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Working Paper

ALIENATION : SOME THEORY, SOME RESEARCH

Ву

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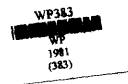
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ABSTRACT

Alienation is a much used concept in social sciences. The present paper attempts to bring together some important theoretical interpretations of alienation and also some recent Indian researches on alienation. An attempt is made to present the results of some studies on alienation in relation to job attitudes as also productivity.

In Webster's (1968) lexicographic usage the term alienation' portrays meanings such as 'transfer of title' or legal conveyance of property to another', 'the state of being alienated', 'a withdrawal or estrangement, 'as the heart or affections', and 'delirium, mental derangement, insanity', etc. In another dictionary it is defined as 'the action of estranging, or the state of being alienated and loss or derangement of mental faculties, insanity' (Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles, 1973). Still another defines the term alienation as "an estrangement or separation between parts and the whole of the personality and significant aspects of the world of experience" (Lang, 1964).

In an excellent historical review of the concept,
Schacht (1970) has noted various meanings of "separateness"
in the philosophical writings of Hobbes, Rousseau, Sehiller,
and most importantly of Hegel who employed the term alienation
(Entfremdung). For Hegel the term has two distinct connotations. Firstly, the notion of becoming alien which is similar
to its popular, contemporary meaning and refers to the state
or process through which an individual becomes separated in
various degrees from the social reality (Hegel's social
substance). Secondly, there is a more active condition of
"making alien". Alienation in this sense is a more deliberate
"surrender or transfer of a right to another" and connected to
more hostile, inimical and deliberate separation of individuals

from part of the social substance (including possibly their own essence). In the former place Hegel's conceptualization of alienation suggests that all individuals are only partly aware of the social reality and participate only fractionally with other objects in social universe, and hence, all humans are, atleast partly, estranged and alien. A corollary to this is the recognition of frustration and discord in the realization of the discrepancy between the actual conditions of the individual and those broader potentialities which are latent in his essential nature.

Schacht (1970) goes next to analyse Marx's use of the concept of self-alienation. It is "the state produced by the ravages of a particular economic system -- namely, capitalism -- which separated the individual from the product of his labour, from the process of work, from the fellowship of his mankind and ultimately from himself".

One of the most influential and intellectual proponents of classical Marxian conception of alienation, Eric Fromm, defined the term as "a mode of experience in which the person experiences himself as an alien. He has become estranged from himself. He does not experience himself as the center of his world, as the creator of his own acts - but his acts and their consequences have become his masters, whom he obeys, or whom he may even worship. The alienated person is out of touch with himself as he is out of touch with any other

person. He, like the others, is experienced as things are experienced; with the sense and with common sense, but at the same time without being related to oneself and to the world outside productively" (Fromm, 1955). Elsewhere, he states that the process of alienation leads to the objectification of labour which indicates that the worker is related to the product of his efforts as to an alien object. It originates by treating the worker as a commodity. The work is external to the worker; it is not part of his nature and consequently he does not fulfill himself in the work but actually denies himself. This is a state of self-alienation (Fromm, 1961). It has also been argued that the monetary returns for work are essentially meant to negate the dissatisfactions inherent in the job-life; they are not meant to enhance happiness of the worker (Argyris, 1965).

The concept is used in a variety of ways by philosophers, theologians, sociologists, and more recently by psychologists and psychiatrists (e.g. Keinston, 1960; Seeman, 1959, 1972, 1975; Stokols, 1975). Schacht (1970) observed a few years ago that the term is employed in connection with "so many different (phenomena, ... it enjoys no special association

with any of them. Using the term 'alienation' without explaining any further what one has in mind communicates little more today than does tapping one's glass with one's spoon at a banquet; neither does much more than attract attention."

As Johnson (1973) observed, until early in this century the term was used as a loose, generic category, describing various states of pathological isolation and madness. However, in his view, the term is currently employed to describe objectively observable states of separateness occuring in human groups.

Most of the modern thinking, perhaps, stemmed from the Seeman's (1959) review article bearing the title "On the Meaning of Alienation". In this review he devoted himself to two tasks: (1) to make more organized sense of one of the great traditions in the sociological thought; and (2) to make the traditional

interest in alienation more amenable to sharp empirical statement.

The above stated interests of Seeman already point to the theoretical ambition he had and which was realized in 1972, in the shape of "Alienation and Engagement", a summary of alienation research to-date.

Seeman characterized his approach as roughly consistent with Rotter's (1962) "Social Theory of Learning", since the concept of expectancy and reward, or reinforcement value are these central elements in both of \(\sum \) works. He has identified the following five (and later six) variants or meanings of alienation as:

- (1) <u>powerlessness</u> -- low expectancy that one's own behaviour can control the occurrence of personal and social rewards;
- (2) meaninglessness -- low expectancy that satisfactory predictions about future outcomes of behaviour can be made;
- (3) <u>isolation</u> -- low reward value to goals or beliefs (later behaviours) that are typically highly valued in a given society;
- (4) <u>self-estrangement</u> -- engagement in the activities that are not rewarding in themselves; and
- (5) <u>social isolation</u> -- the feeling of loneliness or feeling of rejection or repudiation.

Later he added the concept of <u>cultural estrangement</u> -the individual rejection of community-held values in
the society (or subsector).

Browning, Farmer, Kirk, and Mitchell (1961) suggest that Seeman's first three variants could be put under predisposing factors while the later two as outcomes or subjective feelings.

Somewhat different than Sceman's classification is the one suggested by Feuer (1963). He considers alienation as a process which includes: (i) alienation of class society, (ii) alienation of competitive society, (iii) alienation of industrial society, (iv) alienation of man's society, (v) alienation of race, and (vi) the alienation of generations. To Barket (1969) also, these are stages rather than a set of variants, and these stages, for him, are (1) the source of alienation at the level of social and normative structures; (2) alienation as a psychological property of the individual; and (3) behavioural consequences of alienation. Scott (1965) defined alienation with regard to its sources, seen as a series of deficiencies, that is, (a) lack of commitment to values; (b) absence of conformity to norms; (c) loss of responsibility in roles; and (d) deficiency in control of facilities.

Psychological depictions of alienation seem to centre around two levels of experience --

- (1) Judgements concerning the subjective life of individual persons made by observers external to the person, and
- (2) Judgements made by individuals who comment on aspects of their own subjectivity.

Psychological alienation is close to the state of self-alienation. It refers to the awareness of separateness from one's own inner reality. Alienation in this sense is described in terms of experienced deficiencies in existence, cognition, conation, feeling, and behaving. The word 'deficiency' is not used in a perjurative sense it is preferable to 'imperfection' (which connoted that the person has fellow from some ideal exalted state) or 'omissions' (which mean that functions have capriciously been lost or not originally allocated).

Kaufman (1965) opines that "to claim that a person is alienated is to claim that his relation to something else has certain features which result in avoidable discontent or loss of satisfaction". In the view of Feuer (1962) "alienation is used to convey the emotional tone which accompanies any behavior in which the person is compelled to act self destructively".

Stokols (1975) believes alienation as a product of three fundamental components: (:) a set of antecedent conditions, deriving from one's physical and social environment engendered by, (b) a specific psychological experience, having motivational

overt nes and expressed as, (c) a set of benavioural manifestations. Thus conceived alienation is a sequential process through which certain social and physical conditions within a particular environmental context evoke specific feelings and behaviours in its occupants.

In his discussions of psychoanalytic-histrocial interpretations of alienation, Meissner (1974) argued that rejection of social values and the establishment is based on the mother's idealism which results in devaluation of father and his world (the current social world). Further, alienation leads to depression, narcicissm and aggression against the establishment. That is, alienation can be characterized by (i) feeling of personal incapacity, (ii) rejection of conventional rules, and (iii) the rejection of conventional criteria for success.

In a factor analytic study Kureshi and his associates

(Dutt and Kureshi, 1976; Kureshi, 1979) have identified five

varients of alienation, namely, despair, disillusionment, unstructrued universe, psychological vaccum, and narcissism. The first factor, despair, refers to a feeling of hopelessness, of being

disheartened and pessimistic as weel general anxiety. Desillusionment is indicative of feelings of being thrown to reality from the world of make-believe, realization that what is apparent is not essentially real. This factor, according to him, seems to be consonant with Klein and Gould's (1969) factor of "cynicism".

Psychological vaccum refers to the experience of emptiness and extinction of meaning and purpose in life, a feeling that the corporal needs are all in all and that the human values hardly matter. It is closer to Seeman's (1959) 'meaninglessness' or Kemiston's (1968) 'interpersonal alienation' and Klein and Gould's (1969) 'emotional distance' Kureshi's unstructured universe has some resemblance to Seeman's (1959) 'moralessness' and Sinha and Sinha's (1974) 'casteism'. Narcissism refers to an excersive preoccupation with one's own self, and often an unrealistic view of one's own worth.

Pulvino (1971) based his views on Sullivan's theory of Murray's need-environmental press paradigm. Sullivan suggests interpersonal relationships, and / individuals manifest that feelings of anxiety and/or alienation when their need for security, tenderness and intimacy are not met by their significant others. Pulvino

hypothesized that when needs are not satisfied by perceptions of environment in which one lives, increased alienation and anxiety would occur. The major hypothesis proposing a significant relationship between anxiety and alienation was also supported in his study. Thus high anxiety can be expected when high alienation level is present (Pulvino, 1971).

The foregoing discussion may leave an impression of absence of clarity regarding the concept and also the various elements which constitute it. This is so because some of the catagories are phenomenal and static (i.e. are based on rather specific human behaviours) while others are based on dynamic changes either directly arising from human behaviour or epiphenomenal (as in Marx's notation concerning capitalism); Furthermore, a number of above categories leave the psychological dimensions of alienation either barely touched upon, implied or cmitted entirely. This accounts for a good deal of confusion, since, at times, the same terms (normlessness, anomie, meaninglessness) are interchangeably used to describe internal psychological states as well as objective social phenomena" (Johnson, 1973).

In a number of studies, alienation has been found to be related with several demographic, personality, situational and sociocultural factors. For example, Natsis (1974) studied the impact of family structure on self-esteem, and hostility among college students. His findings show that black students were more alienated than white students. Blacks felt significantly more powerless, more pessimistic and more distrustful than whites. They also felt great interpersonal isolation. Family size had no significant influence on any other independent variable among the blacks. Black women had lower self-esteem, higher alienation and greater hostility.

Alienation and self-esteem were found to be partially correlated.

Allen (1975) also reported that blacks were more alienated than whites, females expressed stronger feelings of alienation than males, and black females had stronger feelings of alienation than any other race and sex group. He also reported a significant correlation between alienation and the degree of disadvantagiousness ($\underline{r} = .40$, $p \le .001$). These findings in relation to blacks and whites are similar to the findings of many other investigators (Burback and Thompson, 1971; Babbit, Burbach, Harold, and Thompson, 1975; Middleton, 1972; White, 1971).

Smith (1975) reported that males were more alienated than females, no relationships were found between alienation and demographic factors, and that both males and females saw

themselves quite definitely as 'antiestablishment Alienation was not found to be associated with religious upbringing, but alienated students manifest less church attendence as also were less satisfied with their current state of affairs; but all groups expressed optimism for the future. Drug abuse was found to be higher among alienated students but differences in variety and frequency were also noted. Harman (1973) had also reported a positive relationship between alienation and drug use. Alienation has also been found to be co-extensive with anxiety (Swang, 1975: Talor, 1971) and aggression (Swang, 1975). In a recent Indian study on adolescent boys and girls from denominational and non-denominational institutions A.K. Singh (1980) has concluded that denominational students have higher level of dogmatism, alienation, insecurity and manifest anxiety than the students of non-denominational Z . It was also observed that Muslim students (boys and girls) of nondenominational institutions were found to be more dogmatic, more alienated, more insecure and more anxious in comparison. to Muslim students of denominational institutions. For this he suggested that Muslim students in non-denominational institutions are in tiny majority compared to their numbers in denominational institutions and therefore, they are more dogmatic, they feel more alienated, more insecure and more anxious than the students of denominational institutions.

ALIENATION AND WORK

In their long and rich traditions of alienation studies a number of sociologists and, of course, a handful of psychologists concentrated themselves on studying work alienation in different organizational and industrial settings. In the following few pages we will try to discuss briefly their findings

With the beginning of the second-half of this century, in their study of coalminers, Trist and Bamforth (1951) observed that the introduction of mechanical coal-cutting and transporting equipment necessitated the breaking up of traditional teams and their replacement by large shifts of workers over long distances. This resulted in a loss of meaning in the work, greater experience of anomie, and low productivity. This observation, when extended further by many other investigators, led to the 'alienation hypothesis' (Blauner, 1964) which, in essence, states that assembly-line production creates a segmented overflow, with repetitive, unvarying jobs, carried out at a constant pace. Discretion is removed from the worker and his relationships are disrupted. His needs for stimulus variation, autonomy, and creative behaviour are obstructed, and the classic frustration-aggression syndrome results. This situation is characterized by powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness. isolation, and self-estrangement (Luthans, 1973). This is

because of the discrepancy between the power of a man believes he has and what he believes he should have; his estrangement from his rightful role (Clark, 1959). It also leads to a feeling of lack of control over the work situation (Pearlin, 1962).

Erikson (1959) has reflected upon the problem of identity and self which eventually relate to alienation. Identity represents an ongoing continuity of one's meaning to others as well as to the self. This continuity is characterized by coherence, wholeness and congruence which are all made possible by resilency. Resilency and flexibility provide the capacity to assume diverse roles and functions with confidence in the ability to maintain one's 'selfsameness'. Our environmental conditions are such that the individual worker and the workers as a group experience stresses and strains which contribute to the loss of identity and enhanced alienation. The explosive growth of cities, pollution, noise, congestion, delinquency, inadequate housing, fragmentation of relationships and modularisation are environmental realities which accelerate the process of isolation (Taffler, 1970). The tragedy of the Indian rural poor is that he has to choose between jobs without homes in the city or homes without jobs in the villages (Bose, 1965).

In a study by Turner and Lawrence (1965) reference has been made to 'anomie', a state of societal normlessness brought about by industrialization. Based on such sociological studies of 'anomie' and alienation, as they claim, Blood and Hulin (1967) conceptualized 'alienation' as a continuum running from "integration with middle-class norms" to "alienation from middle-class norms". The integrated end included those workers who have personal involvement with their jobs and aspirations within their occupations. Their goals are the type of upward mobility and social climbing goals generally associated with the middle-class. On the opposite end, i.e., alienation side of the continuum, workers can be dewcribed as involved in their jobs only instrumentally; the job is only a provider of means for persuing extraoccupational goals. The concern of these workers is not for increased responsibility, higher status, or more autonomy; rather, they want money - and they want it in return for a minimal amount of personal involvement. These findings fit well with Dalton's (1947) views regarding overproducers who are likely to hold middle-class aspirations

and underproducers who do not identify with middle-class ideals. The above findings of Blood and Hulin are in general agreement with Kanungo's (1979) 'alienation-involvement' hypothesis discussed below.

As to the question of "what leads to alienation?", Blauner (1964) suggests that the existence of critically different types of work environments in modern industry results in large variations in the form and intensity of alienation. In modern industrial organizations, for example, a vast process of "structural differentiation" has taken place. Although they have some features in common, most striking are the differences, and these differences produce sociotechnical systems in which the objective conditions and the inner life of employees are strikingly variant. As a result, the industrial system distributes alienation unevenly among its blue-collar labour force, just as our economic system distributes income unevenly. Further, data obfained in a number of researches suggest that anomie is a characteristic feature of the lower class in highly industrialized situations (Bell, 1957; Dean, 1961; Killian and Grigg, 1962; Mayo, 1933; McClosky and Schaar, 1965; Ruitenbeck, 1964; Simpson and Miller, 1963; Turner and Lawrence, 1965). in

Blood and Hulin's (1967) study was based on the hypothesis that "alienation from middle-class norms" results

from lack of socialization to middle-class norms, i.e. where a segment of society exists which holds non-middle-class norms and which is large enough to sustain its own norms, the members of that subculture become socialized to the norms of that subculture. A handful of industrial workers could not be expected to sustain a separate set of norms, but persons separated from middle-class identification by low educational attainment or low occupational status and living in ghettos, slums, and highly industrialized communities could develop and sustain a distinct norm. Alienation from middle-class norms, then, is fostered by industrialized, socially heterogenous, metropolitan conditions.

obtained on populations above the level of skilled blue-collar workers, i.e., not in the case of white-collar workers.

This, according to them, is because different occupations may generate different susceptibility to alienation. This supports Blauner's (1964) notion of alienation as a "general syndrome made up of a number of different objective conditions and subjective feeling-states which emerge from certain relationships between workers and the sociotechnical settings of unemployment. Alienation exists when workers are unable to control their immediate work processes, to develop a sense of purpose and function which connects their jobs to the overall organization of production, to belong to integrated

industrial communities, and when they fail to get involved in the activity or work as a mode of personal self-expression" (p.15).

Stokols (1975) suggests that "an individual's alienation develops within the concept of an ongoing relationship between himself and some other entity - a person, group, society, or culture, for instance. The experience of alienation is brought about through a decline in the quality of one's relationship with a particular context, and his perceived deterioration evokes dissatisfaction with present situation and a yielding for something better which has been either lost or, as yet, unattained." That is, "alienation is a generalized cognition (or belief) state of psychological separation from work, in so far as our work is perceived to lack the potentiality for satisfying one's salient needs and expectations (Kanungo, 1979)." That is, workers, as being human beings, have vital needs to share thoughts and feelings with others, to exercise control and power over persons and his environment, self-determination, individuality, independence, acquisition, achievement and possession, etc. and when he fails to meet any or most of them satisfactorily, he becomes frustrated and alienated.

In a cross-cultural investigation Zurcher, Meadow, and Zurcher (1965) found that the degree of alienation from work is significantly different among the Mexican, Mexican-American,

and Ando-American subjects. The Mexicans were significantly more alienated from work in bank than the Mexican-Americans and Anglo-Americans, but Mexican-Americans were not significently more alienated than Anglo-Americans. Further, alienation was found to be significantly and positively correlated with particularism (duty to a friend), and significantly but negatively correlated with longivity, position level, satisfaction with position and plans to continue working in the bank. The explanations offered by them are based on the fact that the formal structures of all Mexican banks are on American pattern and thus more universalistic (i.e. more scientific and abstract, bound to rule) in nature. American occupational system is universalistic and achievement oriented - while Mexico, compared with the U.S., is a less technology-oriented, less "scientific", and less urban society, and cultural values are predominently particularistic (Parsons, 1954). The bank, as a universalistic formal organization encourages with continued employment, service awards, and promotions, the employees who meet expectations for employee behaviour and attitude. A universalistically oriented individual is likely to be at home with these expectations, to be more satisfied with his job, to plan to make the bank a career, and to have the best chances of promotion and all this tantamounts to less alienation.

Kohn (1971), then and Hage (1966), and Blauner (1964) suggest that many aspects of modern organizational life; for example, fragmented work, interpersonal relationships and pressures of different kinds—tend to generate a sense of powerlessness and futility in many employees. Advanced age, low formal educational attainment and low salary are also found to be associated with the feelings of alienation (Dean, 1961; Tannenbaum et. al. 1974). It has also been found that high seniority, low level in hierarchy and some aspects of superior—subordinate relationship—for example low confidence and trust, absence of freedom to discuss personal problems, the superior's emphasis on coercive power base and de—emphasis on reward, expert, referent, and law of the situation power bases are related with the feelings of alienation (Tannenbaum et. al. 1974).

High degree of alienation is also found to be associated with low commitment to the work group, absence of group encouragement of best effort, and low confidence and trust in peers (Hage and Liken, 1967; Nightingale & Toulouse, 1978). As observed by Nightingale & Toulouse (1978), emphasis on rules and procedures, close surveillance of employees to assure that they obey these rules, emphasis on the hierarchical chain of command, lack of freedom to use one's initiative, low control excercized by members

at all hierarchical levels, and ambiguity concerning one's task, are all significantly associated with member alienation.

In a number of studies which deal directly with alienation and authoritarianism, the relationship between the two has been established (Dean, 1961; Roberts and Rokeach, 1956; Srole, 1951). It is argued that when a society produces a sense of alienation and estrangement, it concommitantly generates a craving for reassurance, an acute need to believe and a flight into faith (Merton, 1957). That is, any condition which leads to a collapse of stable human values, concommitantly produce in the individual a sense of uncertainty and insecurity which results ultimately in a strong 'need for authority' (Fromm, 1941).

Miller (1967), in a study of cientists and engineers working in a large aerospace company, observed that employees working
for "directive" supervisors had a higher degree of work alienation
than those working for "participatory" or laissez-faire supervisors.
Thus, finding of Miller supplements the earlier observations of
Mizruchi (1960) that high anomia in people was simultaneous with
a low level of participation in both formal and informal associations.

Seybalt and Gruenfeld (1976) report a negative correlation between job satisfaction and alienation separately for professional and managerial workers, clerical workers, and manual workers. These

findings of Seybalt and Gruenfeld were further confirmed by Pestonjee (1979). He observed that occupational level, security and alienation may be desired to be interlinked with each other and influence job satisfaction. Alienation and security-insecurity scores had a positive correlation (Pestonjee, 1979; Pestonjee and Ahmed, 1977) while a highly significant but negative correlation was obtained between alienation and job satisfaction (Pestonjee, 1979; Singh, 1978; Singh, 1980). It has also been observed that the relationship between alienation and security-insecurity, though not statistically significant in the case of supervisors, is significant for workers as well as for the combined sample of workers and supervisors. It is further suggested that lower positions in the organization may stifle imitiative and the urge to display one's skill, setting the pace of work, participation in decision making process etc., and denial of such extrinsic factors may alienate the individual organizationally, and at a later stage, socially (Pestonjee, 1979).

An analysis of the Indian scene is presented elsewhere also,
India is a populous country and a very large segment of the population comes from a rural background. Generally, workers are pushed
out of their lan's and not pulled to the cities. The mental life
of such an individual can be characterised by langour, lassitude
and 'atonie' or a string that does not vibrate (Pestonjee, 1978).

In one of the better known Indian investigation on alienation in the work environment, Sharma (1974) has come to the conclusion that the workers are generally an alienated lot. There is great deal of social isolation characterised by interpersonal distrust and lack of dependability. However, almost 75% of them believed that human nature is fundamentally cooperative. The second dimension of alienation, namely, mormlessness was also explored with the help of certain questions. These relate to 'rightness' 'wrongness' of norms, and steadfastness of norms. No consistant results were found on this dimension. Powerlessness was another dimension on which data were gnerated. Here, 68.8% felt that the world is changing so fast that it is difficult to predict if the decisions one takes are the right decisions.

In a series of investigations on alienation conducted in recent years in India it was reported that alienation is negatively correlated with sense of participation (Pestonjee and Singh, 1979), ego-strength (Singh, 1978; Singh and Shrivastava, 1979), and productivity (Singh, 1978; Singh and Shrivastava, 1979; Singh, 1980). Job involvement and alienation are also found to be negatively related with each other and conceptualized as an opposite end of a bipolar continuum (Mishra, 1979; Kanungo, 1979).

Recently Pestonjee and his associates (Pestonjee, Singh and Singh, 1980 a, b) have attempted to examine the moderating effect of alienation on job involvement-performance relationship and job satisfaction-performance relationship. Their observations are quite interesting in the sense that for the high alienated group job involvement-performance relationship becomes quite predictable ($\underline{r} = .36$) as compared to the low alienation group ($\underline{r} = .17$). The obtained correlation coefficient, however, for the entire sample is .30. They feel that alienation is a potential moderator for the jobinvolvement-job performance relationship. In the second study, they tried to analyse the effect of alienation on job satisfaction-job performance relationship and have noted that the relationship between performance and job satisfaction for high alienated subjects is somewhat poor ($\underline{r} = .23$) as

compared to the low alienated group ($\underline{r} = .52$) or for the entire sample ($\underline{r} = .34$). The difference between the obtained correlation coefficients for high/low alienated groups was statistically determined by applying Fisher's Z. The obtained C.R. was 2.50 which is statistically significant (Pestonjee, Singh, and Singh, 1980, a & 1980 b).

In summary, we may mention that the problem of alienation permeates almost all the vital segments of our lives. Ludz (1976) has very rightly observed that the general weakness of the concept can be ascribed to a very low level of theory building around it. It encompasses subjective feelings and objective facts. Its range of interpretations span from historico- philosophical interpretations to empirico-analytical theories. The present emphasis is on giving it a manageable frame and to provide operational definitions. The empirical studies in the realm of organisational spsychology bear testimony to this.

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