, why do we not have more of it?

Two reasons on behalf of administrators have been given: (1) human tendencies to postpone unpleasantness, to procrastinate, and (2) desire to preserve executive authority. But the second of these reasons is not one-sided; the executive acts to preserve authority because he knows that his subordinates will use the information, if he communicates it in advance of action, to challenge his right to make the decision itself. If this is so, as I think it is, and if the lower echelons of organization want advance communication, as I think they do, then they, the lower echelons, must come to understand that advance communications give information and do not, of necessity ask permission.

Failure to understand this distinction is perhaps most evident in union-management relations, not in collective bargaining, but during the life of a collective agreement. Let management make a decision legally theirs under the contract, let them state their intentions in advance to the union, and the response is likely to be an attempt to block the decision itself. This is understandable enough but it

does militate against future communication in advance of action.

An example of this kind of challenging union behavior was witnessed at another arbitration hearing between the company and union involved in the Rollins case (Chapter XII). In this case, the company decided to transfer certain mechanical department employees across craft lines to meet a temporary production need. Subject to the requirement that they maintain craft distinction "whenever possible," the contract gave permission for such a transfer.

As part of a policy of communicating decisions in advance of action, two union stewards were informed of the intended transfer; they in turn reported to their union officers and an attempt was made to block the move, culminating finally in a grievance carried to arbitration. In view of the qualifying clause pledging observance of craft lines "whenever possible," the dispute was legitimate enough and the incident is not told just because the union tried to block the action.

What was revealing, apropos of advance communication, was the testimony of one union man who accused the company of being remiss in discussing the transfer with the stewards and asked, "Why were the stewards told about the intended transfer, if not to ask their permission?" To this man—and, one may surmise, to his colleagues too—a statement of decision, e.g., "We intend. . . ," at once translates into a request for permission: "May we . . . ?" This is precisely the fallacy which has been discussed through these many pages: that communication of decision in advance of action and execution equates to sharing authority, to asking permission. It does not, or, more realistically, should not, for optimum communication in any organization.