

Adapted from “Adaptive and Integrative Changes as Sources of Strain in Social Systems,” Robert F. Bales *Interaction Process Analysis: A Method for the Study of Small Groups*. Addison-Wesley, 1949.

Looking at large scale systems in a very abstract way, one can form an idea of two “chains of events” or “series of strains” starting from opposite poles and proceeding in opposite directions, tending to cancel each other out, and each in its terminal effects tending to set off the opposite chain of events. One chain of events has its starting point in the necessities of adaptation to the outer situation and proceeds in its series of strains through changes in the division of labor, changes in the distribution of property, authority, and status and has its malintegrative terminal effects in the disturbance of the existing state of solidarity. The other chain of events has its starting point in the necessities of integration or reintegration of the social system itself and proceeds in its series of strains through a reactive (or perhaps aboriginal) emphasis on solidarity which exerts a dissolving, undermining, equalizing, or curbing effect of the differential distribution of status, on differences in authority, differences in distribution of property, and differences in functional roles in the division of labor, with an ultimate terminal effect that may be maladaptive. The social system in its organization, we postulate, tends to swing or falter indeterminately back and forth between these two theoretical poles: optimum adaptation to the outer situation at the cost of internal malintegration, or optimum internal integration at the cost of maladaptation to the outer situation.

The series of hypotheses below is an attempt to state our conception of these interconnections in the most general way possible, for all sorts of small groups:

As particular functional problems (instrumental, adaptive, integrative, or expressive) become more acute, pressing, or continuous, more demanding in time and effort, strains are created toward the definition of specific social roles, differentiated in terms of particular persons, who are given the implicit or explicit responsibility of meeting and solving the specific functional problems as they arise in the group.

As the felt importance of the specific function performed by a particular person increases, strains are created toward an increase in his generalized social status. Conversely, as the felt importance of the particular function decreases, strains are created toward a decrease in his generalized social status.

As the functional social roles in a group become more specific, differentiated, and formal, more demanding in time and effort of the particular individuals performing the roles, strains are created toward a more individualistic and unequalitarian distribution of access to resources and rewards, both in terms of access to the instrumentalities involved in the performance of the function and in terms of some reward or compensation for the loss of time and effort and the value rendered to the group.

As the felt advantage of a particular person in the distribution of access to resources increases, strains are created toward an increase in his generalized social status.

Conversely, as the advantage of the particular person decreases, strains are created toward a decrease in his generalized social status.

As the functional social roles in a group become more specific, differentiated, and formal, strains are created toward a more differentiated and centralized exercise of directive control in order to coordinate and regulate these special functions.

As the directive control of a given person increases, strains are created toward an increase in his generalized social status. Conversely, as his directive control decreases, strains are created toward a decrease in his generalized social status.

As status differences between persons increase, strains are created toward a less solid (more neutral, indifferent, or antagonistic) relation between them. As the functional roles performed by persons in a group become more specific differentiated, and formal, strains are created toward a less solidary relation between them.

As solidarity between persons of different status increases, strains are created toward a merging, or equalization of their status, both as they view the relation and as others view the relation. In general, members of solidary groups tend to be classed together in the scale of stratification, and individual mobility in the scale of stratification involves some loosening or breaking of former ties of solidarity. Solidarity and status differences are in certain respects incompatible.

The adaptation of the social system to its outer situation requires a certain degree of neutrality, mobility, and recognition of status differences in certain social relationships.

As solidarity between persons performing specific, differentiated, and formal roles increases, strains are created toward a more diffuse, less differentiated, and less formalized performance of functional social roles, which in turn may be accompanied by a loss of efficiency and responsibility, a loss of the inducement of increased status, a perversion of function from group ends to the individual ends of the persons immediately involved, and so may threaten the adaptation and integration of the group as a whole. (Nepotism, favoritism, particularism, etc.)

As solidarity between persons having different advantages in the distribution of property rights increases, strains are created toward a more "communal," "equalitarian" distribution of property rights, which may tend to interfere with the adaptation and integration of the whole group by the dissociation of reward from functionally specific tasks, and consequent reduction of motivation to the efficient performance of explicit functions on behalf of the group.

As solidarity increases between those in authority and those subjected to control, strains are created toward a more diffuse, less differentiated, and less formal exercise of authority, which in turn may interfere with the adaptation and integration of the whole group by making it difficult or impossible for the persons in authority to require or demand that which is necessary but unpleasant, difficult, or dangerous.