

## **FACULTY—SUPERIOR RELATIONS: A STUDY IN PERCEPTION OF LEADERSHIP**

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Scientific concern with work and its attendant consequences, or correlates, is fairly recent in the study of human organizations. Factors external to and conditions operative within the structure of an organization have been invoked by scholars as critical variables which make work pleasurable (or boring) and rewarding (or punishing), at least from the point of view of workers. The role of leadership is perhaps nowhere more emphasized than in settings where people put a high premium on accomplishments. Premised on this idea, the present paper argues that the nature of social relationship between subordinates and their superiors is an invaluable clue to understanding work performance of an organization, in the present example a school system.

As the term "social relationship" is broad, only a segment of it will be investigated by focusing on one side of the boss-worker continuum: how do members perceive their superiors, and what account for differences in their perceptions? These perceptions are no doubt essential if one wishes to know the nature, type and intensity of any social relationship that may develop between categories of persons who have unequal statuses, rights, and privileges. Consequently, such information will prove useful in prediction of whatever effect may arise from the network of relations (e.g., cooperation or conflict, exchange of favors and ideas, etc.) that pit workers against their superiors.

Answers to two research problems are sought in this study:

1. How do teachers perceive their superiors?
2. What status characteristics, if any, differentiate faculty members who hold varying levels of perceptions of their superiors?

Indirectly, this paper also hopes to draw up some policy implications of these problems by pointing out circumstances that may help enhance teachers perceptions of their superiors, and consequently increase the degree of positive relationship between them.

### Starting Points: the Status Consistency Hypothesis

The relationship between faculty and superiors is a two-sided affair, we are often told. Leaders are liked and accorded reverence on the basis of their charismatic appeal, perceived "goodness," and more. As a matter of generalization, it has been said that the kinds of leaders in a group are reflections of the mood of the time, of the deep-seated sentiments, characteristics, and expectations on the part of members. One line of explanation states that authoritarian members tend to prefer a group leader with a similar personality inclination. Valid or not, we have been informed that "crooked leaders exist because of tolerating attitudes among members," which implies that deception cannot happen when individuals keep watch over their turf.

Another explanation, one which is used here, offers a new approach to explaining differences in leadership perception, namely the *hypothesis of status consistency* (Lenski, 1954). Briefly defined, status consistency (sometimes known as status crystallization or congruency) a state of balance between and among important status hierarchies; that is, the extent to which an individual's ranks on these hierarchies are at the same relative level (high or low). For example, a person with high income but with low education, or vice-versa, is a status inconsistent. In the academe, a faculty who has a congruent status system is one whose academic rank is at tandem with his educational attainment, teaching experience, or research productivity, or all three of them fall at the same line as rank.

The lack of such balance, or the degree of inconsistency, is conceptually stressful among members who experience it. Writers have maintained that status inconsistency accounts for the development of prejudice (Treiman, 1966), psychosocial illness (Jackson, 1962), political attitudes (Lenski, 1954), and even promotes social unrest (Galtung, 1964). According to the hypothesis, status inconsistencies will generally have a negative attitude toward their world. Once given the opportunity they are apt to do something in their environment so as to alleviate their tension, that is, to attain a sense of balance.

With respect to the academe, the logic of the hypothesis is that teachers whose ranks in the various criteria of status are at different levels (inconsistency) will tend to perceive their superior unfavorably.

Restated in a positive way, those whose ranks are equilibrated (consistency) at the same level will hold favorable perceptions of their superiors. More generally, therefore, status congruence varies directly with perceptions. But as relationships are reciprocal, we can easily imagine that the kind of perceptions people have of others does not necessarily result from inconsistent statuses. Inconsistency may also be the product of sour relationship between the boss and the worker. Because they do not see each other eye to eye, the boss may deliberately withhold or delay his worker's promotion, even if the latter is qualified enough to get a raise in salary due to a new educational status, thus creating inconsistency.

The endless problem of distinguishing the "egg from the chicken" makes the consistency hypothesis difficult as an explanatory condition (technically called the independent variable) to people's attitude toward their boss (the dependent variable). To resolve this dilemma, and considering that the approach of analysis adopted here does not exactly follow a well defined sequence of these variables, it has been decided to view categories of leadership perception as phenomena which co-exist with degrees of status consistency. Here, status differences among teachers are not seen in the traditional way of doing research as a "cause" or independent variable, but are viewed as simply correlated to the levels of perceptions among them.

Some notes of clarification are in order. Status consistency is an objective indication of the state of contentment among persons, a subjective affair. Although that theory is not necessarily true, the assumption about the correspondence between the objective indication and the subjective matter is made even clearer by referencing to the valid or desired dimensions of status. Geschwender (1967) has proposed two basic components, reward status (e.g., position in an income scale) and investment status (e.g., position in educational scale), which are utilized in evaluating the degree of fit between several statuses. On the one hand, if one's reward status is in harmony with his investment status, then he is satisfied. On the other hand, a discrepant status system will wrench people out, a condition which is likely to be a source of discomfort and rankling.

The connection between these components of status is easier said

than seen. How high the rewards must be to compensate for investments is a moot point; a satisfactory answer will depend largely on the situations and personal assessment of individuals as conditioned by their experiences. Individual idiosyncracies aside, however, it is possible to formulate a general statement applicable to the academe why status inconsistency is stressful. (Under what conditions or when it should be stressful is another matter for investigation.) Normative expectations in our society inform us that teachers who are highly educated, have varied research and prolonged teaching experiences, and more of such qualities, are made by these accomplishments worthy of a high academic rank. If, by chance, a teacher with such characteristics happens to occupy a low rank, his reaction will be one of anger. If his qualifications are lower than his rank, his feeling will be one of guilt. In either case, he experiences status incongruence. The greater the incongruence, the higher the level of disaffection.

### **Research Setting and Sample**

The site of the study is Mindanao State University, Marawi City. Created in 1961, and located in the heart of Muslim Mindanao, MSU has been regarded as the second largest state university in the country and the first in the south.

Questionnaires were distributed to the faculty members who were actually teaching, as of summer of 1973, or were physically on campus so as to participate in the survey. The returns were satisfying. Some 90 percent of the "population" fully cooperated, giving us 116 usable questionnaires.

### **Procedure: Conceptualizing the Variables**

Two sets of social location measures, as status is sometimes called, centering on the concepts of "investment" and "reward," were chosen to indicate divergence or consistency in the status system among respondents. Academic rank and tenure of appointment (at the time of interview) were used to capture the idea of reward status, under the assumption that teachers strive for promotion and security of work, hence, raising their reward status. Rank is categorized into four levels:

Instructor, Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, and Professor, which in turn consist of four steps each. Nearly three-fourths of the sample are in the lowest category of Instructor; the rest are distributed in decreasing proportions in the higher levels. In terms of tenure, only 11.2 percent enjoyed a permanent tenure in contrast to an overwhelming majority of the faculty who held only a temporary status or "probationary appointment."

The second measure of status is investment, which refers to efforts exerted to earn tenure and attain a particular rank. Four proxy indicators of investment were tapped on the basis of social statuses which reflect such efforts, namely: (1) educational qualifications, (2) eligibility, (3) research productivity, and (4) length of teaching experience. The premise is that one's standing in these status characteristics will normally lead him to acquire an equivalent reward status. In a broad sense, they are universally accepted criteria for promotion in rank and award of permanent tenure.

Education, as a variable, is a five-point hierarchical scale with Bachelor's degree at one end and Ph.D. degree at another end. A majority (58.6%) of the cases had only baccalaureate degrees behind their credentials. Some (35.3%) had masteral degrees, with a small fraction (2.6%) who held Ph.D. degrees. A simple count of the number of research works published constituted the other variable, "research," which was coded into a scale of 1-5 points. The lowest point in this scale, zero publication (scored 1 point), was awarded to a full 82 percent of the sample, with only 11.2 percent saying having published 1-2 articles. A much smaller percentage (6.9%) admitted publication of 3 or more. Finally, "eligibility" is a dummy variable which was scored according to presence or absence (with eligibility = 1 point; otherwise = 0 point).

To establish the extent of status congruency, product-moment correlations among the six measures of status were calculated separately for the "high" and "low" perception groups. Although such procedure does not yield information on the various categories of consistency/inconsistency, a single measure of "fit" is considered adequate. (Goertzal, 1970).

The second concept, perceptions of superiors, was operationally

defined as a set of attitudes toward persons of authority in both the academic and administrative sectors. They include the Deans, Directors and other top officials of the University who are involved in the formulation of policies. These perceptions (symbolized here by POS) were ascertained by a scale containing five items, which are statements asked of the faculty to elicit their opinions on University leadership. Answers were forced into an "agree-disagree" format, to which scores ranging from 1 to 5 were assigned, following the Likert principle. Sample statements are reproduced below together with the scoring scheme:

Statement	Response Category*				
	SA	A	N	D	SD
1. You got to have "pull" with certain people around here to get ahead.	1	2	3	4	5
2. The University administration gives high priority to the welfare of the faculty	5	4	3	2	1

The score was then computed by summing up the item scores. Using the average (median) of the distribution as cutoff point, scores were dichotomized into "high" (above the median) and "low." Fifty-two cases fell into the high-perception group, while 64 were classified as low-perception group.

Preliminary analysis of the POS Scale revealed that the items are reliable. The magnitude of gamma coefficients computed from a four-fold table (gamma ranges from .61 to .92) for the item-total score correlation is satisfactory. Additional evidence of reliability is suggested by the fairly high intercorrelations among the items, thus forming a "cluster" by factor analysis (loadings in the leadership factor range from .54 to .81).

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\*SA = Strongly agree,    A = agree    N = neutral,    D = disagree

\*SA = strongly

### Results and Analysis

How do the teachers perceive their superiors? Answers to this query are disquieting: University leaders were at best viewed with skepticism, if not apathy. The attitudes of the faculty toward them, at least in 1973, were patently negative in many angles, owing perhaps to their perception that rewards are affected by particularistic ties between subordinates and superiors. Promotions in rank were taken as "ascribed" rewards, delivered on the basis of "whom one knows" and not "what he knows." Table 1 shows the distribution of responses, collapsed into "agree" and "disagree."

Obviously, it is incorrect to generalize that every teacher was discontented. Some did show signs of satisfaction, of favorable perceptions of superiors. What, then, distinguishes between those who hold opposing views about the leaders? It was found that the faculty in the "low" perception group, those with unfavorable attitudes toward superiors, are typically the more educated ones, but are people who are on probationary appointment and have no eligibility. Thus, there is some evidence to show that status inconsistency exists for this group. Its members have high education but lack security of job. Moreover, such status incongruence does not hold up for the combination of academic rank and the other statuses like teaching experience, eligibility and research.

**Table 1:** Percentage Distribution of Responses to Perception-of-Superiors Scale Items, Circa 1973 (N = 116)

Scale Item	Agree*	Disagree*
1. We can classify faculty members in this University into two types: the "favored" and the "unfavored"	62.6	13.0
2. You got to have "pull" with certain people around here to get ahead	62.9	9.5
3. The University Administration is in the hands of honest men	37.4	14.8

4. The University Administration places low priority on my College/Department relative to others	25.2	30.0
5. The University Administration is doing its best to achieve school's primary aims (research, higher learning, and scholarship)	34.8	46.1

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\*Strongly agree (strongly disagree) and agree (disagree) are collapsed into a single category of agree (disagree).

Carrying the analysis further, primarily to test the notion of status divergence, the intercorrelations among the six status characteristics were computed within each of the two groups of cases classified according to POS scores. Oddly enough, results contrary to the hypothesis turned up. Within the low-perception group a higher status crystallization appeared, judging from the strength of correlations among the status variables. Correlation coefficients range from  $r = -.03$  to  $.78$ , with about two thirds at the level of  $.3$  and above. Trends shown by the high-perception group indicated lower correlations and narrower range, with about 40 percent of the coefficients being  $r = .3$  and above. Table 2 displays the contrasting patterns of status congruency between the two groups of teachers.

Interpreted in the light of status-consistency thesis, it may be said that the data do not completely conform to prediction. There is no unequivocal evidence that will lead us to accept the hypothesis. This is particularly true of the relationship between academic rank (reward) and the four measures of investment status. Looking at the correlations between tenure (another measure of reward), however, suggests opposite trends which point to higher status consistency among the high-perception group than its counterpart. What interpretations can be made of these seemingly puzzling results? Several intuitive analysis are possible.

First, tenure of appointment by and in itself, as a reward status, is an important pay-off which can make people happy. Given high

investments and a permanent status as faculty, teachers were inclined to believe that the system was all right. Thus, the validity of the principle of status consistency applies to tenure.

And second, academic rank is just as important as tenure, if not more so. But unlike tenure, there is no clear-cut definition of a satisfactory rank that can give comfort to teachers, given their efforts or accomplishments. Granting a qualified teacher the rank of Professor does not automatically make him a status consistent. In the objective sense of the word he is, but subjectively he may not be. Thus, the high correlations between reward and investment among the low-perception group is illusory. Qualified faculty who received the ranks due them might feel that something is still wrong. There is more to it than what is physically observed. Objective status consistency may, in fact, mean social injustice in a subjective sense among members of the low-perception group.

To illustrate, for this group promotion in rank (or status quo) might have occurred according to the maxim of fair play: equal work, equal reward. But this very process could engender the upsurge of grievances. The process of rewarding the faculty by promotion, if not uniformly applied to all, will create more problems than it solves. Feelings of injustice may enrage those for whom the idea of fair play is ap-

**Table 2:** Product-Moment Correlations Among the Status Variables by Level of Leadership Perception

Status Variables	Perception of Superiors		Total Sample
	Low	High	
1. Academic Rank with			
a. Education	.78	.32	.59
b. Research	.36	.48	.41
c. Teaching	.50	.26	.39
d. Tenure	.34	.41	.36
e. Eligibility	.39	.26	.31
2. Education with			
a. Teaching	.36	.26	.42

b. Research	.38	.21	.33
c. Tenure	.21	.47	.30
d. Eligibility	.39	.00	.18
3. Eligibility with			
a. Research	.23	.20	.20
b. Tenure	.03	.32	.15
c. Teaching	.06	.26	.14
4. Research with			
a. Tenure	.14	.27	.18
b. Teaching	.14	.03	.09
5. Teaching with			
a. Tenure	.60	.44	.51
N	(64)	(52)	(116)

plied, not among people who have been exempted from this rule. Status consistents may themselves be unhappy over their situation, and may go so far as to develop negative attitudes toward their superiors. It is for them whom the rule is stringently applied, whereas the same is relaxed on others. This case is one of "relative deprivation" which Stouffer and associates (1949) have proposed to account for demoralization among American soldiers. According to them, people compare themselves with others as the basis for assessing their own situations as better or worse.

Turning now to the high-perception group and the apparently low correlations among the status variables for its members, one can infer that many of them enjoy high reward despite their low qualifications, or vice-versa. Those with high academic ranks are not necessarily highly educated, unlike members of the other group. An extreme example is the absence of fit between education and eligibility. Another is that high (low) rank does not neatly go with long (short) teaching experience, although the relationship is positive and perhaps significant.

This inconsistency in status characteristics implies that promotion

is delivered to some who do not fully deserve it, but it is denied to some others who badly need to be promoted. Distributive justice of this nature, which is in itself inconsistent or self-defeating, will drive a wedge between leaders and subordinates in a small school system where everyone else's promotion is known to all teachers. Over-ranked faculty (in the high-perception group) will always be used a standard to go by, a comparison point for others which serves as a precedent in the process of bargaining for or evaluation of ranks.

The disparity in providing rewards between these groups of teachers is put into sharper focus when rank is viewed as a function of education and teaching experience. For the low-perception group, these two investment statuses together are enough bases for knowing with accuracy the level of one's rank, in a predictive way. Their multiple correlation is substantial ( $R = .81$ ); it accounts for about 66 percent of the variance in rank. In contrast, for the high-perception group the same set of variables is slightly correlated ( $R = .21$ ) with rank, explaining only some four percent of its variation. These findings suggest that these two status criteria are faithfully applied to some teachers in determining their ranks, whereas they are not used with the same faithfulness to other teachers.

From the data, it is difficult to estimate the number of faculty who have experienced this discrepant evaluation, since the "high" and "low" groups are merely typologies, a heuristic device which helps us realize that differential ranking may exist as it does inspite of a common evaluation scheme for teachers.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

This study began with the notion that teachers have their own lenses through which they look at their superiors; that they evaluate the school leadership as favorable or unfavorable, better or worse. Differences in shade of opinion always lurk in any social group whose members have varied personal experiences, backgrounds, and even statuses. It must be emphasized that this investigation is not an evaluative effort to demean, cause defamation, or cast any bad light to leaders in a particular school—in the present instance, Mindanao State University. The research problems of the sort we attempted to probe are general areas

of social inquiry in all human organizations. As in any empirical research, this study only offers help to the school administrators to understand their niche better by supplying them information that may give an aura of feedback. We presented the problems as they were; now it is up to the administrators to solve them.

The principle of status consistency as a correlate of teachers' low or high leadership perception transcends the policy of giving rewards where they are due. Although the hypothesis was reversed, or at best weakly supported by data, there is value in knowing objective status inconsistency among teachers who had a negative view of their superiors. The result may be reinterpreted as indicating a subjective status inconsistency. As Meyer and Hammond (1971:95) succinctly put it, "inconsistency can result despite rank balance if the variance on one status attribute is greater than on the other." This point raises the question of whether status consistency should be defined in terms of an individual's objective ranks, or should be defined in terms of the individual's personal evaluation of the fit among his status ranks.

Although speculative, there are valid reasons to suspect that teachers may experience a sense of inconsistency between their academic rank and qualifications even when these two are at the same relative level. If this is so, the administrators must not only content themselves with giving the right ranks to teachers, but also strive to assure them that the process of implementing an evaluation procedure will be grounded on universalistic rules. Arbitrary implementation and flexible application of the rules for promotion will result in the loss of faith in the leadership, and cause eventual decay in the social relationship that binds superiors and subordinates into the brotherhood of bureaucratic order.

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