# How Organisations and Hierarchies Arise

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## An Introduction to Organisations

To carry out communal activities at any scale, we form what I will describe, generically, as "organisations". These are formal or informal groups of individuals that have their own culture and purpose. They can be religious, political, economic, or have some other function.

All human organisations are self-maintaining systems. As an organisation comes into existence and develops, so too does a hierarchy within it. For example, a typical commercial enterprise comprises a managing director followed by directors, senior managers, middle managers, junior managers, and ordinary employees. A typical religion might be organised with a god at the top, followed by "his representative on earth", and so on down to the lay population. Such hierarchies exist everywhere in society, albeit with different names for the various strata, and we take this for granted.

However, the type of hierarchy in an organisation depends on the extent to which it relies on leadership or power for control. A person with leadership attributes gains high status by virtue of skills in directing a group of individuals to an agreed common goal. Generally, these skills are recognised by the subordinates, and the leader's status is held with their consent. On the other hand, a person with power attributes has skills in directing a group of individuals to a goal set by him, her or those above. He or she does not necessarily hold their status with their subordinates' consent. Individuals in a hierarchy generally hold a combination of both attributes, each manifesting to a greater or lesser degree. Unfortunately, there has been a history of power masquerading as leadership, and the term "leader" is used to describe both those who exercise power and those who exercise genuine leadership. In this series of articles, I will, therefore, use the terms "highest status", "high status", "low status", "lowest status", "senior" and "junior" when referring to the members of a hierarchy.

Control and adaptation mechanisms in an organisation or sub-organisation depend on the highest status individuals receiving information from those of lower status and issuing instructions to them. The balance of leadership and power attributes can vary from organisation to organisation and from sub-organisation to sub-organisation. It is normally a reflection of the attributes of its highest status members and can become entrenched as a culture.

In the same way as systems, all organisations contain sub-organisations and are part of yet larger ones. A commercial organisation, for example, may comprise departments and teams. It may also belong to a sector, i.e., a group of commercial organisations with similar purpose. Thus, organisations are themselves structured hierarchically. An outline of this hierarchy from the top down is:

Earth's Ecology

Global Human Organisation

Cultural Alliances of Nations

Individual Nations

National Elites

Sectors (both formal and informal)

Named Organisations

Departments

Teams

Individuals

The term "organisation" is used generically to describe any one of these.

Organisations exist to facilitate the co-operation of individuals for a common purpose. Usually, they are a means of satisfying the needs and avoiding the contra-needs of a group of individuals. However, their purpose can also be to satisfy the needs and avoid the contra-needs of one or more other organisations. It is also possible for organisations to come into being with the specific purpose of creating contra-satisfiers for others, or to obstruct their satisfiers. So, in the way that it impacts on others, an organisation can be a satisfier or contra-satisfier of a type described by Max Neef.

All organisations are open systems with inputs, processes, and outputs. They have needs and contra-needs. Their needs are to carry out their function and grow, and their contra-needs are an inability to do so. Satisfiers are the inputs and internal organisation necessary for them to carry out their processes. Contra-satisfiers are anything that prevents this.

Organisations interact with one another to provide inputs and outputs. When one organisation provides the outputs needed by another, it is a satisfier of the latter's needs. However, it can also act as a contra-satisfier, either deliberately or unintentionally. Organisations will also compete with one another for the inputs or resources required to satisfy their needs. These interactions are not necessarily at the same level in the hierarchy of organisations. For example, an individual interacts with a commercial organisation for payment or other benefits in return for his labour. He also interacts with many organisations for products and services in return for money. In general, individuals and organisations will be attracted to organisations they believe will satisfy their needs. A form of risk-benefit-cost analysis is carried out and equitable reciprocation is expected.

Finally, all organisations come into existence, carry out their function for a time, and then either expire or change their purpose. As I discuss organisations and hierarchies in more detail, I will follow this order.


## Competition & Co-operation

According to ecological theory, the population of a species will grow until it becomes constrained by the available resources. These resources then become insufficient to satisfy the needs of all members of the species, and they will compete for them. This is a natural evolutionary process and applies as much to humanity as it does to any other species.

However, competition is of two types: negative and positive. Negative competition involves preventing a competitor from achieving their aims. In a running race, for example, competitors who engage in negative competition will attempt to trip one another up. Clearly, when taken to extreme, this can lead to conflict. Positive competition, on the other hand, involves each competitor striving to be superior to the other. In the example of a running race, each strives to be first to reach the finish line.

Counter-intuitively, positive competition can lead to co-operation, and thus, to human organisation. This form of competition reveals the most competent individual for a particular task. Other competitors, providing they are not engaging in negative competition, recognise that the task is best carried out by that person. They also recognise that there is benefit in excelling in their own niche and trading its outputs with those who most efficiently occupy others. For example, whoever is best at hunting will be recognised as the hunter, whoever best at fishing recognised as the fisherman, and the two will trade fish for meat to the advantage of

both. Thus, an efficient "division of labour" emerges, with everyone doing what they do best, and each task being done by whoever is most competent to do it. In the absence of negative competition, trust also emerges, and everyone benefits through a process of trade.

Leadership is just one necessary task in human organisation. In general systems theory it is referred to as requisite hierarchy. It involves organizing the tasks carried out by a group of people to achieve a common goal, identifying who is most suited to each task, amicably resolving any disagreements, and discouraging any negative competition. The most competent leader is also revealed by positive competition. Through a process of trust and trade, e.g., fish and meat for leadership effort, the others come to accept him or her. With a leader and a division of labour in place, an organisation can be said to have formed.

Clearly, positive competition is socially beneficial, and negative competition socially harmful. In the running race, positive competition results in it being won in the shortest possible time, i.e., most efficiently. Negative competition, on the other hand, can lead to it never being won at all, if the participants descend to trading blows at the halfway point. Obviously, the benefits of positive competition described above seem rather idealistic. In practice, all human beings continuously balance their immediate interests with their longer-term interests gained from the support of a co-operative group. We all engage in both positive and negative competition to varying degrees. So, there are many ways in which human organisation can fail and I will discuss some of them in future articles.

Historically, humanity has extensively engaged in negative competition. Like many animals, early man competed aggressively for territory and the resources it contained. However, again like many animals, co-operation probably originated in small family groups. Unlike other animals, however, a virtuous circle, or positive feedback loop, developed. When two organized groups engage in positive competition, they begin to co-operate, and form a yet larger organized group. This, in turn, leads to ever greater skill and efficiency in acquiring resources and, thus, ever greater population. The process scales up. Thus, tribes formed kingdoms, kingdoms formed nations, and nations formed cultural groups, until we arrived at the world we see today.

Some, who feel that they cannot succeed in positive competition, will resort to negative competition. So, to reduce this within organized groups, norms, i.e., codes of acceptable behaviour, and methods of enforcement were established. In smaller groups, such as tribes, this would have been the word of the leader. However, as the membership of organized groups became ever larger, it became necessary to generalize and formalise these norms as laws, and to delegate their enforcement. In the world today, laws exist in all nations. Enforcement also exists, to a greater or lesser extent, and this has a strong bearing on a nation's success or failure.

Negative competition has always existed between organized groups, from the tribal to the national scale. Hence the wars that we have seen in the past. It could even be argued that the two go hand in hand, because positive competition would result in tribes and nations merging to form larger organized groups. To a large extent this negative competition still exists today and, although they are becoming rarer, wars continue to take place. Unfortunately, control over negative competition between nations is still in its infancy, and many of the existential threats that humanity faces are global in nature. Suggestions as to how to take this forward are, therefore, given in a future article.

**The Nature of Organisations**

In this discussion, "organisation" is a generic term. It means any formal or informal group of individuals who interact, co-operate, have a common culture, a common purpose, and carry out communal activities at any scale.

This common purpose may be:

1. To yield benefits for the organisation itself.

2. To yield benefits for other external individuals or organisations.

3. A combination of the two. Because an organisation must maintain itself, it is never entirely altruistic. However, because it requires inputs to function, it is normally co-operative. This involves a process of negotiation and agreement.

4. To yield disbenefits for other individuals or organisations. If this is the purpose of an organisation, then it is normally part of a larger one which benefits from this behaviour.

Because an organisation must maintain itself and its function, its purpose cannot be disbenefits for itself. However, this does not prevent an organisation from harming itself in error. Nor does it prevent a sub-organisation from harming it.

Benefits are, of course, the satisfaction of needs and the avoidance of contra-needs. In the case of individuals, these needs are for existence and procreation, kin relatedness, non-kin relatedness and growth. Their contra-needs are any failures of these. In the case of organisations, their needs are to maintain and operate the processes, and to produce the outputs, for which they were established. Their contra-needs are any failures of these processes and outputs.

Organisations fulfil their purpose by satisfying their own needs, avoiding their own contra-needs, and as outputs, providing satisfiers and contra-satisfiers for others. Resources may also be necessary to fulfil an organisation's purpose. If so, a process is needed to turn the necessary resources into sufficient satisfiers, or ways of avoiding contra-satisfiers. This process can be carried out either by the organisation itself, or by another individual or organisation. Thus, an organisation will either:

1. acquire, from another individual or other organisation, ready-made satisfiers, or ways of avoiding contra-satisfiers, or

2. acquire the necessary resources from another individual, organisation, or elsewhere in its environment, and process them.


## How Organisations Emerge

There are several steps in the emergence of an organisation. These are described in the diagram and text below.
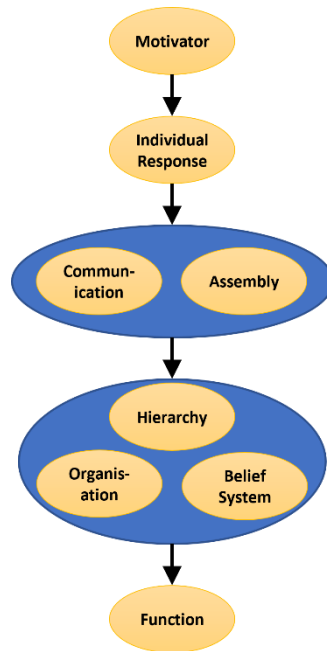
**Motivator.** Motivators are defined as perceived opportunities to benefit oneself and/or others, and perceived risks of dis-benefits to oneself and/or others. Organisations arise from the decision-making processes of one or more individuals. Each will have recognised the same motivator, prioritised it, and concluded that action is required. Each will also have assessed the options for action, and will have concluded that they lack the resources to carry it out alone.

**Individual Response.** Each individual may then decide that the motivator is something beyond their control. Alternatively, they may decide to adopt a problem-solving approach, and either join an existing organisation, or form a new one to deal with it collectively.

**Communication and Assembly.** If the affected individuals adopt a problem-solving approach, they will contact and communicate with one another. If they assemble, either formally or informally, then this creates an organisation.

There are interactions between the following stages, and they normally progress in parallel.

**Belief System.** The members of the organisation debate the motivator, either formally or informally. Ultimately, they either create or adopt a belief system which, correctly or incorrectly, explains the motivator and how they hope to address it.

**Hierarchy.** Owing to the principal of requisite hierarchy, a social hierarchy emerges within the organisation. Each level in the hierarchy is known as a stratum. Those in a higher stratum have greater social status and control over the activities of the organisation than those in lower strata.

**Organisation.** The organisation structures itself and the processes necessary for it to carry out its intended function. This structure comprises sub-organisations with specific delegated responsibilities, a command sub-organisation, and a system of communication between them.

**Function.** At some stage, the states of organisation, hierarchy and belief are sufficient for an organisation to begin carrying out its intended function.

Any of the final four stages, i.e., belief system, hierarchy, and organisation formation, as well as actual function, can result in motivators for others. For example, individuals and organisations will generally attempt to obtain a satisfier with the least expenditure of their own resources. This may pose a threat to others. Thus, other organisations which pre-exist or become established, may act in competition or opposition.

I will discuss the various steps in this process in more detail, one by one in the articles which follow. I will then move on to discuss how organisations sustain themselves and how, ultimately, they collapse.

## Motivators

Motivators are the raison d'etre for all organisations, from the smallest club or society to the largest nation. They are what causes an organisation to come into existence and carry out its function. Motivators come in many forms, personal, inter-personal, organisational, social/economic, and environmental. Examples are given at the end of this article.

The type of motivator determines the type of organisation that emerges. For example, if there is a perceived opportunity to provide a satisfier for a national population, then a commercial organisation or government taskforce may emerge. If there is a perceived opportunity to remove a contra-satisfier from other organisations, a commercial organisation may result. If there is a perceived opportunity to remove a contra-satisfier from a group of individuals, then a charity or activist organisation may form. For example, a group of individuals who have suffered a personal contra-need, such as the loss of a loved one, discrimination, etc., may form a charity supporting those in a similar situation.

If more people are becoming aware of a motivator and giving it a higher priority, then it is likely that positive feedback exists in some form. If awareness is declining and individuals are giving it a lower priority, then it is likely that negative feedback exists. Finally, if it is stable, then either there are no feedback loops influencing it, or a combination of positive and negative feedback exists.

Some examples of motivators now follow.

**Personal and Inter-personal Motivators** arise from our relationships with other individuals and comprise anything that impacts, either positively or negatively, on our needs for:

1. Survival and procreation, e.g., attracting a partner.
2. Kin-relatedness, e.g., loss of a loved one.
3. Non-kin relatedness, e.g., bullying.
4. Growth, e.g., finding or failing to find a purpose.

**Organisational Motivators** arise from an organisation's relationships with other organisations and individuals. They are anything that aids or impedes its:

1. Inputs, i.e., the resources, goods, and services it needs to carry out its function. Typically, this may be shortages, rising costs, etc.
2. Processes, i.e., the way in which the organisation is structured and operates. For example, staff shortages, poor structuring, etc.
3. Outputs, i.e., the resources, products, and services that it delivers to others.

**Social & Economic Motivators** arise from general social trends and include:

1. Population density, especially in the vicinity of urban centres, including crowding and noise.
2. Decline of the emotional support provided by religion.
3. Growth in the social pressures caused by advertising and the consumer economy.
4. Decreasing leisure time.

5. Automation, technological and scientific developments.

6. Coping with the pace of change.

7. Unemployment and job insecurity.

8. Heavy workload.

9. Lack of control over one's job.

10. Unsafe working conditions.

11. Inflation.

12. Pay/reward differentials.

13. Recession and depression.

14. Labour unrest, protest and strikes.

15. Crime.

16. Corruption.

17. Population demographics.

18. Immigration and refugees.

19. Prejudice and discrimination.

20. Political unrest and protest.

21. Accessibility and standards of education.

22. Accessibility and standards of healthcare.

23. Availability and security of food and other essentials.

24. Risks and disruptions due to aging infrastructure.

25. International competition for resources.

26. Economic sanctions.

27. War, civil war, and revolution.

**Environmental Motivators** arise from the natural environment but may ultimately have a social cause. They include:

1. Population Growth.

2. Climate change.

3. Temperature.

4. Pollution.

5. Ecosystem decline.

6. Depletion of earth's non-renewable resources.

7. Sea level rise.

8. Pandemics.

9. Floods.

10. Storms.

11. Droughts.

12. Earthquakes and volcanic action.

13. Famine.

**Individual Response to Motivators**

This is the second stage in the emergence of an organisation. Positive motivators are perceived opportunities for the satisfaction of our needs. Negative motivators are perceived threats to the satisfaction of our needs, perceived threats of contra-satisfiers or the simple presence of the latter.

Our individual response to a motivator is governed by the following factors:

1. Our needs/contra-needs and their relative importance at the time, together with the emotions caused by them.

2. Knowledge and beliefs influence what we regard as a motivator.

3. Norms, values, beliefs, etc. internalised from our social environment via social learning.

4. Individual human psyche, e.g., our ability to reason, psychological damage, attitude towards risk, opportunity, threats, etc.

There are two main forms of response when we encounter a negative motivator: emotion focussed coping and problem focussed coping. Emotion focussed coping involves efforts to reduce the negative emotions associated with the motivator and generally occurs when we are faced with situations that are entirely beyond our control, e.g., grief at the death of a loved one. Problem focussed coping, on the other hand, uses our problem-solving skills to respond to the motivator.

The same is true when we encounter a positive motivator. We either feel empowered to grasp the opportunity or not.

However, even if we adopt a problem-solving approach, we may recognise that we do not have the resources to act alone. People are attracted to organisations they feel will satisfy their needs, irrespective of whether these needs are consistent with the purpose of the organisation, and irrespective of whether the needs are normal or anti-social. One option is therefore to join an existing organisation.

Another is to participate in the creation of a new one. If so, then individuals will proceed to the next stage, and contact others in a similar situation or with similar ambitions. However, the more people there are in that situation or with that ambition, the more likely they are to make contact. Also, the more people who do make contact, and the more motivated they are, the more likely it is that an organisation will emerge. Thus, as the impact or the recognition of a motivator increases, there may be a threshold at which an organisation forms. Unfortunately, however, charismatic individuals, news fakers, and established interests can exaggerate, or even manufacture, a potential motivator, to that end.

**Communication and Assembly**

In the context of an organisation, communication means an ability to find other individuals and organisations who wish to address the same motivator as oneself. Once communication is established and ongoing, the individuals have assembled and can be described as an organisation.

For much of the history of humanity we have only been able to communicate face to face, and this has limited our ability to form organisations. Indeed, it is interesting to note that the evolution of communication has followed that of the hierarchy of needs. Alarm calls are

associated with a creature's existence needs; mating displays with its procreation needs; behavioural symbols, such as grooming, dominance, etc., with its relatedness needs; writing and more long-distance communication with its growth needs.

Much of our interaction is still face to face, of course. So, individuals in an existing organisation, who experience the same motivator, can assemble physically to form a sub-organisation or an entirely separate one. Individuals in a community can also assemble physically. This is evidenced by the number of groups in the UK that protest against local building development.

However, in the present day, we also have technologies which enable us to communicate with many people over very long distances, e.g., the telephone, internet, etc. These technologies have developed over time. We have, therefore, become ever more capable of contacting others who are experiencing the same motivator, and thus, ever more capable of forming an organisation. This growth in our ability to communicate has contributed significantly to increasing social complexity. It has also contributed to our ability to respond to motivators, both positive and negative, and thus, to the nature of our societies. On the other hand, it has created new motivators of both types.

It may be necessary for a significant number of individuals to be affected by a motivator before they assemble into an organisation. The extent to which they are affected also has a bearing. The motivator must be of sufficient significance for people to find communication worth their time and effort. Thus, there can be a threshold below which an organisation does not form.

A charismatic individual or one willing to put in much time and effort can help in the assembly process. However, their personal motivation may or may not be the same as those affected by the motivator.

## Organisation

In the West, we have a fascination with organisational structure. Owing to their competitive nature, this is particularly the case for business organisations. There is, therefore, a vast body of information on the internet, and apart from describing the basics, I will not attempt to repeat it here.

Organisational structure defines how activities for the purpose and maintenance of the organisation are carried out. Usually, there is a division of labour. Each member's role and how it fits into the overall system is defined. A simple club, for example, normally requires a chair, a secretary, and a treasurer as a minimum. Typically, organisations comprise a number of sub-organisations with particular responsibilities. They may be divided according to function, geography, or a matrix combining both. For example, a business may comprise several departments with responsibilities for procurement, production, marketing, and sales. A police force may be divided into northern, southern, and central departments.

Organisations also form part of larger parent organisations. For example, nations may combine to form political, cultural, economic, or geographical alliances. Smaller organisations in a nation may collaborate to form functional sectors, or geographical alliances.

## Belief System Emergence – Introduction

Belief systems include cultures, ideologies, and individual worldviews. The latter was discussed in a previous article. The former apply to organisations of all scales, including small clubs and nations. There are differences between cultures and ideologies, however. The former is normally established and voluntarily accepted by its members. The latter, through its

historical association with political movements, is now regarded as a more authoritarian belief system with expansionist tendencies.

One of our growth needs in Maslow's hierarchy is the need to make sense of the world. If we can do so, then it enables us to make successful decisions when faced with a threat or opportunity. On the other hand, if we are unable to make sense of the world then this increases our vulnerability. It seems likely, therefore, that this need has an evolutionary basis. To make sense of the world we create a schema which models the world as we understand it. This is our personal worldview.

Unsurprisingly, an inability to make sense of the world causes distress, a search for explanations and a readiness to accept those which appear to fit the facts, even incorrectly. This need can, in itself, be a motivator, therefore.

Every organisation develops a system of beliefs which, ostensibly at least, is shared by its individual members. These beliefs cover the purpose of the organisation, how it should function, how interactions should take place internally and externally, the nature and cause of its motivators, and how it should address them.

Belief systems can emerge through a process of negotiation between individuals, and via a process of feedback between individual worldviews and emerging shared views. Individuals contribute their worldviews to the organisations common belief system, but as the latter emerges, a process of socialisation causes them to adopt it. They may, however, only adopt it in their organisational role. In other roles, they may retain their general worldview, or hold other belief systems more appropriate to those roles. This can, of course, lead to contradictions and distress.

Often however, a belief system is formulated by an individual, particularly one with charisma or high status, and is based on his worldview. Due to the lack of debate and consultation such belief systems tend to provide a simplistic explanation, which can neglect the true complexity of a situation.

Belief systems can also be affected by external factors, such as prevailing culture, law, fake news, media interests, social media, and influential individuals, e.g., politicians, celebrities, scientists, or role models. In some cases, the belief system can be in the interests of the general population, i.e., pro-social. In other cases, it can be in the interests of the organisation only, i.e., selfish. In the latter case, the belief system can, for example, either correctly or incorrectly, place blame on an out-group. Also coming into play can be a "Just World Hypothesis", in which the fortunate and unfortunate are thought to have have brought their situation upon themselves by their own actions.

Finally, if opposition to the purpose of an organisation is encountered, its belief system can harden, become more selfish, and more extreme.


### Belief System Emergence – Culture

Worldviews were discussed in a previous article and tend to be a form of personal, rather than communal, belief system. I will now move on to discuss culture, therefore.

Community, whether it be a family, clan, organisation, or nation, is based on the economics of needs. It allows individuals to specialise and to create satisfiers more efficiently by developing specific tools, knowledge, and skills. In turn, this benefits all members of the community through the process of trading. One individual or group of individuals will provide a satisfier to address the needs of another, and in return, reasonable reciprocation is expected. The community can also satisfy the social needs of an individual member, and in return, that

member is expected to contribute to the group. Community relies on the reciprocal satisfaction of one another's needs and this reciprocation relies on trading in the social sense and not necessarily the commercial sense.

The majority but not all of us have an inherited predisposition to create and abide by the cultures which bind us together into co-operative groups. A culture comprises: norms or acceptable forms of behaviour; values or things held good by the community; beliefs or those things that the community holds true; and symbols, i.e., modes of dress, logos, rituals, and other physical things with a shared meaning which identify individuals as being members the community.

Norms and values are developed to ensure that satisfiers and resources are equitably traded and do, of course, include morality and ethics. They can be described as good or bad. For example, it is usually held bad simply to take or steal from others. Thus, what we sometimes refer to as the ethics and morals of a community do not have a religious source, but rather a practical secular one.

The norms, values, beliefs, and symbols of a community are initially of a pragmatic nature and are enforced through the process of socialisation. That is, members are rewarded for correct behaviour and receive disapproval for incorrect behaviour. However, with time, these norms may become formally established as laws.

The detail of a culture is not genetically inherited. The diversity of cultures across the world and the manner in which they can rapidly change from generation to generation suggest that cultures, and hence our morals and ethics, are acquired, respond to circumstances and are passed on via social learning. As Richard Dawkins has pointed out, for a culture to be hereditary and change at the rate at which it does, it would be necessary for those who participate in it to breed far more rapidly and successfully than those who do not. This is clearly not the case. However, cultures do form memes, and there is a degree of competition for acceptance between them. This is more so in a global economy where contact between different cultures is greater than it has ever been.

In response to globalisation of the economy, culture in the West is currently moving from a more national/tribal one to a more global one. Many see the global economy as group co-operation on a grand scale, and as bringing great benefits to humanity. We are learning that it requires a more tolerant and inclusive attitude to enable us to co-operate successfully at that scale. However, this change is not without resistance from ideological and other interest groups concerned that they may lose what they currently hold. Difficulties have also been caused by the transfer of consumerism to nations without the infrastructure to support it.

Humanity also faces great risks at the global scale and the move from national/tribal to global morals and ethics needs to be encouraged so that we can better co-operate in tackling these risks.

The political scientist, Ronald Inglehart, using the extensive research of the World Values Survey, identified two key independent dimensions in national culture. These are:

1. **Traditional vs. Secular-rational values**. The World Values Survey describes these values as follows. "Traditional values emphasize the importance of religion, parent-child ties, deference to authority and traditional family values. People who embrace these values also reject divorce, abortion, euthanasia and suicide. These societies have high levels of national pride and a nationalistic outlook.". On the other hand, "Secular-rational values have the opposite preferences to the traditional values. These societies place less emphasis on religion, traditional family values and authority. Divorce,

abortion, euthanasia and suicide are seen as relatively acceptable. (Suicide is not necessarily more common.)"

2. **Survival vs. Self Expression Values.** Again, these are described by the World Values Survey as follows. "Survival values place emphasis on economic and physical security. It is linked with a relatively ethnocentric outlook and low levels of trust and tolerance.". On the other hand, "Self-expression values give high priority to environmental protection, growing tolerance of foreigners, gays and lesbians and gender equality, and rising demands for participation in decision-making in economic and political life."

It is argued that a national culture can be measured by assessing where it sits between the two extremes on the two dimensions. More details, including a fascinating map of where each nation currently sits on these two dimensions can be found at https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/wvs.jsp.

## Belief System Emergence– Ideology

Ideology is a significant form of belief system. The term was first coined by the French philosopher Antoine Destutt de Tracy, in 1796, during the French Revolution. In response to the chaos it brought about, he originally used the term to describe a science of ideas. However, with time, it has come to mean the following, as described in the Encyclopaedia Britannica:

1. an explanatory theory, of a more or less comprehensive kind, about human experience and the external world;

2. a program, in generalized and abstract terms, of social and political organization;

3. entailing a struggle for the realization of this program;

4. seeking not merely to persuade, but to recruit loyal adherents, demanding what is sometimes called commitment;

5. addressing a wide public, but tending to confer some special role of leadership on intellectuals.

An ideology is a form of culture, and so, unites people into a group via its values, norms, beliefs, and symbols. Ideologies can be political, economic, business, social, or religious. The former four lay claim, correctly or incorrectly, to being rational and worldly, whilst the latter includes a significant element of superstition. An ideology can also be regarded as a collection of information, in the same way as a schema, paradigm or meme. Thus, it comprises, information which may be objectively true or false, information which satisfies the needs of an individual or group, and rationales which make it a consistent body of information.

Individuals will follow an ideology for the following reasons.

1. It may provide a pre-established explanation of the world in which we live and, thus, satisfy our need for understanding.

2. It is much easier to adopt and understand a convincing ideology than it is to develop one's own world view.

3. It may be expounded by a role model.

4. Its acceptance may be necessary to satisfy the social need of belonging to a group.

Unsurprisingly, people accept ideologies which appear to explain their condition and to be capable of providing satisfiers for their needs. Ideologies can also act as cognitive satisfiers by providing beliefs which are consistent with particular inherited predispositions and/or personality traits. Thus, people with a shared predisposition or personality trait, or people with

a particular unsatisfied need, will often join an organisation that supports and promotes an ideology. This can result in a feedback process: the ideology attracts particular individuals who then modify, reinforce, support and promote it. Ideologies are not necessarily "bad" and in many cases they can be socially positive. However, this feedback process can lead to some extreme ideologies which diverge substantially from natural morality and ethics.

Ideologies usually offer overly simplistic explanations. Furthermore, they can be dogmatic rather than realistic, unwilling to accept criticism, and resistant to change. They can be unwilling to accept views which challenge their dogma and make attempts to undermine them.

Everyone holds an ideology to some extent. Problems only arise when it is held strongly, and there is an unwillingness to change one's view in the face of reality. The advantage of not holding an ideology strongly is that this frees the mind to alter one's schemata so that they are consistent with the world that we actually observe. In this way, less effort is needed to psychologically manage any inconsistencies, resulting in greater mental wellbeing. More cognitive effort is, of course, needed to work out our own worldview, but this has the advantage of developing our cognitive skills and creativity.


## Hierarchy Emergence - Introduction

A person's social status in an organisation, from a club to a nation, is a measure of their attributes of leadership and power. Social status takes the form of a pyramidical hierarchy. Each level in the hierarchy is known as a stratum. Those in a higher stratum are normally fewer in number and have greater social status than those in a lower stratum. Such hierarchies are ubiquitous. Even organisations whose stated aims are socialist and progressive have hierarchies within them. The perception of relative status is important in determining how people interact with one another. Those of higher status will trade delegated status for the support of those of lower status, and vice versa. However, they will often compete with those of similar status.

An understanding of how status hierarchies arise can be gained by considering very small groups of individuals. In a group of just two people, the attributes of leadership and power in both are often similar. This leads to an equitable balance in social status. It is only where the attributes of one are greater than those of the other that differences emerge. For example, if person A clearly has more knowledge of how to tackle a situation than person B, then, in their mutual interest, B may defer to A. Similarly, if person B is more dominant through reasons of personality, physical strength, economic power, etc., then person A, in his own interest, may defer to B.

However, in a group of three, a hierarchy is almost inevitable. If person A clearly has greater attributes of leadership and power than B & C combined, then they will usually defer to him. However, if the attributes of A & C are roughly equal but greater than those of B, then there will be competition between A & C. Person B may acknowledge the higher status of both, but to avoid lowest status, may support whoever offers him greatest benefit in return, e.g., A. The attributes of an alliance of two are usually greater than those of one alone. The result is, therefore, that A gains highest status, followed by his supporter B, and C has lowest status. As a rule, the hierarchy ABC will offer greater benefit to every member than would be the case if each operated in isolation, and so, it may be accepted.

Another strategy for B is to remain neutral and encourage competition between A & C. B can then either wait for one of the others to negotiate with him, or alternatively, approach the person least confident of winning the competition.

Even at this very small scale, it is not necessarily the most competent leader who achieves highest status. Much depends on how highly the group members value competent leadership

over personal interest. Unfortunately, it is also the case that power tends to trump leadership. A social hierarchy can, therefore, often be based on the former rather than the latter.

Although the interactions described above are between two or three individuals, they take place on a day-to-day basis between members of much larger organisations, the organisations themselves, and sub-organisations within them. Ultimately, a highest status individual, whose motives may or may not be the same as those of the organisation, either emerges from it or joins it.

However, hierarchies in very small groups can be dynamic, whilst those in larger groups are more entrenched. Small organisations tend to be informal, and influenced by the character of particular individuals. Thus, when individuals or circumstances change, then so too does the nature of the hierarchy. However, as hierarchies become larger and more complex, they increasingly need a formal structure, with titles and reporting lines. These enable people to better understand their roles and co-operate. In formal hierarchies, roles and reporting lines are independent of individuals, who may change from time to time.

## Why We Follow a Leader

Much has been written about leadership, particularly concerning what constitutes a "good" or "effective" leader. However, the topic of why people follow a leader has been relatively neglected. For historical reasons, in the West, there are strong positive connotations associated with being a leader and negative connotations with being a follower. This was brought about by a historical tendency for the powerful, e.g., royalty, the church, the Nazi party, etc., to seize control, and for people who dared to challenge them to suffer. High status individuals have also received, and in many cases continue to receive, a disproportionate reward from society, in the form of prestige and wealth. There is now such a strong cultural assumption that followers are passive subordinates, and less competent than leaders, that many of us are not even aware that it exists. I hope to dispel this assumption because it does not serve us well.

The systems theory explanation for why we follow a leader is as follows. Human organisations are self-maintaining adaptive systems, and subject therefore to the principle of requisite hierarchy. In essence, leaders are a command sub-system that maintains group cohesion and purpose, and that enables us to adapt to a changing environment.

The evolutionary explanation for why we follow a leader is as follows. Tribes which have greater co-ordination, co-operation, and innovative thinking have a greater chance of surviving and prospering than those without these characteristics. The former requires a social structure in the form of leaders and followers. However, human beings are less hierarchical than other primates and tend to shy away from authoritarian leadership. Rather, in a successful tribe, one person with skills, e.g., hunting, or emotional intelligence, that are relevant to the problem to be solved, chooses to lead and the others to follow. This, of course suggests that both leaders and followers have a role in determining what the hierarchy should be. It also suggests that the hierarchy should alter according to circumstances, if the tribe is to be successful. In general systems theory this is known as redundancy of potential command. Providing the interests of both the leader and the followers are aligned, which unfortunately is not always the case, leadership is a process of mutual influence in which leaders and followers work together towards a common goal.

The psychological explanation is as follows. The leader/follower relationship is one of trade and depends on the pressing needs of the two individuals concerned. A follower may follow a leader who provides for his existence, connectedness, or growth needs as a part of the trade. A leader can, for example, offer certainty, which is a growth need. On the other hand, a leader

may lack the resources to achieve a particular goal on his own and, thus, may need the support of followers.

In a non-authoritarian regime, there are three types of follower: passive, active, and non-follower. These are not necessarily personality types. People can move from one to another depending on the style of leadership required. Passive followers are content to be obedient; non-followers avoid involvement; but active followers make a constructive contribution to the leadership process. If necessary, the latter can challenge decisions, and work with the leader to devise more effective or appropriate courses of action. Thus, there are feedback loops in which leaders influence followers who, in turn, influence leaders. These loops can be negative, causing behaviours to be extinguished, or positive, causing them to be amplified.

Many people can switch role from follower to leader, and vice versa, but unfortunately, historical beliefs still hamper this. In the past Western culture has favoured established hierarchies and reward structures. However, society is now so complex that a single individual is incapable of leading in all circumstances. It can be argued that in the modern world, followers are beginning, once more, to select their leaders. Certainly, this is true in democratic politics. However, it is less the case in business.

There are two main ways in which we assess a leader or potential leader:

1. System-1 is an automatic system that operates quickly, with little or no effort, and in which emotion, beliefs, and past experience have a part to play. This system is informal and leaders tend to emerge naturally. Unfortunately, when selecting or continuing to follow a leader, we tend to attribute outcomes to the leader rather than to complex processes.

2. System-2 is a more formal reasoned response and requires the time, attention, focus, and effort needed for complex mental activities, e.g., calculations.

The relationship between a leader and a follower is, also, of two types:

1. distant, such as that between a politician and the electorate, and

2. close, such as that between a manager and a worker.

The decision whether to follow a close leader is usually a system-2 inference and based on associating the leader's behaviour and decisions with results. However, the decision on whether to follow a distant leader is a system-1 inference. Distant leaders tend to articulate ideals and visions and to use "symbolism, mysticism, imaging and fantasy". Distant followers have little knowledge of his or her actual character and performance and relatively few clues as to what it may be. Followers may, for example, be impressed by the leader's rhetoric or public life story.

In the case of a distant relationship, the type of leader that a follower selects depends on the following.

1. When people face an existential threat, e.g., war or terrorism, the need for safety comes to the fore. Followers will favour a leader perceived as strong, wise, and competent, i.e., an authoritarian, protective, and often right-wing figure. This tendency is cross-cultural. It is thought to originate from our long childhood, during which most of us relied on our parents for safety.

2. In circumstances where a non-existential threat is perceived, but the cause is complex and difficult to identify, people from all cultures will become stressed by the situation. They will follow a leader, particularly a charismatic one, who is able to provide an easily understood explanation. Often this explanation is overly simple and incorrect, but it is the need for certainty and the reduction in distress that the follower is seeking. In recent years, such leaders have been described as "populist".

3. Finally, during a period of stability, the need for identity and belonging comes to the fore. Followers will seek a leader who gives meaning to their social identity by acting as a symbol of their culture. Unlike the above, this is a culture specific response, and the characteristics of the chosen leader will differ from one culture to the next.

Clearly, from the above, it is possible for individuals to pursue personal objectives by presenting themselves as a leader of the type that followers seek. Particularly in the case of distant leaders, there is little evidence to confirm that the leader's objectives are truly aligned with those of the follower, and they may, in fact, be personal but disguised. Improving followers' skills in choosing leaders, and limiting their willingness to follow, would therefore improve the quality of leadership everywhere, but especially in the political, social, and ideological realms.

## **Power**

Leadership and power are two different aspects of social status, and there is a constant interplay between them. Leadership maintains group cohesion and purpose and enables us to adapt in a changing environment. Power, on the other hand, is the ability to direct the resources of sub-ordinates to some purpose.

Many people actively seek social status which, as well as holding leadership obligations, also conveys power. The reasons are diverse and vary from individual to individual. For example, it might be a consequence of lacking a feeling of safety, the influence of upbringing, or the influence of a role model. However, the principal motivators are thought to be:

1) A desire to be in control of one's own affairs and freedom from social demands. Power enables one to enjoy the benefits of a co-operative society without the associated effort of negotiating and compromising with large numbers of other people. Rather, it is easier to negotiate with just a few in a hierarchy. Those who seek power for this reason can often be identified by their retiring nature, e.g., living in homes surrounded by security fencing and avoiding the media.

2) A desire for control over the affairs of others as a means of obtaining positive regard. Such seekers of power have a tendency towards narcissism and publicity seeking. They enjoy their status and having others look up to them.

3) The pursuit of resources. Where people believe that they have insufficient resources to satisfy, and sustain the satisfaction of, their personal needs, they will attempt to control the resources of others: i.e., their time, physical effort, mental effort, and property. We seek to satisfy our needs as efficiently as possible. From a personal perspective it is more efficient to do so using the resources of others, rather than our own. Although communities rely on reciprocal trading for the equitable satisfaction of their members' needs, some members will use strategies to tilt the balance of reciprocation in their favour. They will, therefore, benefit inequitably from the resources of the group.

The drive to acquire social status is a natural part of the human psyche and the consequence of millions of years of evolution. In the past, it has enabled us to survive and prosper. It is a part of human nature. Without it we would be less than human and we certainly lack the skills to design a better psyche. However, one component of social status, the drive to acquire power, now poses a threat to the future of humanity. The answer, however, is not to attempt to remove it by technical or psychological means. Nor is the answer the replacement of one ideology by another. Nor is it the replacement of particular individuals or groups by others, e.g., men by women, or the elite by the working class. This is because we all seek power to a greater or lesser degree. Rather the answer is to put in place social controls and attitudes which will ensure

that power does not eclipse the other aspect of social status, leadership. In this way requisite hierarchy can be made to benefit all of humanity and life on earth.

## Trading Status for Support and Vice Versa

In any organisation people advance their position by trading status for support. The process typically involves a higher status, or senior, individual identifying lower status, or junior, individuals who are likely to support their aspirations, whatever those aspirations may be. Many lower status individuals, in turn, signal their willingness to participate in such a process. They may for example, offer vocal support at meetings, act out the culture of their seniors, and so on. If a successful partnership appears to be possible, then the senior will delegate some of his or her status to the junior in return for their support. Thus, promotions within a hierarchy often have more to do with "politics" than aptitude.

Social exchange theory holds that the negotiation is based on a risk/cost/benefit analysis for both parties, as described in a previous article. A relationship will be successful if it provides a net benefit for both parties, but will fail if it provides a net disbenefit for one or the other. The former can even apply when the junior partner is coerced, if the disbenefit of the punishment exceeds that of compliance. The relationship is not based solely on the ability of the senior partner to provide something that the junior partner desires, therefore. Rather it is an aggregate of the rewards and punishments that the former can dispense. The same is true of the junior partner, of course, but the options to mete out disbenefits to a senior are often much reduced and, unless done covertly, may prompt reciprocal action.

This form of trading is so commonplace in human society that it is often carried out unconsciously.

Other forms of trading can take place within an organisation, of course, e.g., bribery, corruption, sexual services, etc. Fortunately, however, some forms of social interaction can be tempered by social norms, i.e., what forms of interaction are acceptable and what are not.

In a stratified organisation, the greater the support an individual can provide to the higher strata, the greater the delegated status they receive in return. The higher an individual is in the hierarchy, the more resources they control, the greater the support they can provide and the greater their ability to trade. Conversely, the higher they are in the hierarchy, the greater the threat they can pose, and the greater the adverse reaction if they do so. Thus, they will be more cautious not to upset the status quo.

Trading tends to take place between people in adjacent strata. Those in the stratum immediately below are the most familiar individuals and have the greatest support to offer to those in the stratum above. Those in the lowest strata tend to be of least consequence to those in the highest, and opportunities for trading between these strata are fewer, therefore.

In practice, a balance is often negotiated between the strata. This results in the lower strata being sufficiently satisfied to support the organisation, even though they are denied its full potential benefits. Conversely, the upper strata are denied the full potential benefit that they might otherwise take, in return for a stability which ensures that their benefits are sustained. Thus, degrees of egalitarianism and stratification within organisations can vary.

## The Acquisition of Status

Those who rise to the top of an organisation are not necessarily those whose skills are associated with its intended function. Rather, they can be those whose skill is the acquisition

of status. People who achieve high social status often show some or all of the following characteristics.

**Ambition.** As well as carrying out a community function, organisations also satisfy the needs of their members. For example, normal employment provides a salary, social interaction, etc. In a voluntary organisation, it provides for more social and psychological needs. To be ambitious one must have a pressing need to satisfy. The more pressing the need, the more vigorously we will pursue its satisfaction, and thus, the more likely we are to succeed.

**Negotiating skills.** To acquire status, one must trade support for it. Some are more skilled in this than others. We may, for example, have learned these skills during our upbringing or from a role model. Imbalances in trading skills will eventually lead to a situation in which those with greater skills have greater status than others.

**Skill in Selecting an Existing Hierarchy to Climb.** A point worth noting is that it is far easier to climb an existing hierarchy than to create a new one with oneself at the pinnacle. The latter requires genuine leadership skills and much effort. This is not a universal rule, of course. There are, for example, politicians, press magnates, businessmen, and celebrities who have achieved high status with the help of a silver spoon from their parents.

**Displays of Status.** Clearly, those who aspire to higher social status must be seen to have something to trade with potential supporters. They must, therefore, overtly display the attributes of leadership and/or power. Irrespective of the role that they fill, the more successful they are in this, the more support they will receive. Conversely, those of lower status must display a willingness and ability to provide support.

Status is displayed through symbols, e.g., material goods such as clothing, cars, houses, etc. They are also displayed through communication, e.g., "name dropping". A common strategy for acquiring social status, leadership and power is therefore the false display of such symbols and communications. People will create an impression of status by creating an impression of power or influence. Potential supporters will respond accordingly and, thus, status comes to those who appear to have it.

Within a very large hierarchy such as a nation, the various strata may be so large that they form their own distinct culture, for example the social classes in the UK. Displaying the values, norms, symbols, and beliefs of a higher status culture are often necessary to enhance one's social status. Again, this can be learnt through upbringing or the emulation of a role model. However, it is more difficult to do so if one has been raised in a lower stratum of society. This reinforces the strata in a hierarchy, making movement between them more difficult.

**Displays of Competence.** Leadership skills will attract followers, thus enhancing social status. However, such skills also need to be overtly displayed or convincingly faked.

**Displays of Altruism.** People who aspire to climb a hierarchy can be altruistic only to the extent required for others to support them. A common strategy among those who would lead is to give the impression that it is the needs of the group which are valued most highly whilst, in reality, it may be personal needs. However, the individual will take care that this is not recognised by the group until his or her status is established.

**Emulation of Role Models**. To attract followers, members of the higher strata will display the trappings of their status to those in the lower ones. In many cases they will become a role model to those in the lower strata. Note that people learn both leadership skills and the use of power from role models. There are formal leadership courses but none for managing power.

**Cultural Adaptation.** If a higher status individual is seen to be behaving in a way contrary to the conscience or self-concept of a lower status one, then the latter may conclude that there is

something wrong with their conscience or self-concept and modify it. Even if the behaviour of the higher status individual is believed to be wrong, the lower status one may value membership of the group to such an extent that, rather than risk rejection, they will adopt a strategy for dealing with internal conflicts, such as rationalisation, repression, or denial. Often a rationale will be provided by the organisation, which the lower status individual accepts and adopts.

**Expansionism.** The larger a group, the greater the power of those in the highest stratum. Thus, there is a natural tendency for the latter to seek to expand their organisation or part of it. This applies whether the group is a department, business organisation, religion or nation. Such expansion is not necessarily in the interest of the group as a whole, however, and may be solely in the interest of the highest stratum.

**Chance, luck, or fortune.** Finally, Imbalances in chance, luck, or fortune will inevitably lead to some individuals achieving greater social status than others.