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I have been much honored for my theoretical and research work in the following areas: cooperation and competition, conflict resolution, social justice, peace psychology, and prejudice. Much of this work was stimulated by my experiences in World War II where I served in combat in Europe with the United States Eighth Air Force. When I started my PhD graduate study at Kurt Lewin’ Research Center for Group Dynamics at M.I.T. in September 1945, I wanted to do work that would contribute to the development of a peaceful world.

Cooperation and Competition

At the time, I had an image of the recently developed UN Security Council, with its five permanent members. I wondered whether it would be a cooperative or competitive group, and pondered what the consequences would be of the two different types of functioning. Under the influence of the atmosphere at the Research Center for Group Dynamics and Kurt Lewin’s dictum, “There is nothing so practiced as a good theory,” I turned these questions into my dissertation research. This was a theoretical and research study (Deutsch, 1949a, b) on the different effects of cooperation and competition upon the functioning of small groups. This study laid the foundation for much of my subsequent work in conflict resolution, social justice, and peace psychology.

My theory of cooperation and competition, in brief, distinguished two basic types of interdependence between people (groups, nations): cooperative (”where people win or lose together”) and competitive (where if one gains, the other loses). It also described three basic processes that would be affected differently by the two types of interdependencies: substitutability (where one party’s actions can satisfy the intentions of another); inducibility (where one party can influence another); and cathexis (in which positive or negative attitudes are developed toward another). We hypothesized that cooperative interdependence would lead to
positive substitutability, inducibility, and cathexis; while competitive interdependence would have negative effects on these variables. A second independent variable in our theory was type of action: effective or ineffective. The effective action facilitates the actor’s goal attainment; ineffective action hinders it. The preceding statements about the effects of cooperative and competitive interdependence assume effective actions. With ineffective actions, cooperative interdependence becomes more like competitive interdependence and competitive interdependence becomes more like cooperative interdependence.

We have employed the image of a doubles tennis match to illustrate our theory. The members on each team are cooperatively interdependent; the two teams are competitively interdependent. A good play by your teammate is substitutable for your having to make the play; your partner can induce you to make a good play; and you positively cathect a good play by your partner and you also positively cathect your partner. The opposite is true for good plays by members of the opposing team.

The research was conducted in small groups of five, who were students from a large introductory psychology course I was teaching at M.I.T. The cooperative groups were all graded cooperatively (how well they did as a group); the competitive groups were all graded in competition with one another. The members of the cooperative groups learned more than did the members of the competitive groups. This result led one of my students, David W. Johnson, to do much to further the development of cooperative education.

The results of my experimental study supported my theoretical predictions. In the cooperative as compared to the competitive groups, communication among members was more informative and honest; there was a good sense of trust and warm personal relations; more readiness to help others and to enhance their power, more division of labor, and greater group productivity. The results also indicated that when conflict occurred between members they were resolved more constructively in the cooperative as compared to the competitive groups. This led to our study of conflict and negotiations and to the theory relating to conflict resolution.

The Resolution of Conflict:

In many studies (Deutsch, 1973), my students and I investigated the question of what determines whether a conflict will take a constructive or destructive course. We used a variety of negotiating and bargaining solutions as well as the Prisoner’s Dilemma with many different experimental
Our results essentially indicated that the typical effects of a cooperative process when introduced into a conflict or negotiation situation led to a constructive (“win-win”) conflict resolution. While the typical effects of a competitive process led to a destructive conflict resolution process. Since the typical effects of cooperative and competitive processes were known from our preceding research on cooperative and competitive processes, we had a theory of conflict resolution. This result was generalized into Deutsch’s Crude Law of Social Relations: The typical effects of a given social relation tend to induce that relation.

Our work on conflict resolution has stimulated much further development of theory, research, and practice in this area (see Coleman, Deutsch, and Marcus 2014). And something I’m most proud of, in Poland the key negotiators for the Communist Party (Professor Reykowski) and for the Solidarity Movement (Professor Grzlek), who helped to negotiate peaceful transfer of power from the Communist Government to the Solidarity Movement, have indicated that our work helped them to engage in a constructive process of conflict resolution (Deutsch, 2012).

**Social Justice**

Our work on conflict made it evident that conflict often was related to social justice issues. And, as we pondered this area, it became clear that our earlier research on cooperation and competition was about two different principles of distributive justice. Stimulated by these thoughts, I began doing more systematic, theoretical, and research work on distributive justice. I began with a critique of the limitations of equity theory (Deutsch, 1975), which was then the predominant theory of justice in social psychology. I then elaborated, in detail, the various attributes that are involved in a system of distributive justice. Thus, for example, among many factors one has to consider the goals of the distribution (such as to foster “productivity,” “social harmony,” or “personal growth”); what is being distributed (e.g., “money,” “love,” “health care,” “social status”), the relative power of the “distributers” and the “receivers” of the distribution; etc. This was followed by a series of research studies by my students and myself (Deutsch, 1985) on the effects of different types of distributive systems (“winner takes-all,” “equity,” “equality,” and “need”) as well as of factors affecting the choice among the different systems. Among the interesting findings were: (1) the use of an “equality” distribution was as task productive as the use of an “equity” or “merit” system of rewarding undervalued group members; and (2) the choice of a distributive system followed Deutsch’s Guide Law of Social Relations. Thus, as in
our studies of conflict resolution, the typical effects of a distributive system tend to induce that distributive system.

I also wrote about the processes of awakening the sense of injustice (1974) and overcoming oppression (2006) because I hoped these articles would be useful in stimulating action to promote justice.

Peace Psychology

As indicated earlier, I always wanted my work in psychology to be useful in promoting. I believed my work on cooperation—competition, conflict resolution, and social justice. This work led me to be very active in writing various articles analyzing psychological factors promoting war and co-editing a book on Preventing World War III (Wright, Evan, and Deutsch. 1962), I also was very active in presenting my views to officials in government, to professional groups, and to the public. I served on many committees; one of which helped to establish the United States Institute of Peace. Many of my articles written during this period are in a 2015 two volume reflection by Springer: Morton Deutsch: a Pioneer in Developing Peace Psychology and Morton Deutsch: Major Texts in Peace Psychology (edited by Peter T. Coleman and Morton Deutsch).

Prejudice

The first research study that I was involved in after obtaining my Ph.D. was a comparative study of the effects of segregated and integrated public housing (Deutsch and Collins, 1951). This study helped to lead to the desegregation of public housing and played a role in the U.S. Supreme Court decision on Brown versus the Board of Education that made public segregation illegal. I was very active in the 1950s in discussing the results with public officials at professional meetings, and at public events. I also served on many action-oriented professional committees which worked to reduce prejudice and discrimination.

Other activities of note

I co-authored two influential volumes, which were the first of its kind in social psychology, one on research methods (Selltiz, Jahoda, Deutsch, and Cook 1951, 1959) and one on theories (Deutsch and Krauss, 1965).
I also served as president of the following professional societies: The Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, The Society for the Study of Peace, Conflict, and Violence, and the International Society of Political Psychology. My Presidential Addresses were mainly related to a discussion of the social psychological issues related to the prevention of destructive conflicts such as war, and injustice.

More recently, impelled by the potentially catastrophic consequences of climate change for the people who inhabit planet Earth, I have turned my attention to the social psychological factors involved in developing a global community and working with colleagues on a theoretical paper (Deutsch, Marcus, Brazaitis, 2015) and a research study of attitudes towards actively participating in a global community (Marcus, Deutsch, and Liu, in preparation).

Conclusion

Under the influence of my mentor, Kurt Lewin, I have mainly done theoretical and research work in areas that are central to all the social sciences: cooperation-competition, conflict resolution and social justice. My work is very much indebted to the many outstanding doctoral students who were in my “work groups” as students. They were active participants in developing these areas.

Although my work was mainly in the laboratory, the work has had some important positive social impacts due mainly to the contributions of former students and colleagues. Throughout my career I have also always tried to point out the important social implications of this work.

References


