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The Instrument Compelling the Organizations To Conform

by

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The Instrument Compelling the Organizations
to Conform

Hungary has not reached yet the computer age, however, about the some 80 computers working here, all well-known symptoms of the "intellectual luddism" accompanying the introduction of computers have fully developed.^{1/}

For two years now I have been examining these phenomena, well known from the experience of countries having entered the computer age, first of all in large-scale works of the different industrial branches. The material so far gathered is based partly on documents of organizations, partly on data of interviews and questionnaires given by those concerned and can give an outline of tendencies and phenomena upon observation, rather than prove with numerical data.

It appears none the less that, notwithstanding the differences between the two kind of socio-economic systems, the introduction of the computer has the same effects within organizations. With the advance of examinations, and of the application of computers, analogies become more conspicuous. It is now easier to prove that, independent of the socio-economic system, in every organization where the computer appears there follow, as of necessity, the worry about statues, positions, the outcome of individual expectations, the fear of uncertainty, forced changes and, as a counterpart, an instinctive, stubborn resistance.^{2/}

In Hungary today one of the key issues of a wider application of computers is the efficient reduction of tensions showing in organizations; for in our days a number of initiatives of introduction are stopped as a consequence of the different forms of resistance on the part of individuals at different levels within the organization . As a result, the initiating organizations expect sociology in the first place to give them the means and methods serving to reduce tensions. Therefore, the primary aim of our research is to facilitate, as far as possible, the still difficult process of accomodation for the organizations that must resort to the computer. My report is written on these efforts.

Chapter I. describes A/ the types of organizations in which demand for introduction is the strongest; the primary motives for the developping of their demands and, B/ within the organization the initiating individuals, groups, and the typical factors determining their attitude.

Chapter II. contains our observations on the degree of tensions in organizations, i.e. the effects dependent on A/ the type of application, B/ the phase of introduction, and C/ the distance between the new organizational demands and the new individual expectations.

I. Motives for application of computers

H.A. Rhee gives a remarkable account of the factors that promoted the use of electronic data processing in capitalist countries.^{3/}

I availed myself of my case studies to select the typical motives in Hungarian firms. Most of the factors shown in Rhee's table - which can be interpreted at all in our conditions - are to be found in Hungarian industrial works, too.

According to my experience, in the initiating organizations there are always several incentive factors, some of

which have stronger effects, other weaker. There are, however, in every organization one or two primary incentives, dominating the rest. I consider primary incentives those, which give rise to the demand for using a computer. Accordingly, certain incentives can be primary factors in one firm secondary ones in other firms.

I am going to describe the three types of organizations in which are the strongest for the application of a computer. In all three, the typical composition of primary and secondary factors is different.

A/ Types of the initiating organizations.

- Organizations already possessing a computer.

The primary incentive here is the presence of the computer.

Most of the computers working today in Hungary have been purchased by the State and placed by the State at institutions in which their poeration seemed the most effective. About one third of the computers are operated in scientific research institutes or at universities; another third at central organs /ministries, the National Bank of Hungary, the Railways, the Post, the Statistical Office, etc./, and one third at big works of different industrial branches. Part of the capacity of machines working elsewhere are also utilised by industrial works.

The organizations received a computer generally before they could prepare themselves for its use. That is the situation at factories where, because of unpreparedness, the computer was made to do only the old, punch-card system of data processing. The demand for a maximum use of computers becomes however more and more obvious. But, as we shall see, the demand in itself is generally not enough. A succesfull realisation of initiatives happens only if, beyond the presence of the computer, there are other incentive factors, too e.g. a dynamic development of the organizations or the pros-

pect of an intensive development, the increasing of competitiveness on the world market, etc.

- Firms effectuating large-volume exports to Western countries.

While firms generally enjoy a favourable position on the home market, and on the markets of socialist countries where demand, as a rule, exceeds offer and, if the firm has a monopolistic position it has not to make any efforts to sell its goods, on the capitalist markets firms have several competitors to fight. Most of the competitors use computers which puts them into an advantageous position, since they can get promptly the exact data needed in the changing conditions of transactions. One of the strongest motives of Hungarian firms is to assure similar position for themselves. In the past years, most of the firms initiating the use of computers were those effectuating large-volume exports to capitalist countries. To increase competitiveness is in itself a sufficient incentive and here it becomes of secondary importance that it entails also the facilitating of the staff problems of administrative units, and that successful operation will bring more prestige to the firm.

- Firm developing more dynamically than others

One of the strongest motives here is - the same as everywhere in the world at quickly developing firms - the traditional way of administration becoming an obstacle. Today it is obvious that, by further increasing the number of the administrative staff - which is made more difficult by the chronic labour shortage and the rather high fluctuation of employees - it is impossible to achieve any considerable improvement. It is the computer that promises to solve the problem, and that is the primary reason for which markets the firm sells its products and that it can, at the same time, increase its competitiveness and prestige. Of course, these

factors are also incentives, but the primary motive is to render the dysfunctional administration suitable for serving the affairs.

It is to be remarked that the increase of the prestige and of the progressive reputation of the firm is always among the secondary motives. This is related to the fact that the development of a firm, as well as its status and recognition are dependent but partly on its activity; it is more the prospective plans of national economy that determine the perspectives and possibilities of its development. Therefore the increase of prestige is not an organizational motive, but rather one of an individual's incentive; the initiators wish to increase by the computer their prestige within their own branch. As a matter of fact, the "band-wagon effect" appear also as an individual motive, this is not the organization's incentive either, but one of the initiations'.

B/ The initiations

The examinations carried out so far prove that the initiators, on account of their position within the organization, represent primarily particular interests. This is because the primary organizational motives appear usually at one of the sections of the organization and the initiators represent these actions. /Of course, the complicated, mutual efforts of many factors have their part in this. To be expressed very simply: it is not the initiators that invent the primary incentives, but they become initiators under effect of the primary incentives. At the same time, however, representing particular interests means usually representing the interests of the whole organization and, viewing it from the other side, also the individual interests of the initiators./

The circle of initiators is more or less clearly given, depending on the type of the organization.

- In organizations already in possession of a computer, the initiators are usually specialists of the new organizational units operating the computer. Their motive is, in the first place, a demand for specialistic application of the computers, and with it, to have the computer staff, and their own status and role acknowledged. The computer-operating staff usually work at inadequate places, somewhere at the lower levels of the organizational hierarchy and are connected to a top manager only through several different levels. If in a firm there is among the incentives no other particular interest represented by another section, initiatives have not much success. In such cases the passivity of the top managers /which usually hides the protection of their own particular interests, and with it their fear for prestige and power/ renders the efforts of the computer staff extremely difficult and slow.

- Within firms effectuating large-volume foreign trade Western countries, the initiators are, as a rule, among holders of important directing posts of the factory. Quite often general manager himself is initiating and the wider circle of directors - first of all the leaders of the commercial and economic departments - is among the initiators. Although resistance to the application of computers is met with also here because of the particular interests of individual departments, the initiators' power ensures a rather prompt realisation of the ideas.

- First of all in the dynamically developing firms, initiative comes almost exclusively from the directing economic departments.^{4/}

Why the leaders of the directing economic departments /economic directors/ become initiators is also explained firstly by their particular interests.

In the most of Hungarian factories the official rank of the economic director is that he is the "third man". /After

the general manager comes the technical director who is also his first deputy and who directs production activity and usually also the technical developping./

The economic director is charged with the control of the economic problems and administration. Commercial activity is generally also under his control. /During the past years commercial activity has been made independent, i.e. got under the direct control of the general manager in a number of firms./

In the dynamically developping factories traditional administration could not keep up with the demands of the organization, in spite of the mechanisation of bureaus. However, the demand for its radical rationalisation has become really pressing only in the new economic control system.

During more than twenty years, in fact until the reform of the economic control system, the principals of the "primariness of production" had been ruling. This means it was more important to utilise production capacities to the utmost /assuring this way fulfilment of the compulsory production plan/, than to consider, how much the production is economical, what would be the most advantageous combination of products, etc. /This is actually the attitude represented by the official status of technical directors controlling production./ In the past years, however, parallel with the elimination of the obligatory directives of plans and with the widening of the decision sphere of firms, the demand for economical production, and for the most profitable utilisation of production capacities have become increasingly important. However, to determine the products, standards, etc. most advantageous for production is possible only with the aid of a reliable data processing system. This information service must be supplied by the directing economic departments; they are practically unable to do it with the traditional data processing. Therefore the application of a computer would make it possible for economic directors on the one hand to fulfil

the requirement of the organization and, on the other hand, to strengthen their position, actual importance and status, by supplying such information as would to great extent determine production activity. The increase of the effective sphere of activity and importance of the economic direction would be in itself sufficient, to increase discrepancies between the technical staff, generally better qualified, enjoying higher prestige, and the directing economic departments having so far lower prestige. It can be well understood, why the technical directors are barely enthusiastic about the computer, which represent as well as strengthens the new sphere of activity of the economic directors. In the studied cases technical directors were at best passive onlookers of the economic directors' aspirations, while in some cases they strongly opposed to the initiative. The success of the economic director's aspiration depended in many cases on whether he, or the technical director could get the general manager for ally. /We will say more about the conduct of directors and those working at different levels later/.

In our days the circle of the first initiating industrial works and that of the initiators within the organization can be well defined. Supposedly the factors determining today the conduct of the organization and that of the initiators will be prevailing also in the coming years.

II. The degree of tensions, their levels of appearance, and their typical forms.

The resistance toward computers originates mainly in the fact that, to the application of the computer for a specific aim belongs a specific organisational structure. The organizational patterns required have not existed in any organization before the appearance of the computer; they must be created explicitly to meet the computer's requirements,

breaking down, then rebuilding the given structure and relations system of the organization. The reconstruction of the organizational pattern leads to new organizational expectations in respect of those at the different levels.^{5/} The forced accommodation, which means the force alternation of individual expectations, inevitably gives rise to tensions and opposition toward the computer that forces the changes.

The forming of organizational patterns conforming to the requirements of the computers is as yet - owing to the given circumstances - at the very beginning at Hungarian industrial works. As regards the tensions appearing in different forms and at different levels, we could gather information on them also only from this initial phase.

According to our observations, the degree of tensions and the levels at which they appear depend basically information processing used in the organisation /which determines both the size of the circle of those concerned, and the organisational expectations regarding them/ and, B/ the phase of introduction of the computer system /which determines the dynamism of the increase of the circle of those concerned and that of the effectiveness of the new organizational expectations./

A/ The degree of tensions depending on the type of information processing.

As it is well known, the use of computers does not always give rise to lasting and strong tensions. E.g. in case the computer is applied for scientific and technical computations, its application/in some cases its installation in organizations/ is not accompanied by higher tension than that accompanying any other new technical instrument exacting better knowledge /e.g. microscope of high efficiency, or a special measuring instrument/. Lasting and high tensions do

not arise, since the effecting of the computations does not entail the forming of new organizational patterns; all relations systems and with them the places and positions of individuals remain unchanged.

The occasional computations of orientation character do not arouse high tensions either. In the Hungarian industrial works this is one of the most ordinary forms of getting to know the computer and of forming the first connections with it. All activities of the firm are carried out in the traditional way but, occasionally /e.g. one in a year/ one or two such computations are made as can be done effectively only with computer /e.g. the calculation of variants connected with the optimal product pattern, profit, investment decision/. The computations are of informatory character and serve as basis of the directors' decisions.

The circle of those concerned is small, in fact, it is limited to the directors ordering the subjects, and to a few leaders at lower levels, and employees, who compile the data. Besides, the connection with the computer lasts only a short time and after a few weeks or months everybody continues their usual activity.

Since the computation does not require the breakdown of any relations system within the organization, small-scale tensions are caused only occasionally, by the additional work at the time of compiling the basic data, first of all at the lowest, data-supplying levels.

A stronger and more lasting tension may arise from the information processing of registration character. I include in this category every data processing of statistical character. In the industrial works the typical fields of this are the many different kinds of book-keeping /material, wages, fixed assets, etc./, the costing, the registration of inputs relating to production. This type of data processing is also rather general in our days, mainly at factories

already in possession of a computer, at the same time other firms also try to have the computer process for them a certain part of their customary registration and accounting data, which they used to process usually with the Hollerith system.

If the computer is charged with the earlies, punch-card system data processing without any change or with little changes in the inputs and outputs of the system, application will not entail tensions, since actually only the machine has changed and everything else remained the same.

Tensions of high degree may arise, however, in case the earlier data processing of registration character is altered with a view to the possibilities and requirements of the computer. For, in such a case a new organizational pattern must be constructed, and new relations systems must be built, mainly because a number of earlier, usually mass works - such as calculation and checking - become superfluous and with them the jobs become superfluous, too. E.g. at one of the factories examined the staff of 90 or so of the central book-keeping department was reduced to half and, according to the department head's opinion there remained still too many at the department. He plans to reduce the staff to five or so, and is trying to find the five, highly qualified co-operators who can do important analyses on their own. Although most of those leaving the department could get advantageous jobs /e.g. individuals having e.d.p. practice were employed in the administration of production units with higher salaries/, reorganization brought to the surface every well known tension usual at such instance. With those remaining at the department the state of tension has become constant, partly because of the uncertainty of their future position, partly because of the new demands of the organization to which several of them cannot, or will not conform.

The strongest, and longest lasting tensions are concomitant with the information processing of decision and control character. I put in this category the direction by computer of some independent, partial activities /in the industrial works these are characteristically the material management, production programming, forwarding of products, distribution , etc./ The application of computer means that an important part of the routine decision and control activity - so far human activity - is automatised. In Hungary, computer susystems work already at several factories, with the prospect to build up - by connecting the continuously established subsystems - the integrated information processing system. This type of application of the computer - which can simultaneously supply outputs of orientation and registration character - makes it inevitable to build up new organisational patterns. Both the vertical, and the horizontal relations systems have to be broken up and those carrying out so far the activities, from top managers to subordinates at the low levels become concerned. New organisational expectations are formed toward all of them which may contain both the giving up their former position, and the new demands connected with their activity. Therefore the building up of each subsystems are accompanied by tensions always expanding and longer lasting.

B/ Degree and levels of appearance of tensions depending on the phase of application.

There are three different periods of electronic information processing: the periods of

- initiative,
- introduction /system organizing/, and
- operative application.

In the period of initiative the planned programme is being developed in the firm: information is gathered on

the possibilities, demands, costs, etc. Initiatives are limited to the usually small leading circle. Theoretically it lasts, depending on the type of application, a few weeks, or a few months at the most. The plan of information processing of technical calculations and of orientation type are carried through to decision without encountering opposition and generally with the support of every leader concerned. The adaptation of the earlier, punch-card system data processing does not meet with opposition either. However, the plans of applications requiring new organizational patterns give rise to resistance already at the initial stage, arouses instinctive fear for the "upsetting" to be expected, for the risk, and the diminution of individual power and prestige.

Because of the resistance appearing at the top levels - aimed at the protection of particular and individual interests, a number of initiatives are stopped already at this phase. I have seen a case where the initiating technical director left the factory because differences had become extremely sharp between him and the other leaders of the factory, who put every obstacle in the way of the plan that would bring danger. Usually, because of the resistance on the part of leaders, the period of the initiative can be prolonged too much, in some instances years elapse till one initiative comes to decision.

At the period of system-organising tensions increase and expand, parallel with the building of the new organisational patterns. The period of system-organising may last a few months or several years, depending on the type of application. This period is generally somewhat longer than would be necessary, mainly because the initiators are not prepared for the resistance appearing at all levels; in other words, because they have not considered the sociological factors.

The most lasting, and most effective resistance is met with at the top levels. The main motivation for this is

the fear for power and prestige. Leaders usually fell instinctively that the primary possessing of information means power; the individuals that possess information can go far to determine the activities and possibilities for decision of others. The initiators also feel -or know this and strive for keeping information processing in their own sphere of activity, as far as possible. Where there is a computer, they try to place the computer centre under their own, direct control, and where there is no computer, the initiators try to assure for themselves the power positions by controlling the system-organising. System-organising, is , however, a series of leaders' decisions consisting of several steps. Our case-studies prove that the initiators try as a rule to keep away other leaders as far as they can, inform them only about what is inevitable and try to "smuggle in" the new system avoiding the senior staff. This is, of course, a hopeless undertaking, because the breaking out of hidden tensions can be delayed only, but not avoided.

At the lower levels, which are charged with the different practical tasks concomitant with the introduction of the new system, dissatisfaction arises generally because of the excess work which they are to do in addition to their everyday activity, in many cases to the expense of the latter. Later, with the new organizational pattern shaping, at all levels, those concerned take stock of the situation to find out, what the organization will offer them in return for the new organizational requirements. In all cases where there is going to be a considerable distance between the new organisational requirements and individual expectations, resistance toward the change will become strong.

As our case-studies demonstrate, in the period of system-organising many attempts are given up; the difficulties of building the first sub-system often deter companies from making further steps.

At the beginning of the period of operative application tensions are generally increasing, especially in the case of applications entailing considerable organisational changes. Our little experience in Hungary confirms what a great number of examinations in foreign countries have proved; that this is the time when the new requirements toward both leaders and employees, as well as their ability and willingness to fulfil the new expectations become clear. All this remains the source of tensions for two or three years. The length of the period of operative application is in theoretically limitless; the new system becomes routine. It happens however in our days that the period of operative application is of short duration; upon effect of the initial difficulties /more exactly; growing difficulties/ the traditional, well-proved methods return.

It is doubtless that in our days those initiatives are successful which do not require - or only to a small extent - the building of new organisational patterns. The organizations are none the less compelled sooner or later to draw the new organizational patterns, which will conform to the computer's requirement, and affect a wide circle of those within the organization.

C/ Degree of tensions depending on the distance
between the new organizational demands, and the
new individual expectations

Depending on the type of application and on the phase of introduction /i.e. varying also in time/, the characteristic composition of organizational demands varies in the first small, and then wider circle of those concerned. To be expressed more clearly; as it has been seen, in a given period many resemblances are to be found in the case of those belonging to the same level.

The investigations carried out so far seem to prove that the typical composition of the new organizational de-

mands is relatively easy to find out, both at higher and lower levels.

As a counterpart to the new organizational demands, the individual expectations - or rather their typical composition - have been formed. If the organization does not know these and does not take care of fulfilling them as best as possible, it can pay for the neglect with the failure of the system organising.

It is more difficult to typify individual expectations and to make up their typical composition, if only because these are all subjective demands. A few attempts were made in this respect with individuals at different levels and it seems that the problem can be solved; independent of age, sex, intelligence, etc. at a given level, and in a given period of application a considerable number of expectations of the same type are to be found. E.g. it is well known, and confirmed also by our own investigations, that some of the typical expectations at all levels are the supply of very thorough, detailed information, the initiation of individuals into the forming of the system, consideration of their experience and the recognition of the importance of their cooperation. A similar typical expectation is the remuneration of the cooperation, if it means intellectual contribution beyond duties of the job, practical activity, or work of higher intensity than the customary. /In the case of this expectation it is quite simple to determine the form and extent of the remuneration deemed adequate at the different levels./^{6/}

With a post-examination of an unsuccessful attempt of computer application we used e.g. the method as follows:

For a few months the firm had a computer direct the forwarding and distribution of the products and then, for several reasons, returned to the traditional system. We put the most detailed questions to all those concerned - from the

general manager to the warehouse administrators - and we stated in all cases the new organizational demands they had to face. At the same time each of them told, which conditions had been lacking for a successful operation of the new system. From these we could compile the individual expectations. We considered typical those, which were mentioned by the majority. /At the lowest level e.g. the composition of the typical individual expectations is the following: general information in advance - previous special information, maybe a special course - asking for their opinion in advance - possibility for practice in advance - possibility of communication with the leaders of the system - assuring adequate working conditions - material remuneration of work exceeding the customary - moral recognition of accomplishments beyond the customary/. We have put together the expectations mentioned by the majority at all levels, then we asked everybody to specify, to which extent, according to his opinion, the firm recompensed each of them. It turned out as a final result that the high-level directors satisfied the new organizational demands to a smaller extent than the employees, however, the expectations of the latter were satisfied to a very little extent by the firm. This is unfortunately rather a general practice, leaders often do not care to satisfy even the growing of tensions induce frustrations, conflicts and defeats even where it could be avoided.

At the present phase of our research work we are trying to reveal first of all the typical compositions of the new individual expectation of those at the different levels and to observe, to which points the individuals conform easily to the new demands of the organization, and at which points the expectations of the organization and those of the individuals differ considerably from each other.

According to our view, sociology can help today the

computer by a methodological revealing of the two kinds of expectations and mainly by the complication of the typical individual expectations. Since in the coming years demands for the different types of application of computers will presumably keep increasing, our endeavours may render easier the inevitable painful process of accomodation in many organizations.

NOTES

- 1/ It was C.P. Snow who - in his lecture held at the scientific session of the M.I.T. Centennial Year on 1961, named "intellectual luddites" those who resisted to the computer.
- 2/ Here can mentioned a few works only:
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- 3/ RHEE, H.A.: Office Automation in Social Perspective. Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1968.
- 4/ The Inner structure of the Hungarian factories are - in general - the following:

Top manager

- | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Technical management
of production
/directing: technical
director/
Within it:
product designing department
production organizing dep.;
etc. | Economic management
of production
/directing: economic
director/
Within it:
planning dep.; departm. of
labour; book-keeping dep.
control of materials etc. |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
- 5/ The levels of management in the Hungarian factories:
- I. Top manager
 - II. Technical, economic, commercial directors
 - III. Departments
 - IV. Sections
 - V. Subsections
 - VI. Subordinates

- 6/ These are usually the same as expectations which arise with innovations, and with the process of the accommodation to the changing situation. See e.g.:
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