CHAPTER 14 How Good an Organization Man Are You?

In the foregoing chapters, I have argued that the dominant ideological drift in organization life is toward (1) idolatry of the system and (2) the misuse of science to achieve this. I would now like to go into some detail on one manifestation of this drift: the mass testing of "personality." These curious inquisitions into the psyche are becoming a regular feature of organization life, and, before long, of U.S. life in general. And these tests are no playthings; scoff as the unbeliever may, if he has ambitions of getting ahead he would do well to develop, or simulate, the master personality matrix the tests best fit.

I hope these chapters will be instructive in this respect, and in examining the curious ways tests are scored, I will give some quite practical advice on how to beat them. But it is the underlying principles of testing that will be my main consideration. Ordinarily, The Organization's demands for conformity are so clouded in mystique that their real purport is somewhat obscured. In personality tests, however, they are abundantly evident. Here is the Social Ethic carried to the ultimate; more than any other current development, these tests dovetail the twin strands of scientism and the total integration of the individual. The testers can protest that this is not so, that really the tests are for the individual, that they encourage difference, not conformity. But the tests speak otherwise. They are not, I hope to demonstrate, objective. They do not respect individual difference. They are not science; only the illusion of it.

Personnel testing of one kind or another has been going on for a long time, but the testing of personality has been a fairly recent development. Spiritually, it is not descended so much from the scientific-management movement of the twenties but rather...
from the later, and presumably more liberal, human-relations movement. The scientific-management people, such as Taylor, were primarily interested in getting things done, and their concern with the employee was with those aspects that contributed to this—such as his ability to distinguish distance, or the dexterity of his hands. The development of testing during this period was almost wholly concerned with aptitudes, and some fair success was accomplished along these lines; by having job applicants try their hand at putting wiggly blocks together and such, management was much better able to tell what kind of work a man was best suited for.

Concurrently, organizations were finding vocabulary and intelligence tests similarly useful. During World War I, psychologists had developed, in the “Alpha” tests, a very serviceable vocabulary and intelligence test, and civilian organizations were quick to see its usefulness. While these were not precise, enough people were being tested to produce rough norms that would enable an organization to tell whether a person’s mental capacities were sufficient for the particular work at hand. While schools and colleges have been the primary users of such tests, industry found that with the growing complexity of certain kinds of jobs, I.Q. tests were just as valuable as physical-aptitude tests in gauging employees. By the time of World War II, the use of aptitude and intelligence tests had become so widespread that it was almost impossible for any white-collar American to come of age without having taken a battery at one time or another.

But something was eluding The Organization. With aptitude tests The Organization could only hope to measure the specific, isolated skills a man had, and as far as his subsequent performance was concerned, it could predict the future only if the man was magnificently endowed or abysmally deficient in a particular skill. Aptitude tests, in short, revealed only a small part of a man, and as more and more group-relations advocates have been saying, it is the whole man The Organization wants and not just a part of him. Is the man well adjusted? Will he remain well adjusted? A test of potential merit could not tell this; needed was a test of potential loyalty.

For a long time applied psychologists had been experimenting with inmates of mental institutions and prisons to plumb the deeper recesses of maladjustment, and in the course of this work they had developed some ingenious pen and pencil tests. While most of these originally designed to measure abnormality, they could not do so unless they were applied to normal people to get some sort of standard. Before long, the psychologists, spurred by the lively interest of professional educators, began applying these to ordinary groups of people. At first there were only crude indexes—chiefly of degree people were extroverted or introverted. But the psychologists were nothing if not ingenious, and they designed tests which presumably can measure almost any aspect of a man’s personality. Now in regular use are tests which tell in decimal figures a man’s degree of radicalism versus conservatism, his practical judgment, his social judgment, the amount of perseverance he has, his stability and his contentment index, his hostility to society, his personal behavior—and now some psychologists are tinker with a bit of a sense of humor. More elaborate yet are the projective techniques. With such devices as the Rorschach Inkblot test and the Thematic Apperception test, the subject is forced to apply his imagination to a stimulus, thereby X-raying himself for latent feelings and psychoses. Asking a normal adult to reveal himself is not the same thing as asking an inmate of a mental institution, of course, and some adults have balked at the self-revelation asked.

But this recalcitrance, psychologists have advised organizations, is not the great stumbling block. Testers have learned ways to attach great significance to the manner in which people respond to the rest of the tests, and if a man refuses to answer several questions, he does not escape analysis. Given such a man, many psychologists believe that they can deduce his suppressed anxieties almost as well as if he had co-operated fully.

Hence, in short, was just what The Organization wanted. Not all organizations, to be sure, but since the war there has been a steady increase in the numbers which have taken up this tool. In 1954, the third of U.S. corporations used personality tests; since then the proportion has been climbing—of the 63 corporations I checked in 1954, some 60 per cent were already using the tests, and these include such bellwether firms as Sears, General Electric, and Westinghouse. Today, there remain some companies opposed to personality testing, but most of the large ones have joined and a fair number of smaller ones too.

The most widespread use of tests has been for the fairly mundane
job of screening applicants. Even in companies which aren't yet fully sold on personality tests, it is part of standard operating procedure to add several personality tests to the battery of checks on the job applicant. If business declines, the tests may also be used to help cut down the work force. "For trimming inefficiency in the company operation," Industry Psychology Inc. advises clients, "there is no better place to direct the ax than in the worker category." And there is no better way to do this, it adds, than to run the work force through tests.

But the most intriguing development in personality testing lies in another direction. In about 25 per cent of the country's corporations the tests are used not merely to help screen applicants for The Organization but to check on people already in it. And these people, significantly, are not the workers; as in so many other aspects of human relations it is the managers who are being hoist. Some companies don't bother to give personality tests to workers at all. Aside from the fact that testing can be very expensive, they feel that the limited number of psychologists available should concentrate on the more crucial questions.

Should Jones be promoted or put on the shelf? Just about the time an executive reaches fifty and begins to get butterflies in his stomach wondering what it has all added up to and whether the long-sought prize is to be his after all, the company is wondering too. Once the man’s superiors would have had to thresh this out among themselves; now they can check with the psychologists to find out what the tests say. At Sears, for example, for the last ten years no one has been promoted in the upper brackets until the board chairman has consulted the tests. At Sears, as elsewhere, the formal decision is based on other factors too, but the weight now being given test reports makes it clear that for those who aspire to be an executive the most critical day they may spend in their lives will be the one they spend taking tests.

Giving them has become something of an industry itself. In the last five years the number of blank test forms sold has risen 300 per cent. The growth of psychological consulting firms has paralleled the rise. In addition to such established firms as the Psychological Corporation, literally hundreds of consultants are setting up shop. Science Research Associates of Chicago, a leading test supplier, reports that in one year seven hundred new consultants asked

How Good an Organization Man Are You?

To be put on its approved list of customers. Colleges are also getting into the business; through research centers like Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute’s Personnel Testing Laboratory, professors in mufti have been tailoring tests for companies on a consultant basis—a kind of competition, incidentally, which annoys a good many of the frankly commercial firms.

Types of service offered vary greatly. Some firms will do the entire operation by mail—the Klein Institute for Aptitude Testing, Inc., of New York, for example, within forty-eight hours of getting the completed test back will have an analysis on its way to the company. Usually, however, the job is done on the premises. Sometimes the consultant group, like the Activity Vector Analysts, will process the entire management group at one crack. More usually the analysts will come in and study the organization in order to find the personality “profiles” best suited for particular jobs. They will then work up a battery of tests and master profiles. (Someday, most batteries always seem to be made up of the same tests, but they are presumably just the right mix for the particular client.) The analysts may help out with the day-in, day-out machinery of testing, but the company’s personnel department generally handles the rest of the job.

A dynamic would appear to be at work. The more people who are tested, the more test results there are to correlate, and the more correlations, the surer are many testers of predicting success or failure, and thus the more reason there is for more organizations to test more and more people. Some companies have already coded their executives onto IBM cards containing vital statistics, and added test scores would seem an inevitable next step. What with the computers already doing much the same thing, with electronics making testing increasingly easy, there seems no barrier to the building up of such personnel inventories for every organization. Since so many of the tests are standard, in time almost everyone can be followed from childhood on, as, echelon by echelon, he makes his way up the ladder of our organization society.

USEFUL? THERE’S NO LIMIT TO WHAT SOME PEOPLE WOULD LIKE TO USE.

Several years ago, I wrote a little piece for Fortune satirizing current integration trends. Under the nom de plume of Otis Stanford, I presented a plan for a Universal Card. The idea
was to do away with the duplication of effort in which each company goes about testing independently. Instead of each company tackling the job on its own, there would be one central organization. Eventually everyone would be processed by it—from school on. One's passport to organization life would be his card. On it would be coded all pertinent information: political leanings, marital relations, credit rating, personality test scores, and, if the states co-operated, the card would also be one's operator's license and car registration. (We had a very realistic card gotten up, complete with laminated photo of a young man wearing thick horn-rimmed glasses.) With this tool, organization could get full loyalty; if a man developed hostility he could not escape by leaving an organization. His card would be revoked and that would be that. Lest readers get too excited, I made the end patently ridiculous: with the card, I said, society would be protected from people who questioned things and rocked the boat. For good measure there was a footnote indicating that the whole thing was a hoax.

To our surprise, a considerable number of people took it seriously. Some thought it was appalling. (Punch devoted an article to it, as one more evidence of Yankee boorishness.) Many readers wrote indignant letters, and several newspapers editorialized with great heat. All this we didn't mind; we were sorry they were mad at us but we were glad they were mad at the card.

Unfortunately, however, many who took it literally thought it was a splendid idea and the net effect of the article on them was to embolden them to action. The president of the country's largest statistical firm called in great excitement to find out if anyone had yet started the central processing organization—he said it was the sort of idea you kick yourself for not having thought of first. His firm, he suggested, was just the right outfit on which to build this central unit. When I last heard from him he was on his way to see a testing outfit he might team up with.

The idea of a card I thought so novel, it also developed, was not novel at all. After the article had appeared I came across an account of an index system Westinghouse Electric had had in operation for several years. For each management man they had a "Management Development Personnel Code Card," Westinghouse Form 24908. It is a square card containing basic data on the man, the edges of which are punched so that it can be run through the ma-
There is, evidently, not much point at this date in belaboring
the moral implications of mass testing. Ethical considerations are
paramount, to be sure, but to put the case against testing on these
grounds seems to array the critic with the ancient forces of superstition
against the embattled followers of science. By default, the basic
claims of the testers are left unchallenged. Worse yet, the criticism
that portrays testing as a black art only serves to whet the curi-
osity of organizations all the more.

But do the tests do what they purport to do? Let us examine the
testers on their own grounds: the scientific method. As a pre-
liminary, let me ask the reader to study the following composite
test and its scoring table. To my knowledge, the printing of these
guides gives the layman his first opportunity of judging for himself
how sensibly prefabricated answers are scored. Until recently, test-
ners have successfully kept such matters within the club; exposure
of answers, they have maintained, would be highly unethical—it
takes a trained mind to interpret scores, meaningful only to men

— Tilman J. Cooper

Ph.D.s in psychology, individual scores are the property of the
organization, the layman would get the wrong idea, etc., etc.

The layman has every right in the world to have a look at the
rightness—in particular, those "right" and "wrong" answers that are
not supposed to exist. Whether or not he is unable to distinguish the
scientific method from the abuse of it, I leave to the reader.

In detailing scoring methods, I have a practical purpose also. In
small way, I hope to redress the balance of power between the
individual and The Organization. When an individual is com-
manded by an organization to reveal his innermost feelings, he has
a duty to himself to give answers that serve his self-interest rather
than that of The Organization. In a word, he should cheat. To put
it so baldly may shock some people—I was scolded severely by
several undergraduate groups for giving just such advice. But why
be hypocritical? Most people instinctively cheat anyway on such
tests. Why, then, do it ineptly? Usually, the dice are loaded in favor
of The Organization, and the amateur, unprepared, is apt to slant his
answers so badly as to get himself an even worse score than his reg-
ular maladjustments would warrant.

A trot is in order. In providing this service, I could not expect the
individual to memorize specific questions and answers—there are
scores and scores of different tests and far too many hundreds of
answers for memorizing to be of any real help. What I have done
is to paraphrase the essence of the different types of questions that
come up most frequently, and in giving answers in the composite
test I have abstracted the basic rules of the game which, once learned,
will help the reader master most of the testing situations he may
come across.

I suggest to the reader that, before going on to the next chapter,
pause and take the test. If he will then turn to the appendix, he
will find a condensed guide on how he should have answered the
questions and some tips on test-taking in general. I hope all this
may be of some practical benefit, but in asking the reader to pore
over these details my main purpose is to give him a chance to
evaluate for himself the underlying principles of personality test-
ing. To repeat, here is the voice of The Organization, and if one
chooses to judge what the future would be like were we to intensify
organization trends now so evident, let him ponder well what the
questions are really driving at.
COMPOSITE PERSONALITY TEST

SELF-REPORT QUESTIONS
1) Have you enjoyed reading books as much as having company in?
2) Are you sometimes afraid of failure?
3) Do you sometimes feel self-conscious?
4) Does it annoy you to be interrupted in the middle of your work?
5) Do you prefer serious motion pictures about famous historical personalities to musical comedies?

Indicate whether you agree, disagree, or are uncertain:
6) I am going to Hell.
7) I often get pink spots all over.
8) The sex act is repulsive.
9) I like strong-minded women.
10) Strange voices speak to me.
11) My father is a tyrant.

HYPOTHETICAL QUESTION—DOMINANCE TYPE
12) You have been waiting patiently for a salesperson to wait on you. Just when she's finished with another customer, a woman walks up abruptly and demands to be waited upon before you. What would you do?
   a) Do nothing
   b) Push the woman to one side
   c) Give her a piece of your mind
   d) Comment about her behavior to the salesperson

OPINION QUESTIONS: POLICY TYPE
26) A worker's home life is not the concern of the company.
    Agree........ Disagree........
27) Good supervisors are born, not made.
    Agree........ Disagree........
28) It should be company policy to encourage off-hours participation by employees in company-sponsored social gatherings, clubs, and teams.
    Agree........ Disagree........

OPINION QUESTIONS: VALUE TYPE
29) When you look at a great skyscraper, do you think of:
    a) our tremendous industrial growth
    b) the simplicity and beauty of the structural design
30) Who helped mankind most?
    a) Shakespeare
    b) Sir Isaac Newton
have to be taught to reach. All of them. Some will be outstanding, some not, but the few will never flourish where the values of the many are against them.

I HAVE BEEN SPEAKING OF MEASURES ORGANIZATIONS CAN TAKE. Ultimately any real change will be up to the individual himself—this is why his education is so central to the problem. For him to look to his discontents with different eyes. It has been said that the dominance of the group is the wave of the future and that change, for it or not, he might as well accept it. But this is contemporary at its worst; things are not as they are because there is some reason they are. Nor is the reverse true. It may one day prove true as some prophets argue, that we are in a great and dismal history that cannot be reversed, but if we accept the view we are only prove it.

Whatever kind of future suburbia may foreshadow, it will be that at least we have the choices to make. The organization is not in the grip of vast social forces about which it is impossible for him to do anything; the options are there, and with vision and foresight he can turn the future away from the dehumanized collective that so haunts our thoughts. He may not. But he may.

He must fight the Organization. Not stupidly, or selfishly, for the defects of individual self-regard are no more to be venerated than the defects of co-operation. But fight he must, for the demands to his surrender are constant and powerful, and the more he is prone to like the life of organization the more difficult does he find it to resist these demands, or even to recognize them. It is wise to offer dispiriting advice to hold before him the dream that ideally there need be no conflict between him and society. There always—there always must be. Ideology cannot wish it away; the personal mind offered by organization remains a surrender, and no more for being offered in benevolence. That is the problem.

Appendix

HOW TO CHEAT ON PERSONALITY TESTS

The important thing to recognize is that you don't win a good score: you avoid a bad one. What a bad score would be depends upon the particular profile the company in question intends to measure you against, and this varies according to companies and according to the type of work. Your score is usually rendered in terms of your percentile rating—that is, how you answer questions in relation to how other people have answered them. Sometimes it is perfectly all right for you to score in the 80th or 90th percentile; if you are being tested, for example, to see if you would make a good chemist, a score indicating that you are likely to be more reflective than ninety out of a hundred adults might not harm you and might even do you some good.

By and large, however, your safety lies in getting a score somewhere between the 40th and 60th percentiles, which is to say, you should try to answer as if you were like everybody else is supposed to be. This is not always too easy to figure out, of course, and this is one of the reasons why I will go into some detail in the following paragraphs on the principal types of questions. When in doubt, however, there are two general rules you can follow: (1) When asked for word associations or comments about the world, give the most conventional, run-of-the-mill, pedestrian answer possible. (2) To settle on the most beneficial answer to any question, repeat to yourself:

a) I loved my father and my mother, but my father a little bit more.
b) I like things pretty well the way they are.
c) I never worry much about anything.
d) I don't care for books or music much.
e) I love my wife and children.
f) I don't let them get in the way of company work.

Now to specifics. The first five questions in the composite test are examples of the ordinary, garden variety of self-report questions.¹

¹Leading Tests of this type include: The Personality Inventory by Robert G. Bernreuter. Published by The Stanford University Press, Stanford, California. Copyright 1935 by The Board of Trustees of Leland Stanford Junior University. All rights reserved.
The Organization Man

erally speaking, they are designed to reveal your degree of introversion or extraversion, your stability, and such. While it is true that in these "inventory" types of tests there is not a right or wrong answer to any one question, cumulatively you can get yourself into a lot of trouble if you are not wary. "Have you enjoyed reading books as much as having company in"? "Do you sometimes feel self-conscious"?—You can easily see what is being asked for here.

Stay in character. The trick is to mediate yourself a score as near the norm as possible without departing too far from your own true self. It won't necessarily hurt you, for example, to say that you have enjoyed reading books as much as having company in. It will hurt you, however, to answer every such question in that vein if you are, in fact, the kind that does enjoy books and a measure of solitude. Strive for the happy mean; on one hand, recognize that a display of too much introversion, a desire for reflection, or sensitivity is to be avoided. On the other hand, don't overcompensate. If you try too hard to deny these qualities in yourself, you'll end so far on the other end of the scale as to be rated excessively insensitive or extraverted. If you are somewhat introverted,

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125 questions; measures several different things at once; scoring keys available for neurotic tendency; self-sufficiency; introversion-extraversion; dominance-submission; self-confidence; sociability.

Thurstone Temperament Schedule by L. L. Thurstone. Copyright 1949 by L. L. Thurstone. Published by Science Research Associates, Chicago, Ill. 140 questions. Measures, at once, seven areas of temperament: to wit, degree to which one is active, vigorous, impulsive, dominant, stable, sociable, reflective. "The primary aim of the Thurstone Temperament Schedule . . . is to evaluate an individual in terms of his relatively permanent temperament traits. One of the values of the schedule is that it helps provide an objective pattern, or profile, of personal traits which you can use to predict probable success or failure in a particular situation."


The Personal Audit by Clifford R. Adams and William M. Lepley, Psychoneurological Clinic, Pennsylvania State College. Published by Science Research Associates, Chicago, Ill. Copyright 1945 by Clifford R. Adams. All rights reserved.

450 questions. Nine parts, of 50 questions each. Each part measures "a relatively independent component of personality." Extremes of each trait listed thus: seriousness-impulsiveness; firmness-impulsiveness; tranquillity-irritability; frankness-evasion; stability-instability; tolerance-intolerance; steadiness-emotionality; persistence-fluctuation; contentment-worry.

Outstanding example is the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory, revised Edition, by Starke R. Hathaway and J. Charnley McKinley. Published by the Psychological Corporation, N. Y. 495 questions. This yields scores on psychoneurotics, depression, hysteria, psychopathic deviancy, masculinity and femininity, paranoia, psychasthenia, schizophrenia, hypomania. It also yields score on the subject's "test-taking attitude," with a score for his degree of genuineness-frankness. If the subject consistently gives himself the benefit of the doubt, or vice versa, the scoring reveals the fact. This is not a test for amateur to trifle with.
have been adopting these tests as standard. Should you find yourself asked about spiders, Oedipus complexes, and such, you must more than in the previous type of test, remain consistent and as much character as possible—these tests almost always have lie scores built into them. A few mild neuroses conceded here and there won’t give you a bad score, and in conceding neuroses you should know that more than not you have the best margin for error if you err on the side of being “hypermanc”—that is, too energetic and active.

Don’t be too dominant. Question 12, which asks you what you would do if somebody barged in ahead of you in a store, is fairly typical of the kind of questions designed to find out how passive or dominant you may be. As always, the middle course is best. Resist the temptation to show yourself as trying to control each situation. You might think companies would prefer that characteristic to passivity, but they regard it as a sign that you wouldn’t be a permissive kind of employee. To err slightly on the side of acquiescence will rarely give you a bad score.

Incline to Conservatism. Questions 13 through 17, which ask you to comment on a variety of propositions, yield a measure of how conservative or radical your views are. To go to either extreme earns you a bad score, but in most situations you should resolve any doubts you have on a particular question by deciding in favor of the accepted.

Similarly with word associations. In questions 18 through 23, each word in capitals is followed by four words, ranging from the conventional to the somewhat unusual. The trouble here is that if you are a totally conventional person you may be somewhat puzzled as to which the conventional response is. Here is one tip: before examining any one question closely and reading it from left to right, read vertically through the whole list of questions and you may well see a definite pattern. By making up tests, testers are thinking of ease in scoring, and on some forms the most conventional responses will be found in one column, next most conventional in the next, and so on. All you have to do is go down the list and pick, alternately, the most conventional, and the second most conventional. Instead of a high score for emotionalism, which you might easily get were you to proceed on your own, you get a stability score that will indicate “normal ways of thinking.”

* Two tests of this type are: Test of Practical Judgment by Alfred J. Cardall, N.B.A., Ed.D. Published by Science Research Associates, Inc., Chicago, III. Copyright 1942, 1950 by Science Research Associates, Inc. All rights reserved, 48 Forced-choice questions “designed to measure the element of practical judgment as it operates in everyday business and social situations.” How were the “best” answers chosen? Rigorous statistical analysis was supplemented by consensus of authority. . .

Practical Social Judgment by Thomas N. Jenkins, Ph.D. Copyright 1947. All rights reserved. Executive Analysis Corporation, N. Y. 52 questions about hypothetical situations; subject must choose the “best” and the “poorest” of given answers.

* An example of this kind of test is How Super are you? by Quentin W. Fife, edited by H. H. Remmers. Published by The Psychological Corporation, N.Y. Copyright 1948, by Purdue Research Foundation, Lafayette, Indiana. 100 questions on management policy and attitudes.
"Let's figure out how you can improve"—is the "right" answer. Similarly with questions about the worker's home life. It isn't the concern of the company, but it is modern personnel dogma that it should be, and therefore "agree" is the right answer. So with the question about whether good supervisors are born or made. To say that a good supervisor is born deprecates the whole apparatus of modern organization training, and that kind of attitude won't get you anywhere.

Know your company. Questions 29 and 30 are characteristic of the kind of test that attempts to measure the relative emphasis you attach to certain values—such as aesthetic, economic, religious, social. The profile of you it produces is matched against the profile that the company thinks is desirable. To be considered as a potential executive, you will probably do best when you emphasize economic motivation the most; aesthetic and religious, the least. In question 29, accordingly, you should say the skyscraper makes you think of industrial growth. Theoretical motivation is also a good thing; if you were trying out for the research department, for example, you might wish to say that you think Sir Isaac Newton helped mankind more than Shakespeare and thereby increase your rating for theoretical learnings. Were you trying out for a public relations job, however, you might wish to vote for Shakespeare, for a somewhat higher aesthetic score would not be amiss in this case.

There are many more kinds of tests and there is no telling what surprises the testers will come up with in the future. But the principles will probably change little, and by obeying a few simple precepts and getting yourself in the right frame of mind, you have the wherewithal to adapt to any new testing situation. In all of us there is a streak of normalcy.


45 forced-choice questions. Answers are scored to give a measure of the relative prominence of six motives in a person: theoretical, economic, aesthetic, social, political, and religious. A profile is charted to show how he varies from the norm on each of the six.

Acknowledgments

First of all I want to thank my colleagues on Fortune. So many of them were so helpful in so many ways that I could not name them without listing the whole masthead. But I do in particular want to thank Managing Editor Hedley Donovan, and not merely because I am a good organization man. For three years he gave me the time and the freedom to follow my own trails, and though some of the material in this book has appeared in Fortune, through his forebearance and understanding I was able to work on this as a book rather than a collection of articles. Where it lacks the cohesion I was aiming for the failing is mine and not the importunings of journalism.

I also want to thank those who were good enough to give a critical reading to my preliminary drafts: Alex Bavelas, Reinhard Bendix, Nelson Foote, Herbert Gans, Wilbert Moore, Thomas W. Dea, David Riesman, and Hugh Wilson.