Coercion vs. Persuasion

Every organization uses some combination of coercion and persuasion to enforce group norms. The United States is now employing coercion on a very broad range of problems. Overt force is being used in Southeast Asia far more than diplomacy; coercion is being used to enforce integration in the South; and even the universities feel driven to resort to force in order to continue functioning. All this is occurring in one of the world's most literate nations, a nation having the most advanced communications technologies. Perhaps it would be useful to think of persuasion as an alternative to coercion. *Technology continues to lower the cost of producing social change by means of persuasion rather than coercion.* Yet there has still not been a widespread recognition of the fact that our strategies for bringing about social change could be substantially altered by making use of communications equipment now available and additional equipment which will become available in the next few decades.

Electronic Town Meetings

The impact which computer-based exploration of alternative policies will have on the distribution of public concern with federal, state, and local governments will be partly determined by the scale of the networks built. A national computer-based communications system would most likely consist of a network linking "teaching computers" in local communities. Each local computer would have its numerous remote terminals. Local computer-terminal systems will be available in some communities before a national network of "teaching computers" is operating. Consequently it seems probable that this new communications medium will have a noticeable effect on local government before it begins to affect national government. By providing a means for citizens to become involved in urban planning and policy formation at the local level, these simulations might well increase interest and involvement in local government.

NECESSARY CONSIDERATIONS DURING PRELIMINARY TESTING

Regardless of the *need* for more deliberate long-range policy-making, a careful look at the *feasibility* of citizen sampling simulations is required. In addition, research projects with probable large-scale social consequences must include some consideration of regulation in the public interest.

Economic, Social, and Political Feasibility

1. Some idea of the economic feasibility of citizen sampling simulations can be obtained from estimates of the cost of a large-scale computer-based education system.... The cost of instruction on PLATO IV will be less than fifty cents per hour per student. This figure should apply to either educational or governmental use.

2. The social feasibility of the idea could be tested in a small city such as Champaign-Urbana, or perhaps an even smaller community such as the University of Illinois. Questions that would have to be answered include the following: Will people turn out to "play the game"? How much difficulty will they have understanding and dealing with the rather complex issues? How quickly will they be able to adapt to using the teaching computer? What problems are encountered in trying to obtain a representative sample of the population?

Do planners find the data collected to be useful? Are the problems chosen for presentation redefined as the result of feedback from the public?

Are the attitudes of the public on matters of policy changed as the result of exploring alternatives? Do participants change their opinions about the community, local government, planning, and the judgment of their fellow citizens? Do people feel that the decisions which are made after the data from the exploration has been considered, are more in keeping with their own desires?

Do people get information through citizen sampling simulations which they would not see otherwise? How much information do people generally look at before making a decision? Is the information presented in more understandable or more useful form than through existing media of communication? Is information presented in a more interesting and enjoyable form than is possible at present? Do other forms of political participation increase as a result of citizen sampling simulations?

3. Citizen sampling simulations will also have to be accepted by present-day decision-makers. Their response will be influenced by how they believe it will affect the conduct of their jobs, how they believe the public will react to it, and whether they think it would be in the public interest.

There is reason to doubt that some existing institutions are really interested in eliciting public desires. Some political leaders are more concerned with conducting public relations with the masses. However, there are two reasons why political leaders may not actively oppose this new medium. First, introduction of the equipment will take place over a period of several years. Second, the idea of a communications system which permits the easy flow of information and opinions in both directions has an appearance of lack of bias which makes it difficult to argue against in abstract form. Nevertheless, arguments about control of the medium and the wording of specific programs could become agitated.

Public acceptance of this new social technology may depend initially on whether it is regarded as a new step toward the "computerization of our lives" or as a way of "using technology to control technology." Preliminary research and testing could be conducted like any other research project, and distribution of equipment to communities could be gradual. However, it is also possible that the United States could adopt cheap education for everyone or citizen participation in policy formation as a national goal comparable to landing a man on the moon or building a supersonic transport. Such a national commitment could be stimulated by the occurrence of one or more of at least three developments.

   a. International competition, for example from Japan, could drive the United States to attempt to establish preeminence in a new technology which could have an impact on foreign exchange and the balance of payments. For instance, the balance of payments consideration was a major factor in the debate over whether to proceed with the development of the supersonic transport.
   b. If a negative public reaction develops to the formulation of policy by "experts" and "bureaucrats" or by the "more important people" of a city, citizen sampling simulations could become a response to this criticism.
   c. Further increases in the complexity and urgency of domestic problems could convince the government that improved communication within society is needed. John Platt has vividly described the "crisis of multiple crises" which mankind is now encountering.

Question of Regulation and Control

If the idea of citizen sampling simulations seems workable after preliminary testing, some thought sould be given to the following questions before widespread implementation goes very far.
1. Should the physical equipment for these simulations be publicly or privately owned or some combination of the two?
2. Should the institutions which write the programs and collect the responses be governmental agencies, universities, private corporations, or some new kind of institution?
3. How should this new communications system be regulated—by the Federal Communications Commission, by a new regulatory agency, by Congress, or by direct public criticism and the normal legal process as newspapers now are?
4. The approval of only two more state legislatures is required before a second national constitutional convention is called. If a constitutional convention is called, should citizen sampling simulations be made a part of a new kind of governmental process and thereby become a means not only for discussing goals but also for authoritatively setting goals? The use of

computer-based education equipment as a technology for the formal governmental process is not likely to happen until the public is very familiar with the equipment and what can be done with it and is convinced of its usefulness.

The University as a Stage for Political Conflict

Any major social innovation will produce a shift in the relative importance of existing social and political institutions. If the computer-based communications centers, which write the programs and channel responses to the government, are located at universities, the role of the university in society would grow. Also, the function of the university as a platform for social controversy would doubtless increase due to disagreements over what alternatives should be presented and what the probable consequences of actions actually are. The public, when disagreeing with the programmed relationships between developments, should be presented with an argument supported by observations made in a similar situation. The relationships between developments would probably represent the judgment of a group of experts, at least initially, and they would be expected to justify their decisions about probable secondary effects.

The Federation of Feudal Disciplines

Dealing with complex, real-world problems will require using the knowledge of many disciplines and coordinating specialized knowledge, not only for presentation to the public, but also in building the models used in the programs. Thus, there would be a tendency toward the amalgamation of social theory and indeed toward the building of a model, and presumably in time, a theory describing the relationships between all parts of the physical, biological, and social environment. The present trend toward interdisciplinary research would certainly be accelerated. The expanded use of computer simulations would increase interest within the social sciences for building mathematical models.

Collective Bargaining and "Industrial Democracy"

If industrial corporations were to use "employee sampling simulations" the union-management dichotomy could become less pronounced. Collective bargaining might have to be rethought. Workers and managers could explore the consequences of higher wages and prices, such as higher consumer prices and lower real income. They could consider together issues such as whether to manufacture napalm and what percentage of black employees would be socially just and in the best interests of the present employees. Greater information about the social context and experience in playing the role of the opposing party, might help to reduce conflict. However, it is possible that differences of opinion would only be made more clear and that nothing would be resolved.

Social Indicators Will Have an Impact on Lobbies

Inequalities among different groups in the population would be repeatedly pointed out by citizen sampling simulations using social indicators. Consequently, the bringing of group grievances to public attention could become a function of government or the universities just as the resolving of conflicts is now a function of government. "Interest articulation" could become an activity of professionally trained people and therefore less of an additional burden on the individuals to whom injustice is being done. The "comment mode" used in these explorations could help to restore the right of the individual to "petition the king." People who read the comments could be charged to act as ombudsmen.

Social indicators should also help to locate emerging social problems before they reach the critical stage. It is not likely, however, that muckrakers using present media would be put out of business. They will have a whole new social activity to criticize.

Increased use of social indicators for articulating group demands could help to keep lobbyists honest. Indicators of the existing situation would probably hurt well mobilized minorities such as the American Medical Association and help poorly mobilized minorities such as Mexican-Americans and migrant workers.

Political Parties May Become Less Important

If one assumes that political parties are a social technology for aggregating interests, which is required by the fact that there are a large number of interests and a small number of candidates, then the importance of political parties could be reduced by a technology which would allow people to register their opinions on separate issues. With citizen sampling simulations, a substantial part of a citizen's time spent on political questions would be devoted to specifying his hierarchy of priorities or indicating which alternative policies he regards as most important and desirable.

Other Media Might be Reexamined

The concern with public policy fostered by citizen sampling simulations might carry over to the other media. Simply the discussion of computer-based citizen sampling simulations, even prior to widespread implementation, could increase the growing interest in reexamining the educational, political, and cultural functions of existing mass communications media and their regulatory agencies. It is useful to point out again that an implicit national policy regarding the existing media of mass communications already exists, even though it may never have been debated and consciously decided upon.

For example television could be thought of as an instrument for education rather than for entertainment. A device which brings the patent remedy

man directly into the living room could be thought incongruous in a society where many communities prohibit door to door selling. Also, the existing media could be used by each of the many "silent minorities" to make its case to the rest of the public. Mexican-Americans, students, and American Indians are just a few of the groups whose views could be better understood by the public at large.

How Communications Media Affect the Temper of the Times

The present domestic instability and sense of foreboding in the United States may not be due entirely to a combination of very important social conflicts. Each communications medium existing at any particular moment influences the temper of the times by selecting out the kind of information most suited to it. *Television tends to select events which are dramatic as opposed to events which are representative of the total set of events. This situation produces numerous consequences. For example, if a person wants to be heard, he tries to make his comments as dramatic as possible, short of what can be prosecuted for inciting violence. A very large number of dramatic events bombarding the senses tends to create a feeling of catastrophic upheaval when in fact the daily lives of most people remain largely unaffected.*

Computer-based explorations of future alternatives, in a constant attempt to be accurate, would try to present both dangers and opportunities. Discussions about probably secondary effects would tend to select out the most persuasive arguments as opposed to those most flamboyantly presented.

Will Anxiety be Produced or Reduced?

The very major change in social communication and decision-making procedures which would accompany the introduction of citizen sampling simulations could cause great anxiety in the beginning. However, increased information and public involvement in decision-making would, in time, probably reduce anxiety due to unanticipated or unexpected social and technological developments. By looking ahead the public could better anticipate the new technologies and thus have time to create institutions to regulate or eliminate undesireable secondary affects. Greater confidence in society's ability to control the consequences of social and technological developments could lead to more open acceptance of experimentation and alternative life-styles.

Enhancing Self-Esteem

Greater involvement of the individual in social planning could contribute to self-esteem. Assuming that societies change in a non-random way—that is, that some "progress" can be discerned, that the store of knowledge grows, and that societies tend to become more organized in terms of an increase in information flow—then one might say that each individual, simply because he is alive and contributing to social choice, is a factor in social evolution, if he participates.

A Technology for Democracy—As Foreign Aid

In addition to the considerable impact which citizen sampling simulations could have on government within the United States and other industrially for accelerating the process of political development in the newer nations. If the people of a nation request it, computer-based education equipment could be given as aid instead of tanks and guns. The device could then be used both for education and for informing people about the operation of their government. It might be desirable to have some means of regulation by the United Nations to insure that the equipment is not used for propaganda or for inciting hostilities between nations.

Governance by "Those Who Care"

It has been suggested that a representative sample of the population might not be desirable, that a "constituency of the concerned" might be better than pure democracy. Teaching computers raise the possibility of granting citizenship in proportion to involvement. Perhaps there is some merit in this proposal, but care would have to be exercised to insure that citizenship was not granted in proportion to involvement *through a particular medium.* Participating in a citizen sampling simulation might be as uncomfortable for some people as marching in a demonstration is for others.

A Shift from Special Interests to Common Interests

People seem to be becoming aware of the fact that the physical world is not "without end" but in fact is very limited. This realization has very important consequences for political theory. Much of the present theory of coalitions is based on the assumption that some conflicts are of almost no concern to a third party. The idea of log-rolling—support my bill and I'll support yours—assumes that each partner has no interest in the other person's bill. However, in an intellectual climate in which everything is viewed as having some impact sooner or later on everything else, the idea of logrolling, at least in its pure form, breaks down. One is forced then to take into consideration, more than before, which side of the issue will produce the most desirable long-range consequences for the population as a whole.

Citizen sampling simulations make feasible the detailed consideration of secondary effects both by planners and by the public at large and thereby could assist in arriving at decisions which serve long-range as well as short-range interests.

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