METHODS AND PROBLEMS
OF DELEGATION*

1. General


In this intensive study of the locus of decision making in industrial relations in multiplant companies, delegation of authority and responsibility is discussed throughout as a key aspect of decentralization.


The author defines the core of the function of a top executive as the definition, division, and distribution of the parts of the aggregate responsibility which that official holds. Problems and methods of delegation are discussed in that light and a number of relevant organizational principles are summarized at the end of the book.


A textbook discussion of the principles, process, advantages, and limitations of the delegation of authority and responsibility as related to the trend toward decentralization in industry.

2. Material Emphasizing Methods


* Items from this list should be ordered directly from the publisher. Addresses are given in connection with each reference.
Outlines various steps in organizational planning. Includes a discussion of the determination of functional delegations, effect of delegation on line-staff relationships, and the possibilities of efficient decentralization through delegation.


Argues for the advisability of delegating problems involving “functional specialization” to staff assistants reporting directly to the chief executive in smaller organizations. The variety of advantages of this method to the firm as well as to the economy are also discussed.


Discusses the control and coordination of the activities of subordinates under delegation and outlines four essential steps in the development of a control system. Three case studies illustrate the theoretical discussion.

Learned, Edmund P., David N. Ulrich, and Donald R. Booz. *Executive action.* Boston 63 (Soldiers Field). Harvard University, Graduate School of Business Administration, Division of Research. 1951. 218 pp. $3.25.

In this analysis of executive action with emphasis on the human relationships involved, the authors deal extensively with the process of delegation, various common attitudes toward it, and the use of delegation as an effective tool in management.


One of a series of articles on organizational problems in which the author sets down and discusses eight specific steps to be followed in a program of developing greater delegation of authority.

3. Material Emphasizing Problems


A top executive of the Standard Oil Company of California considers delegation one of the key problems of modern organizational planning in growing industrial enterprises. Proper span of control, the function of staff officers, and the direction of delegation are discussed as primary problems in planning for delegation.

In a large organization failure to delegate responsibility consciously forces on subordinates parts of their superior’s responsibilities by default, thus resulting in “unconscious delegation.” With this distinction in mind, the author discusses the problems resulting from “unconscious delegation” and the advantages of conscious delegation, particularly as a means of defining organizational relationships and thus facilitating control.


The author maintains that excessive centralization and failure to delegate can have adverse psychological effect on subordinates and frequently results in the frustration of the potentially able and the eclipse of the individual.


Discusses the problems and procedure involved in training assistants. “The ability to coach others” is stressed as a key requisite for the development of dependable “lieutenants.”


Drawing on his experience as an executive in the War Shipping Administration during World War II, the author suggests delegation as a means of relieving executives’ work load, developing subordinates, and utilizing the division of labor. Differences in temperament of executives are the reasons given for variations in actual methods used, with fear of mistakes, lack of confidence, and personal vanity responsible for insufficient delegation.


Describes in detail the manner in which large organizations have historically solved their organizational problems, including that of delegation. The author stresses the psychology of delegation by distinguishing between leaders who find it psychologically more or less easy to delegate responsibility and authority to subordinates.

Distinguishing between various meanings of authority, the author finds that the authority commonly delegated in administrative organization is "operational authority." Since such delegation is usually restricted by standing plans, specific limits on permission granted, or the limited authority that can be delegated, he concludes that a key aspect of delegation lies in clear definition of the new relationships thus created and their specific limitations.

Outlines the steps necessary for a program of delegation and gives an account of the problems raised, citing some practical examples from companies of various sizes in Great Britain.

4. EXPERIENCE IN SPECIFIC ORGANIZATIONS

Sets up seven stages in the growth of a company at which different organizational problems, including that of delegation, are likely to be encountered. A description of the practical experience with delegation in a number of companies is used to illustrate the analysis.

A study of the managerial policies and organization of General Motors. Chapters 2 and 3 present an excellent account of the methods by which delegation, through the decentralization of decision making, has been employed to overcome the problem of giant size.

Three shillings.
One of the hardest problems for the executive concerns the delegation of the responsibility to coordinate. Citing British army experience the author suggests the staff officer as coordinator between the "line" and the "specialists" as a possible solution.

In this analysis of administrative decentralization in the Department of Agriculture, the author dwells in detail on problems of delegation between headquarters and field offices and lists a number of factors favoring decentralization through delegation.