In the Office:
Networks and Coalitions*

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The study of the internal politics of an office demonstrates that levelling coalitions derive from established networks. This contradicts the view that network analysis is not useful in the study of levelling coalitions. Sixteen months of observation of office politics, particularly the functioning of levelling coalitions in the informal structure, could not be understood apart from the social networks from which they had sprung. Recruitment to and participation in the levelling coalitions derives directly from the existing networks. The analysis also demonstrates that the success or failure of the levelling coalition is dependent upon the relationships held and manipulated by the target. In order to understand the conflicts and be able to predict their outcome coalitions and networks must be analyzed.

Introduction

In this paper we wish to demonstrate that levelling coalitions derive from established networks. Thoden van Velzen claims that "the postulates of modern network analysis appear to have little relevance, if any, for the study of the functioning of levelling coalitions" (1973:248). A levelling coalition is defined as one kind of alliance to reduce and/or destroy the power of some individual. A more complete definition will be given later in the paper. We will argue that levelling coalitions obtain members from previously existing social networks, and that the success or failure of a levelling coalition is also dependent upon the network of its target.

Our analysis is based upon more than 16 months of observation of the members of the office of an overseas branch of a large international organization.[1] More than 30 employees from more than seven countries comprised the office population. A study of the office as a social network extended

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over most of the period. Obviously the members of the office had contacts outside the office, however we decided to restrict the study to the work situation and the contacts within that context. Access to the office was obtained through one of the staff members and through her contact was made with most of the other members. The routes of access chosen made it impossible to obtain some information. Careful cross-checking of the data has hopefully minimized the bias.

Formal structure

As with most organizations there is an ideal formal, or official structure. This consists of the official hierarchy, positions, lines of authority, and lines of communication. Figure 1 is the way the office officially presented itself. It was headed by a president and vice-president under whom there were four subsidiary units with a considerable degree of autonomy, though they were responsible to the president or, in his absence, to the the vice-president. The part of the office with which this study is concerned lay directly below the president. It included the positions in Figure 2. These Figures represent an official structural view of the functioning of the office. Both Figures are, to an extent, ideal types. Decisions and actions had to be legitimated with reference to this official structure. However, not all of the work was done in the manner suggested by Figures 1 and 2. One of the officers passed his work to the budget manager for action. The officer was responsible for the work but did not actually do it. The budget manager, though technically under the authority of the assistant vice-president, reported directly to the president or the vice-president. And the administrative manager actually controlled the bookkeeping section even though the section was not technically under her

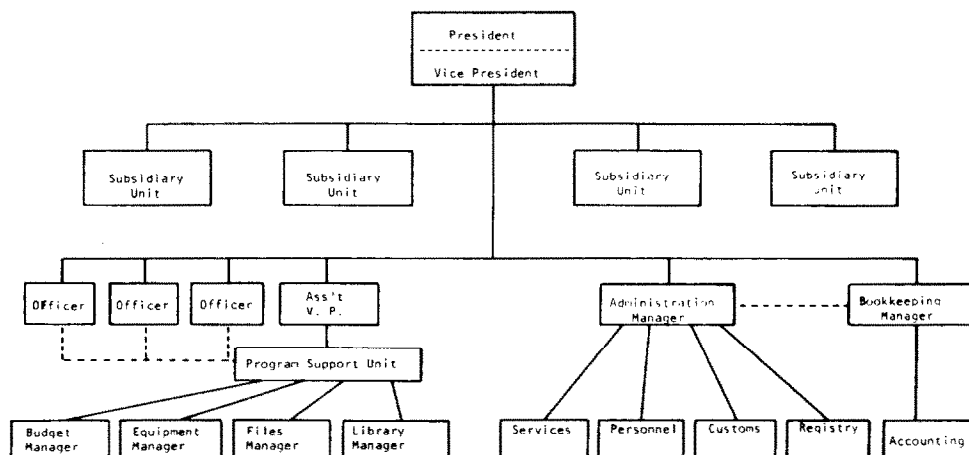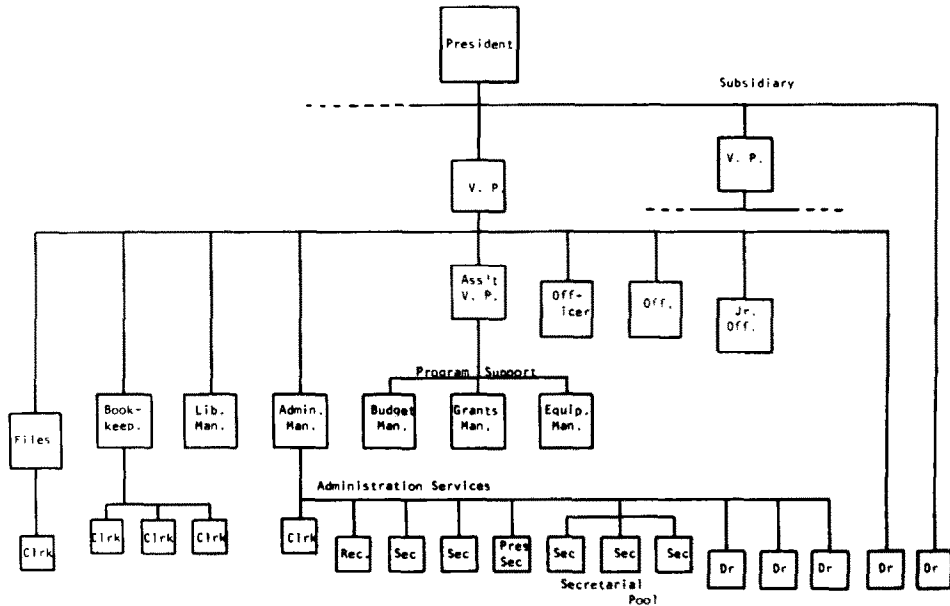Figure 1.   *Organization of the Office*

Figure 2. *Hierarchy and Lines of Authority*

control. Thus, not everything operated according to the ideal structure as presented in the official Figure, but often according to semi-official and informal structures.

Semi-official structure

The semi-official structure in this case was the actual division of labor in the office. Though individuals in certain positions were technically responsible for specified tasks, these may actually have been done by someone in another position. Though the lines of authority and responsibility in the office are presented in a particular way, certain short-cuts have been taken. Although it was not formalized, most people in the office were aware of the semi-official structure and accepted it because "that's the way things are." However, the semi-official structure was so closely tied to the official one that it does not concern us here.

Informal structure

The informal structure of the office consisted of the friendships within the office. These friendships tied people together in ways that were not part of the official structure. The informal structure of friendships had no official authority though it may have influenced official actions. This structure not only served needs of sociability within the office but also was a system of

communication. It cut across hierarchical positions and departmental lines. It provided an alternate set of operational channels for the employees. News about work situations and personal gossip was passed freely within the system. Everyone who has ever worked in an office recognizes the importance of personal links by means of which individuals can manipulate one another. It is in this realm that personal disputes occur. The informal structure of social relations will be the main focus of this study.

Structural divisions

A number of other internal structural divisions need to be mentioned at this point. Their importance will become more apparent later. As an international organization, the office was staffed, in part, by persons from a variety of countries. All of the top ranking personnel (president, vice-president, assistant vice-president, and officers) were foreigners. These individuals were transferred at regular intervals. They spent a minimum of two years and usually no more than four years in a particular office. They were transients in the office and were separated from other personnel.

The lower-level employees were all hired locally. During the study one of the secretaries was a foreigner who had been hired locally. And the administration manager was a local, hired locally, though her predecessor had been a foreigner. This segment constituted a relatively stable element. Thus there were two major groups in the office; nationals and internationals. This division had an effect on friendships in the office because locals were well aware that friendships or animosities with the internationals were temporary, yet they may have had permanent repercussions on relationships with the other locals.

Another division was based on the type of contract held. There were two types of contract, permanent and fixed term. A permanent contract is much like tenure in a university. Its holder has a high degree of job security because he cannot be dismissed unless his position is abolished or he is paid an indemnity. Fixed term contracts, on the other hand, are just that. They are for a limited term. These contracts may be renewed or terminated upon completion. Favorable performance reports and recommendations by superiors may lead to a permanent contract after a number of years.

Those with permanent contracts in the office were the most secure, formed a base of continuity, and wielded power to the extent that their jobs were not endangered by social difficulties which may have arisen. Other distinctions among the nationals existed as they would have done outside the office. Class distinctions were noticeable in friendship choices in the office. Education and degree of bilingualism also influenced these choices although to a lesser extent than class.

Chronology of friendhsips and disputes

The following description will provide the necessary historical background for our analysis. Though the arena of interaction was the office, many of the relationships involved were also carried on outside the office. We have included only those members with multiplex relationships within the office. By multiplex relationships we mean that the content of the relationships the person has with other individuals has several strands such as work, gossip, etc. Thus certain individuals working in the office are excluded because most, if not all, of their relationships were based on their business role *vis-a-vis* other persons with whom they interacted in the office.

In July Pete arrived from the central office to take over as the new vice-president. He was welcomed back to the office by the members of the local staff who remembered him fondly from a previous tour. Among his friends were Lisa, Katy, and Amy. On his previous tour Peter, then single for part of the time, had dated both Katy and Amy. Both ladies were now married and Pete maintained a close friendship with Amy's husband. The relationship with Katy was also warm and friendly though it had come to a sudden halt during Pete's previous tour. It was rumored in the office that Emma had told a relative of Katy's about Pete and that the relative, an influential person in politics, had put a great deal of pressure on the two to halt the relationship. It was believed that Emma had done this because of jealousy. Katy, Amy and Emma had all been secretaries during Pete's previous tour and on his return all had the security of permanent contracts. Lisa was also a trusted friend from the previous tour. She not only had the ear of the president but served as an important contact for him in influential local circles.

Shortly after Pete's arrival came Ann. Ann was new with organization. She had spent a year working in the central office and had requested a transfer to the field. During her time at the central office she had met Pete. It was Pete who arranged for Ann to be assigned to his particular office. He liked her personally and respected her professionally. She arrived, was introduced to Pete's friends and settled into the office with few problems. At almost the same time that Ann arrived, Andy came. Although new to the organization he seemed to settle in without great social or professional problems.

The office at this time gave the impression of cohesiveness. People greeted each other in a friendly way, stopped to chat in each other's offices, and saw each other outside the office. This was especially true among the internationals. Visiting both inside and outside the office was frequent and informal. In general, relationships in the office seemed fairly cordial. Drew, one of the officers, remained remote from almost all of the socializing; and the president was rather formal for hierarchical reasons, it was assumed. This did not create any problems.

Within six months of Pete's arrival certain changes became necessary. Katy, Amy, and Emma were all promoted to managerial positions and duties. This gave them more independence and authority in the office. Emma's

promotion in particular was important. She became the administrative manager. The job was first offered to Lisa who turned it down. Emma accepted the position. Being administrative manager was a large step up in the organization. The position carried a great deal of authority and responsibility. Under the direct control of the administrative manager were the drivers, the bookkeeping section, the secretarial pool, and a variety of other services (see Figures 2 and 3). The responsibility of the position was to make sure that daily operation of services ran in a dependable way so that the work of the officers could be done efficiently. Drivers had to be ready to pick up and return internationals to their homes and appointments, as well as take care of other transport such as going to the airport, the post office, and delivering messages and materials. There were only three drivers, so the schedules had to be carefully arranged and coordinated. Bookkeeping had to take care of accounts and have payments ready on time. In other words, of the approximately 30 people in the office, approximately 16 were under Emma's immediate control. Pete felt she would do a good job. Some of the secretaries were worried. Emma was known to be ambitious.

The first real trouble came shortly after Emma's promotion. The issue was the use of scarce resources: the office cars. Emma used the office cars, as had her predecessor, to get to the office and back. However, the previous manager had been an international and Emma was a national. The general office policy was that only the internationals would be transported in office cars. No one stopped Emma's use of the car. In fact, as Emma began to transport other locals nothing was said. There were few cars and Emma controlled them. When Emma began to use the cars the system became over-

Figure 3.   *Personnel*
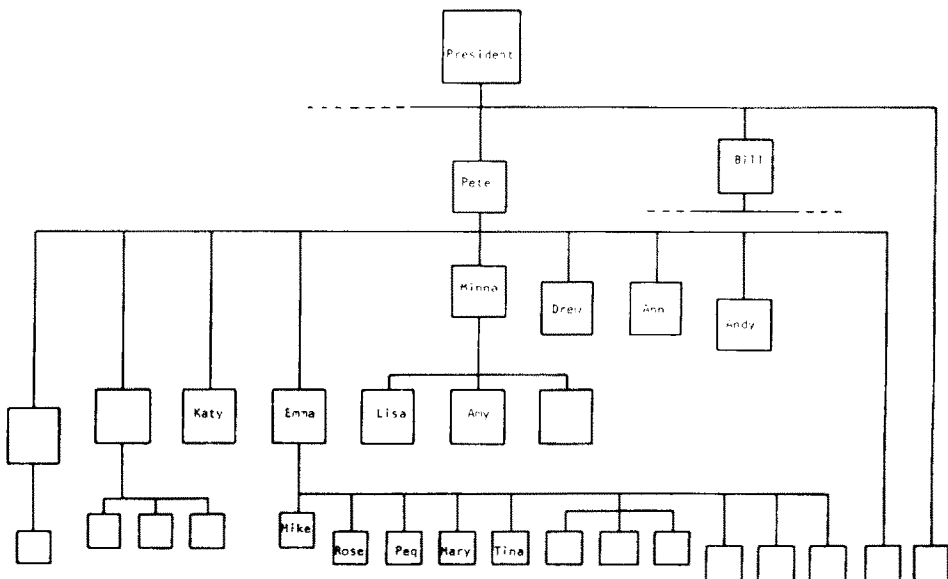
loaded. She would keep the car waiting for her at a restaurant while she and friends had lunch and she would keep the car outside her home in the mornings while she got ready. This denied access to the cars by other people who needed them. Due to a variety of circumstances Ann was picked up late or not at all for several weeks. Normally she was very punctual and well organized. The delays annoyed her. She complained to Pete, but the delays continued. Ann was mad and began to complain to some of her friends. Emma reacted by accusing Ann, behind her back, of lying and misuse of official cars for personal errands.

Pete was ignoring the problem on the grounds that it was a social problem: the result of rivalry or jealousy between two women. Ann, in a fury, finally demanded that the issue be settled at an official level by Pete. She asked that Emma be brought before Pete officially to make her accusations. Pete somewhat reluctantly took action. Unfortunately he did not do so before there was shedding of tears and a great deal of bitterness involved. Ann brought her secretary, Tina, to the the meeting to take notes and act as a witness. Emma asked that Tina not attend. Against Pete's objections Ann had Tina remain. The decision was that Ann would have priority use of a car when she needed it for office business and that two cars would be sent in the mornings so that the two ladies would not have to ride together in the same car. During the dispute Jamie (the assistant V.P.) and Drew (an officer) sided with Ann. Several of the secretaries and several of the managers also sided with her. A great deal of hostility about the way Emma had been running the administration came to the surface. People said she was a hypocrite, a liar, a manipulator, and a back-stabber. Not only was hostility expressed but so was fear: fear of Emma's power. Emma not only had power in the administration section as head, but she also could talk to the president freely. With Pete's decision the office quieted down. Emma's power had been put to the test. Her power had been curtailed slightly, showing that she was vulnerable. And Ann's position had been officially defined as one of power. Underlying bitterness remained and the two women spoke to each other only when necessary for the operation of the office. Nevertheless, open conflict had been avoided.

The situation remained quiet for the next six months. During this period Emma continued to expand her power base. She carefully avoided antagonizing Ann though. As a former secretary Emma tried to continue her friendships with the other secretaries. The secretaries gathered in a small room at lunchtime to talk, gossip, and joke. Emma was among them. To avoid further criticism from Pete, Emma consulted him on an almost daily basis. Her use of the cars to do favors for her secretarial friends continued. Rose, one of the secretaries, announced her alliance with Emma by using the same expressions. The imitation was obvious to all. Not only was Emma able to establish her power in the office, she brought in help. Mike was dating Emma's sister. He was also Emma's candidate for the job of clerk. Mike got the job. There was resentment expressed when he got the job but no opposition was formed.

Emma had no effective opposition. Those above her could find little to criticize. Emma did her job and protected herself by frequently conferring with Pete or the president. Though others did not like her personally, and though they felt she was overstepping her authority, they never felt threatened enough to form an opposition. Below Emma, the workers felt either favored or threatened. Emma could overlook lateness or long lunch hours or provide transportation for those favored. Shifts in the work load could be used as reward or punishment. Emma wrote performance reports on her subordinates. Lisa, Katy, and Amy did not like her. They felt that Emma, coming from a lower class, had had to struggle to rise to her present position, and that she continued to be conniving, pushy and crude: disapproving of qualities. However, personal discontent with Emma was not acted upon. Pete heard the complaints and said that no one else in the office would do as well in such a difficult job and that Emma was doing her job. This certainly suggested to many that Emma had friends in high places. Emma had not won but neither had she lost. She was unassailable. The combination of seeming to have friends in high places, authority, and a permanent contract made her secure in her reach for power.

During the quiet six months Pete continued to be the center of a social circle which included the internationals (excluding Drew and the president) as well as Lisa, Katy, and Amy. In general the office continued to function well. Jamie was transferred. Though his absence was felt, there was no real change in the social relations of the office. The situation changed rapidly with the arrival of Jamie's replacement, Minna.

Minna came in from another field office. She had over 20 years of experience with the organization and, unlike the other internationals, had worked her way up in the organization from a secretarial position. In her most recent post she had had extensive responsibilities and had exercised a great deal of power due to her close relationship with the head of the office. However, both Pete and the president had been warned of Minna's "over enthusiasm" by someone in the organization before her arrival. Over enthusiasm meant that Minna might interrupt the smooth working of the office. Apart from Pete and the president, only Ann and Lisa knew of the warning. Pete had told them. Also, Minna had, to some extent, been forced on the office by someone at headquarters. Friends in high places make a person dangerous or at least difficult to control. Her reception at her new post was chilly.

Minna's approach was enthusiastic. It had been a year-and-a-half since Pete's arrival and the office was stable socially. Breaking into the office social order or working order could have been a quiet affair. Minna was not quiet. Everywhere she went she accompanied herself with a storm of raucous laughter. Socially she attached herself to Ann and Emma. This in itself was not a good move because the two women were not on speaking terms. Parties and visiting, especially on weekends though not exclusively, were the order of the day for Minna. Minna was obviously promoting her friendships in an aggressive and demanding manner. This became a strain for Ann

who began to withdraw. A widening gap between Pete and Minna also contributed to Ann's backing off. Minna's enthusiasm also extended to her work. She was full of plans to change office organization, to make work more efficient, and to introduce her ideas. She was a stickler for detail, but detail which many considered trivial. Memos had to be done on the same size paper and filed so that the edges were even. New systems of charting office projects were introduced by Minna. "We did it better in my other office, where we did it this way", was a frequent attitude taken by Minna. Though her suggestions may have had some merit, they were not appreciated in her new office. They were taken as criticism which many felt was undeserved. Everyone was outwardly friendly with Minna, but behind her back criticism was beginning to grow. Among the internationals there was also a feeling that Minna's professional work was superficial, that it lacked substantive content. Minna's suggestions were not taken, her reports were rejected, and some of her work was distributed to other internationals. For this Pete was blamed even though the decision had been the president's. Minna resented Pete's blocking of her ideas and began to criticize Pete to Lisa and Ann. Ann, wanting no part of a struggle, withdrew from her relationship with Minna. Everyone hoped Minna would settle in after a suitable adjustment period. She didn't.

Minna's differences of opinion with Pete escalated into a feud. At every opportunity Pete was belittled to his friends by Minna. She accused him of trying to belittle her unjustly, of not being willing to listen to her good ideas, not being willing to give her credit for good work, of doing superficial work himself. None of the criticism helped Minna or hurt Pete. Pete remained respected and popular. Criticism of him was viewed as unjust by those who knew him. Minna was alienating potential support. Her only continuous friend was Emma. Potentially, Minna's play for power would serve as an aid for Emma's own ambitions. The team they were forming frightened secretaries and internationals alike. They were afraid that their joint power would be unbeatable. Lunch discussions frequently centered on these two women as individuals and as a team.

Minna's working relationships led to more problems. One expert working on a project had always reported directly to the president even though his project was under the direct authority of the assistant V.P. Jamie had simply accepted the situation calmly; Minna fought it. She claimed that it was her project, and that the man should report to her and do things her way. Both the president and the expert (who were old friends) found Minna's protestations excessive. Minna was told to accept the situation and to settle down. Minna would not accept it. Her loud complaints filtered through the office. Minna's attitude was not shared by her fellow workers who began to feel that she was paranoid.

Within four months Minna had a showdown with the president. She stormed into his office and told him of her discontent and frustration, placing the blame on Pete. Then, with an air of triumph, she told Ann. The president told Pete who, in turn, told Ann. The president in his usual diplo-

matic fashion had told Minna to shape up. This was the signal. Emma's
support for Minna faded. She could not risk putting herself in a weakened
position of alliance with Minna. Secretaries complained that they thought
Minna's friendliness was hypocritical. Others found her laugh neurotic.
Rumors began to circulate that Minna had had a nervous breakdown in one
of her previous posts and that she might be on the verge of another. Minna
tried to recoup some of her losses by explaining her fight with Pete to Ann
and Lisa. The move was largely unsuccessful. Criticism of Minna continued.

Minna then decided to change the situation. She knew that Pete was due
for a requested vacation after which he would not return to the office. She
would take a leave of absence for two months until Pete had left. Minna
expected that with Pete gone she would be able to return and have none of
her former problems. Ordinarily leave would not have been granted to
someone who had only been in the office for four months. However, Minna's
request was granted. She began to plan a farewell party for herself amid
speculation that she would not return. The president, knowing that she
would stop at headquarters during her leave, wrote a highly critical letter and
requested that she be transferred out of the office because she was un-
cooperative and had failed to establish good working relationships.

Minna's final fight with Pete took place over the assignment of offices in
a new location. Pete placed Minna in a particular office. She rebelled saying
that Emma had given her another office which she preferred. It became a
shouting match. Finally, Pete asserted his authority as second-in-command
in the office. Minna had lost. Her final act of vengeance was pointedly not to
invite people to her farewell party who were not on her "white list." None
of the people who were "trying to get me" or their friends would be invited.
Only "people who have been nice to me" would be invited Minna told Lisa,
who told Katy, who told Ann, who told Amy, etc. The "white list" joke and
speculation had begun. As it turned out, Amy, Katy, Pete and the president
were not invited. Shortly after her party Minna took her leave of absence
and the office quitened down once again.

The assignment of offices in the new location was a tremendous oppor-
tunity for Emma. The move entailed the re-arranging of all personnel and of-
fice space from one office space to office spaces in two adjoining converted
houses. Emma worked closely with the president to make sure that the move
was made smoothly. In the process of moving Emma also made sure that her
office would be located in the second building, away from the president and
all other internationals. In this way she would literally become boss in her
own separate building. And she would stay out of all potential face-to-face
conflicts with anyone in the other building. Strategically this was a superb
move. She reigned supreme in her own castle.

Minna returned one week before Pete's departure. There had been almost
two weeks of farewell parties for Pete. Two important parties remained: the
office party and the president's party. Minna was pointedly absent from
both. It was a breach of protocol obvious to all. However, Minna's return
was subdued and quiet. She seemed to have withdrawn from all social

contact with people from the office. She felt frustrated, useless, and heavily criticized. The visit to headquarters had been a disappointing experience. Old, expected support had not been forthcoming. The president's letter had arrived before Minna. Not until nearly six months later did she again try to re-establish friendships. Her laugh was almost never heard. Minna began to talk more frequently with Lisa. The attempt at friendship was thwarted by a rumor that Minna might be a homosexual. Lisa kept her distance.

During this period of observation Emma had retained and strengthened her position. In two and a half years a variety of disputes and problems had not been able to stop her increasing control of resources in the context of the office. She became solidly entrenched and almost untouchable. In five months Minna had failed to establish herself. Her disputes and attempts to gain access to power had been entirely unsuccessful. One way of understanding why one woman succeeded in gaining power and the other failed is to look at the social structure in the office. More specifically, one must look at the relationships, the social network.

Network

A number of methods could be used to analyze these events. The most useful approach is network analysis. What has been described here are shifting patterns of social relationships. Social relationships may be conceived of as links between individuals which tie them together into webs or networks. Here the office is taken as the social network. Links which individuals have with people outside the office are ignored though they obviously play a role in the total life of the individual. The office as a social network offers two major areas of analysis: the individual links themselves, and the pattern of links which any individual has.

The link, the interaction between two individuals, has several characteristics (for a more complete discussion of interactional characteristics see Mitchell 1969:20–29). It was found that two characteristics would be useful if used only in a very general sense: directedness and content multiplexity. Directionality is an indication of the direction of the flow of information, favors, authority. In this study directionality refers to nonreciprocal authority relationships (which are the uniplex relationships of the official office structure). Directedness is important in understanding Emma's position. Her relationships were very much based on authority. Emma's ability to manipulate individuals in a situation was a function of her authority as administration manager. The authority was used to link Emma with a large number of other people and to manipulate them. This aspect of directedness is what contributed to Emma's power and also partially explains Minna's weak links. But, the content of these links is also important.

Content presents a number of difficult problems. A relationship between two people may have one or several kinds of content, which furthermore may change over time. Even if the separate content strands of the relation-

ship are defined they do not lend themselves to anything but a subjective analysis. Values cannot be assigned to each content strand so that the contents of one relationship are in some way comparable to the contents of another relationship. For this study relationships having multiple content strands (multiplex or multistranded) have been focused on. Multiplex relationships were used to construct a model of the office as a social network. The specific contents of each relationship were not explored nor are they meant to have any weighted value for use in comparison. Relationships based solely upon the work relationship (single stranded or uniplex) have been left out for the simple reason that within the context of the office each person has a relationship with every other person. Rather than making an analysis of each particular relationship entered into by any particular ego, we shall emphasize the sets of linkages immediately surrounding particular Egos.[2]

Figure 4 shows all multiplex relationships in the situation analyzed. However, as has already been noted, relationships change over time. The Figure represents the multiplex relationships which existed in the office during the period when Minna was beginning to quarrel with Pete. Other Figures could have been created to show changes through time. Such an exercise would

Figure 4.   *Multiplex relationships*
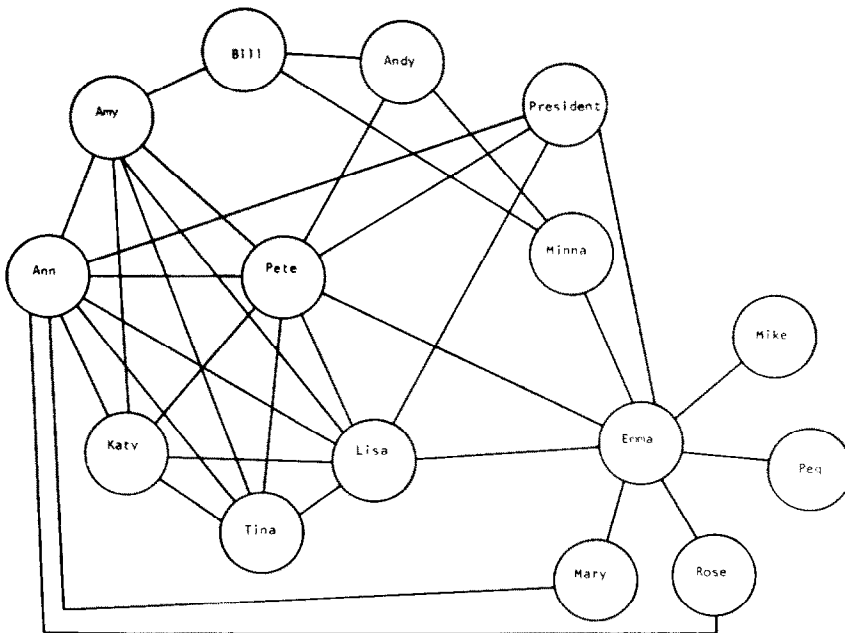
[2] A more thorough discussion of content including frequency, duration, durability, and intensity would add detail and bulk to the article but would not provide data which would add substantially to the analysis. The degree to which Pete's position was based on sexual attractiveness is interesting but does not need to be taken up. The analysis can be accomplished without dissecting each relationship.

not have appreciably added to the study. Therefore the Figure represents the office as a network of multiplex relationships at a particular time, no more than that. More important than the characteristics of individual relationships are the characteristics of the sets of relationships of particular egos.

The sets of relationships or "the direct links radiating from a particular ego to other individuals in a situation, and the links which connect those individuals who are directly tied to ego, to one another" (Kapferer 1961:182) are called reticulums (reticulum is the same as Barnes' first-order zone 1969:59). The morphological characteristics of the reticulums reveal important points in the structure of the network.

We are interested in "the extent to which links which could possibly exist among persons do in fact exist" (Mitchell 1969:18). Barnes refers to this a density (1969—64) which is to be measured through the formula $200a/n$ $(n - 1)$. Using this formula we derive the percent of potential links which have been activated in the reticulum. Looking at Table 1 it can be seen that of all the principal actors only Emma's reticulum has a density below

Table 1.

Name	Density	Span	Degree	# in reticulum
Major Actors				
Amy	76.19%	48.48	4.6	6
Ann	52.78%	57.58	4.2	8
Emma	30.56%	33.33	2.4	8
Katy	100.00%	45.45	5.0	5
Lisa	71.43%	60.60	5.0	7
Minna	66.67%	12.12	2.0	3
Pete	61.11%	66.67	4.9	8
Pres.	90.00%	27.27	3.6	4
Tina	100.00%	45.45	5.0	5
Minor Actors				
Andy	66.67%	12.12	2.0	3
Bill	66.67%	12.12	2.0	3
Mary	66.67%	6.06	1.3	2
Mike	100.00%	3.03	1.0	1
Peg	100.00%	3.03	1.0	1
Rose	66.67%	6.06	1.3	2
Office	31.43%		4.4	15

Density: $\dfrac{200a}{n(n-1)}$ "where a refers to the actual number of links and n to the total number of persons involved including ego." (Mitchell 1969:18)

Span: $\dfrac{100(E + Na)}{S}$ "where E = the number of direct links between ego and the other individuals in ego's reticulum, Na = the number of links between each of the individuals to whom ego is linked and S = the total number of links between all individuals in the situation." (Kapferer 1969:224)

Degree: $\dfrac{2 \times Na}{N}$ Na = number of actual relations
N = number of persons included (Niemeijer 1973:47)

the percentage for the network as whole and that the reticulums (this plural form is in keeping with the usage of Kapferer rather than introduce the term reticula) of all of the other individuals are far above the percentage for the office as a whole. Given that Emma's relationships are based to a large extent on power this result is not surprising. Her positive relationships, as shown by the density of the relationships, are based on individuals with few connections among themselves. A measure of density alone is not sufficient.

Span, Kapferer's adaptation of the notion of range, provides telling data. If span, as Mitchell suggests (1969:19), "has direct relevance to an individual's mobilization of support in a dispute," and if this measure is taken to be "the proportion of actual links among a specified set of persons with whom ego could possibly have contact" (*ibid.*), then span, in this case, is crucial. Span in Table 1 is lowest for Minna, who as we have seen was unable to mobilize support in a conflict situation. It is also low for Emma. However, Emma was able to muster support. Evidently Emma's support did not come through her reticulum. In fact Emma's support came from the official structure and from uniplex relationships with her subordinates. Of course her multiplex relationships with the two highest officials (Pete and the president) were also aids. The dual structure of the office, two strong reticulum links as well as Emma's permanent contract saved her in what otherwise would have been a weak position.

One other measure is particularly useful in demonstrating the relative positions of members of the network: degree. Niemeijer's degree "is the mean number of relations network members have with other network members" (1973:47). Degree of first-order zones for the principals is indicated in Table 1. Again, for Minna and Emma the figures are the lowest in the network and well below the degree of the network as a whole. This is a further indication of their lack of social resources. Such a lack makes them vulnerable in any disputes which may occur.

However, these measures do not tell us anything we do not already know from the description. At best they reinforce what we know and lend supportive numerical evidence. Relations change and there is a dynamic or tension to the system which is also not accounted for by this variety of numerical measures. Where then can we turn for an explanation of what Minna and Emma were up against, why they were up against something, and why one lost and the other held on?

The answer comes through combining the concepts of coalition and network. Thoden van Velzen defines a coalition "as an alliance between social actors who adopt a common stand in conflict situations" (1973: 219). Of the two types of coalition described by Thoden van Velzen the most important here is the levelling coalition; an unstable, leaderless, loosely structured, single-purpose unit acting against a target. The methods by which this coalition accomplishes the levelling are rumor,

criticism, denial of access to power, and withdrawal of support. Given this, who forms the levelling coalition and what are the conditions for the success or failure of the levelling process?

In order to answer the question one must return to the network. Within the network a large number of rumors circulated rapidly among Pete, Ann, Amy, Katy, Tina, and Lisa. On almost every meeting between two or more of these individuals there would be criticism of Minna. Emma was not exempt from such criticism either. However, in her case Pete did not actively participate for two reasons. He felt that Emma was doing a good job generally and he was responsible for her being in her present position. Thus he was also defending his own decisions. Looking at Table 1 also reveals that these same six individuals form the area of highest density, span, and degree. This clustering is a clique (having a density of 100%). It was from several of these individuals that Minna attempted to gain social access to the group. However, when her feuding with Pete began she was cut off from such access and future support was alienated. Having failed to establish herself, Minna had few goods or services in the office to offer. It then became impossible to defend herself through the formation of any kind of support group or interest coalition. Eventually Minna's reputation was severely damaged through the joking about her white list, her excessive laughter, the rejection of her reports, comments about her emotional state, and suggestions about her sexual preferences. She had no defense and no effective way of striking back at a leaderless, almost invisible coalition.

Emma's situation is different. Emma had control over goods and resources in the office. She controlled personnel, access to and availability of transportation, a large loosely knit reticulum which she could rally to her defense or at least prevent from joining the fray, and access to power (her relationship with Pete and the president). Her careful assessment of the situation generally kept her out of open conflict with powerful individuals. In fact, when association with Minna would have been a threat to her position, Emma withdrew. Her one test of her own power, the conflict with Ann, also taught her the limits of her power. Though the same individuals who talked about Minna also talked about Emma, they found no way to deny her access to power nor did they start any rumors which created any lasting damage.

Looking again at the evidence, it becomes apparent that both Emma and Minna were the targets of a levelling coalition. Both women were being attacked but not by an identifiable group being led by a particular individual. They were attacked by a non-group. The members of the non-group who participated in the levelling actions were also very closely tied to each other in a series of multiplex ties. Pete, Ann, Amy, Katy, Tina and Lisa, as a set, technically constitute a clique even though the density of the first order zones is below 100% for four of these individuals. Had the network and the reticulums not been noted

we would have no way of showing how the members of the levelling coalition coalesced. The levelling coalition was the direct outcome of pre-existing social relations in the office. Certainly, as multiplex relationships, they served a variety of purposes. But, given encroachments on various individuals' powers or positions a segment of the network could also function as a levelling coalition.

The degree of success of the levelling coalition seems to be related to the nature of the reticulum of the target. Minna's reticulum of multiplex relationships was small and insecure. She could not use her reticulum to mobilize effective support in a conflict situation. However, Emma's reticulum was wide and her base of power much greater in both the formal and informal structures and therefore she could mobilize a defense against a levelling coalition though a counter-attack was impossible. Thus it is the reticulum that becomes important in understanding the action of the levelling coalition in relation to the target.

Conclusion

Though Thoden van Velzen has noted that "The levelling coalition seems to be the type of 'non-group' least suited for study with the methods of network analysis" (1973:248), network analysis may be absolutely necessary to the understanding of such coalitions. From the data presented here it would seem that a levelling coalition originates from the existing networks. Therefore, to define the participation in and recruitment to a levelling coalition, the network structures must be examined. It would also seem that the success or failure of the levelling coalition is dependent on the relationships held and manipulated by the targets. Again necessitating the investigation of the network. Such a method is necessary to make sense of the social situation and to avoid a static structural picture in a dynamic situation.

Acknowledgements

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