

The Effects of Clarity of the Job and Confidence in
One's Self on the Reactions of Telephone Operators

(Tentative draft - to be revised)

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(draft for discussion)

At a recent conference of telephone operators the problems which bothered them were discussed as well as some of the ways of relieving these difficulties. Among the sources of irritation and uneasiness which were mentioned, three stood out because of their frequent repetition. They were: (a) Service Assistants are inconsistent in the things they tell us and in the way they treat us, (b) we are often unsure as to what is the right thing to do at the board, and (c) some of us have little confidence in ourselves. The latter point was not stated exactly in those terms, but it was clearly the feeling behind many of the questions raised and the assurances being given to each other.

Doubtless, operators learn to "put up with" such problems or to bury their reactions to them so successfully that it is difficult to identify any consequences they may generate. In contrast, the effects often may be visible and clearly noted whether or not they are immediately apparent, it was assumed that the three "complaints" would have important effect on the employees and thus, indirectly, on their performance. The purpose of this study was to determine what these effects might be.

These problems were of interest because they are intimately related to research activities in the Battle Creek Office directed by Ian Ross. In the latter study the complex set of duties assigned to the Service

*A more complete report by A. R. Cohen describing in detail the theory, method, and results of this study is available in the Office of the General Traffic Personnel Supervisor, Michigan Bell Telephone Company, Detroit.

Assistant was reduced in size and simplified. The Service Assistant was required to serve only as a coach and helper for the operator. This change in procedure caused the operators to communicate more readily with the Service Assistant and led to other important changes in job performance and the relations among operators and Service Assistants.*

In the present study we wished to examine further the nature of the operator's work situation and her relations with Service Assistants. In addition, we proposed to determine some of the factors which led to certain emotional reactions among the operators. This investigation then, is a next-step beyond the work Ross has been doing in Battle Creek. It is also relevant to a series of studies in the Research Center for Group Dynamics on the determinants of behavior in a formal organization.

The practical significance of the findings in this research can be discussed more fruitfully toward the end of this report. Suffice it to say now that it is pertinent to answering questions such as these:

(a) What happens to an operator when Service Assistants are inconsistent, one with another, in the information and help they give?

(b) How does an operator feel when she is unable to handle unusual calls?

(c) Does the girl with confidence in herself meet conditions, such as those described in (a) and (b), in a way that is different from the girl with little self-confidence?

(d) What effect does inconsistency in the directions given by various Service Assistants have on the relations among operators and Service Assistants?

*A report on the Battle Creek study is also available in the Office of the General Traffic Personnel Supervisor, Michigan Bell Telephone Company.

(e) When the operator is unclear about the "best" thing to do on an unusual call, what effect does this have on her attitudes toward Service Assistants?

(f) Do girls with high self-esteem differ from those with low opinions of themselves in respect to their feelings about Service Assistants?

The findings in this study will enable us to propose answers for questions like these, and a number of others. It is apparent that such results can be pertinent to operator training practices, Service Assistant daily behavior, and matters relevant to increasing the attractiveness of a job as a telephone operator. These issues will be touched upon later.

In order to examine questions like these, it was decided to use an experimental situation in which an operator would work under the supervision of a Service Assistant so that her reactions could be closely observed. The experiment was so contrived that all matters, other than those in which we were directly interested, were controlled so that their effect was absent or negligible; whereas, the impact of the causal variables was made strong and clear. Let us describe how this was done.

The Experimental Situation

The operators used in this study were from four large offices in the Bell Building in Detroit. Prior to the beginning of the study a total of 250 girls were given a questionnaire to measure their self-esteem. This test is an indicator of self-confidence, and of the value a girl places upon herself.

Out of the original population who took the test, 198 girls were selected to participate in the experiment. They were divided into three groups with 66 girls in each representing those with high, medium, and low self-esteem. Those in the high group are girls who see themselves as being pretty much the way they would like to be. Girls with low self value, in contrast, are ones who see a great discrepancy between what they are and the person they aspire to be.

The participants in the study were brought to an experimental room one at a time. There they were introduced to a Service Assistant from another office. They were told that the Service Assistant would give them a task to do and that she would decide how well the girl had done the job. After the operator had completed the assignment, the Service Assistant left the room and the experimenter returned in order to have the girl answer a number of questions concerning the experience. This, in brief, was the nature of the plan.

During the experiment two major variables were introduced: (a) The Service Assistant was either consistent or inconsistent in her directions, and (b) the task was either clear or unclear in its nature. In order to create the consistency-inconsistency variable, the Service Assistant advised the operator as to the best way of proceeding on the task. For half of the subjects she gave one useful tip and repeated this several times, thus performing in a perfectly consistent fashion. For the other half of the subjects the Service Assistant provided several different suggestions and varied these with no apparent logic in her advice. This created the inconsistent condition.

Its parallel to the operator's complaint that Service Assistants often "tell us different things" is obvious.

The clear-unclear variable was created by varying the nature of the work. Half of the girls were given an assignment in which it was easily apparent as to what should be done in order to complete the job. The other half were asked to do a more confusing task. In both cases the "job" required that they match words and pictures. In the clear situation the names provided were easily attached to the proper picture and the girl could be fairly sure that she was doing the "best" thing most of the time. In the unclear conditions, however, they were to match abstract words with symbolic figures and meaningless designs. In this situation there were no guidelines or ways of knowing when the correct procedure was being used.

This unclear situation is psychologically similar to the experience of the operator when she meets a call which she cannot handle at all and must ask a major question of the Service Assistant. The clear situation, in contrast, is analogous to the simpler difficulties which an operator meets in which she raises a minor issue with the Service Assistant. It should be stressed that it was necessary to use an unusual test situation of this kind in order that we might have a task which was as little influenced by past experience as possible. We did not want differences in training and experience as a telephone operator to make it more or less easy for the girl to do well.

In order that we might be able to tell the effect of self-esteem, Service Assistant consistency, and clarity of the task, separately and in

combination; the subjects were assigned to different experimental conditions and were distributed in the following manner:

| | <u>Operator Self-esteem</u> | | | Totals |
|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------|-----|--------|
| | High | Medium | Low | |
| Service Assistant consistent and task clear | 22 | 22 | 22 | 66 |
| Service Assistant consistent and task unclear | 11 | 11 | 11 | 33 |
| Service Assistant inconsistent and task clear | 11 | 11 | 11 | 33 |
| Service Assistant inconsistent and task unclear | 22 | 22 | 22 | 66 |
| | — | — | — | — |
| Total operators | 66 | 66 | 66 | 198 |

The operators were told that it was important to do well, and the data, as we shall see, suggests that they did very much want to do a good job.

It was stressed that the Service Assistant was the one who could determine how well they had done. This therefore, resembled the real-life situation in which the Service Assistant has an awareness of the adequacy of each girl, at least insofar as the operator sees it.

The questionnaire, filled out by the operator after completing the assignment, was intended to measure their feelings as a result of the experience. As was suggested earlier, there are a number of consequences for the operator which may be determined by the consistency of the Service Assistant, the clarity of the job, and the self-esteem of the girl. What

these consequences are, and the strength of them, depend upon the experience the operator had in this study. The questionnaire, then, was intended to discover the operator's attitudes toward the Service Assistant, her feelings of security in working the Service Assistant, how much she was disturbed by the experience, and how unhappy or happy it made her.

After the completion of the questionnaire all operators were told that they had done well and any uneasiness was relieved in a relaxed conversation about the task.

The Theory Behind this Study

In a very real sense this investigation is a study of several problems which have often worried Traffic Management people. They have long known that operators may become troubled at the board, that the girls dislike inconsistent behavior among the Service Assistants, and that some employees are much better in handling stress situations than are others. Though these things have been well understood, there have been various explanations for them.

In the day-by-day operation of a Traffic Office it is difficult to be sure why things happen as they do since so many different influences are at work at once. This experiment, then, attempted to clearly isolate three of the important difficulties in the daily operation in order to see their effects more distinctly, and thus, to explain what consequences they create for the operator who meets them.

The theory behind this study is based upon several important assumptions which have been found useful in other investigations of formal organizations. One major assumption is that a person with greater power is a possible threat to those with less power. By power is meant the ability of one person to determine whether or not another person is carried toward or away from his goals. More simply stated, it is the ability one has to influence or control the fate of another. In a Traffic Office the Service Assistant has power over the operator. She can tell the operator what to do and how to do it. Because she has this power, she is a potential threat to an operator since she can use her influence in a positive supportive fashion; or, she can use it in a restricting and critical manner. She can help the operator in such a way that her calls are put through efficiently and the girl has feelings of success because her job is well done. Or, the Service Assistant can interfere by failing to provide the necessary aid so that the operator is blocked in her attempts to succeed.

In many hierarchical situations, of course, the person with the greater power has the right to determine promotions, pay raises, recognition for good work and so forth. She may also have the power to withhold these rewards or to demote, reduce income, and even deride these in a lower status position. For our purposes, however, we will ignore such broader extensions of power since they are not ordinarily within the province of the Service Assistant.

An experimental situation was created in which the girl was stimulated to perform as well as she could. When anyone wants very much to succeed, and it becomes apparent that she may not do so, no matter how hard she

tries, the result is a combination of feelings which we have designated as threat. When someone has power over another, the situation can be potentially threatening to the latter, since she can never be sure whether this greater influence will be used in a direction to help or to hinder her. Thus, the Service Assistant's power may be threatening to the operator.

The person with greater power, however, is not always seen as a source of threat. Whether or not she is seen to be such depends upon a variety of circumstances. Three such determining factors are the major variables in this study. We expected the operator to be more or less threatened by the Service Assistant depending upon the nature of the experimental conditions in which she was placed. Let me cite several examples.

When the operator has high self-esteem we expected that she would feel secure in her relations with the Service Assistant in the experimental situation since such a person has learned in the past that she is adequate to cope with the unusual. In contrast, we would expect that a person with low self-esteem would be insecure in her relations with a Service Assistant.

When the task is clear we predicted that the operator would be relaxed and very little threatened by the experimental task since the way to do the job is apparent and the subject is aware of what she must do in order to succeed. In an unclear situation, however, reactions of a threatened type would be anticipated.

When the Service Assistant is consistent, the operator knows what to do and how to do it. She also realizes that the superior is using her influence in such a way as to help her reach her goal. An inconsistent Service Assistant, it was expected would generate uneasy reactions in the operator.

But, one may ask, what if a girl is threatened what difference does it make? In answer, it can be said that threat is an unsatisfactory state since it leads to lack of productivity, mistrust of others, poor interpersonal relations, misunderstandings, hostility, lack of interest in one's work, and other similar consequences. People can react to threat in many ways, but in general terms we can assume that they are emotionally-laden reactions which often do not show on the surface at once but nevertheless are there. We can expect, then, that telephone operators who are threatened will have more vigorous reactions of the following types in the experimental situation than those who are not threatened:

1. Little feeling of attraction to the group in which one is threatened.
2. Greater insecurity.
3. Greater anxiety.
4. Greater negative attitudes toward the Service Assistant and feeling that she is "unfair" to the operator.
5. Greater feelings of failure about the quality of one's work.
6. Longer time taken to do the job.
7. Less desire to do well.
8. More feelings of anger (which can spill out into one's conversation with others when on the job).

These are the reactions we expected in this experiment. That is, we hypothesized that these effects would occur in the more threatening situations. We proposed to test the following three hypotheses:

Hypothesis I: The lower the operator's self-esteem, the more unclear the task, and the more inconsistent the Service Assistant, the more will the operators display forms of behavior (listed above) which are indicative of threat.

Hypothesis II: The lower the operator's self-esteem, the more readily will she be threatened in any type of situation.

Hypothesis III: The more unclear the operator is concerning the best thing for her to do (i.e., the more unclear the task) and the more inconsistent the Service Assistant, the more readily will she be threatened no matter what her self-esteem is.

Results

In describing the method of this study and the theory behind it several assumptions were made about the operator's feelings and wishes. Since the explanation and results we shall advance in a moment are dependent upon the validity of these expectations, let us first see if they are correct.*

* For the sake of brevity and ease of reading, all findings will be reported without the use of numerals. These results meet the usual criteria of statistical significance. For a more detailed description, see the Tables and Figures contained in the report mentioned in the footnote on page 1.

It was assumed that the operators would see the experimental Service Assistant as one who has the power to be either helpful or hindering in determining success for the subject. In order to check on the accuracy of this assumption the operators were asked how much authority she felt that the Service Assistant had over her during the experimental session. The results indicate that no matter what condition an operator was placed in she perceived the Service Assistant as having much power over her. Thus, we may conclude that all operators felt that they were working with a person who is in a position to control their fate.

A second assumption we made was that all girls would wish to succeed on the task. It was necessary to determine if this was, in fact, true, since it is conceivable that girls with different levels of self-esteem may have different strengths of desire to be successful. The results are that the motivation to do well was uniformly high in all conditions. We may conclude, that the subjects were all strongly motivated to do high quality work on the task given them.

A third assumption, is that all subjects would be strongly attracted to the company. It was believed that girls who felt that the company was unimportant to them might not take the experimental situation as seriously as those for whom the job was highly salient. Each operator, therefore was asked how important it was for her to get ahead, how important it was for management and supervisors to like her, and how well she liked being an operator. The girls in the various experimental conditions did not differ on any of these points. Their identification with the company was

uniformly high. Thus, we can conclude that the operators are attracted to the company and that the experimental situation, (in which a boss exercises power over them) was very real.

In general, then, it appears that the major assumptions underpinning this experiment are valid ones. The subjects were strongly motivated to do well and felt that the Service Assistant did have a great deal of power over their goal attainment. In addition, the operators in all experimental conditions were uniformly high in their identification with the company. It should be noted, then, that the following results are true only where the above conditions exist. If an operator, for example, is not particularly interested in doing well, or feels that a Service Assistant has very little power over her, it is less likely that she would react in the way which we are now about to describe. Let us turn to a general description of the results.

The Importance of the "Three Complaints" in Producing Feelings of Threat

It will be recalled that this study was so designed that it was possible to determine the relative importance of three different "causes" in creating threat for the operator. We determined the amount of threat by measuring the feelings of the operator after her experimental session. The aspects measured were described on page 10.

The three "complaints" determine threat-indicative behavior in the following order of importance:

1. Unclearity of the task.
2. Inconsistency of the instructions given by the Service Assistant.
3. Low self-esteem of the operator.

The practical significance of this finding will be discussed later. At this point, however, it should be noted that if we can assume that unclearity of the task is an experience which beginning operator's most frequently meet, we can predict with some confidence the nature of the feelings that must often bother them. Doubtless, neophyte operators can be expected to have more emotional reactions to their job. This matter needs careful consideration in planning their additional training on the board. We shall have more to say about this later.

The Condition in which Threat is Maximal

The types of behavior which we consider indicative that the operator felt threatened were significantly more likely to occur under a maximal condition, namely, when: the Service Assistant was inconsistent, the task was unclear, and the operator had low self-esteem. In contrast, when the behavior of the Service Assistant was consistent, the assignment was clear, and the operator had confidence in herself, the likelihood of threat oriented behavior was very small.

In the maximal threat condition, therefore, the following feelings were generated in the operators: they disliked the experimental situation, were more insecure, were more anxious, felt that the Service Assistant was "unfair",

had strong feelings of failure, took longer on the job, did not desire to do well, and were more hostile. In the experimental treatments which were the oposite of the maximal ones, the operators developed reactions at the other extreme from each of the above.

The Effects of Task Clarity and Service Assistant Consistency

We have described the findings concerning the relative potency of the three "complaints" in creating threat-indicative behavior, and the state of affairs in which emotional reactions are most likely to occur. Now let us set aside self-esteem for a moment and examine the consequences of clarity of the job and behavior of the Service Assistant. If we ignore the amount of self-esteem possessed by the employee, we find that the more unclear the situation is and the more inconsistent the Service Assistant is, the greater is the likelihood that the experimental situation created threat indicative behavior. That is, all of the forms of behavior and feeling described above occurred more often in the unclear-inconsistent situation than they did in the clear-consistent conditions.

The clarity or unclarity of the task, however, is far more important than the consistency or inconsistency of the Service Assistant in producing threat-indicative reactions in the operator. This does not mean that the consistency-inconsistency shown by the superior is unimportant. When it works against clarity-unclarity it dulls its effect and when it works with it, the effects of the clarity or unclarity of the task are enhanced.

In general, both aspects of the experimental environment, when working together are more potent than self-esteem in leading to threat reactions. However, the amount of self-esteem does have an effect in one dramatic instance. When the operator with low self-esteem is put in a situation which is clear and in which the Service Assistant is perfectly consistent - then, she is very likely to be threatened. Here she knows exactly what should be done and knows that the Service Assistant is straightforward in her instructions. Under such a condition the girl who has little confidence in herself cannot blame other causes for any failure on her part and she readily shows signs of considerable threat in her relations with a Service Assistant.

In the daily operations of a Traffic Office this situation would be comparable to one in which a girl is fully trained and has much experience; and in addition, is working with a Service Assistant who is clear and consistent in her advice or instructions. In such a circumstance if the operator is one who has low faith in herself, she may find contacts with the Service Assistant to be upsetting experiences. Further findings concerning the effects of operator self-confidence, can now be described.

The Effects of Operator Self-esteem

The prediction was earlier made that the amount of self-confidence possessed by the girl would have an important bearing on the nature of her relations with an authority figure. We have already seen, however, that the matters of task-clarity and Service Assistant consistency are generally more important than self-esteem in this connection. It will be fruitful, therefore, to further examine the conditions under which self-esteem makes

a difference in the nature of the threat oriented behavior shown by the operators when working with a Service Assistant.

For the sake of simplicity let us combine these persons who were in the task-clear and Service Assistant-consistent conditions and call it a Structured situation. Also, those who were given an unclear assignment and who had inconsistent behavior from the Service Assistant will be described as being in an Unstructured condition. Then we can compare the reactions of persons in these two degrees of structure depending upon the amount of self-confidence they possess.

When the situation is well structured the low self-esteem operators show signs of threat to an appreciable degree; a reaction stemming from their conviction that they are not able to deal with any requirements of their environment in an effective manner. The girls with a high degree of faith in themselves, however, are quite at ease since they are sure of their ability to cope with any situation.

In the unstructured situation, in contrast, when both the task and the behavior of the superior are confusing, the girls with high self-esteem show that they are threatened just as much as those whose self-confidence is low. Thus, the girls with low self-esteem are not always the most easily upset.

If we generalize this finding to the day-by-day work in a Central Office, we can predict that the girls who are not at all sure as to the "best" way to handle an unusual situation, and who have inconsistent

instructions from Service Assistants, are likely to be greatly threatened by the experience no matter how strong their confidence in themselves may be.

It is noteworthy, however, that those with high self-esteem and the operators with little faith in themselves react to the unstructured situation in different ways. In general, the manner they choose to use in reacting to this close relationship with the power figure is in accordance with the picture that they have of themselves:

(a) The reaction of operators with high self-esteem. These girls work slowly, are very concerned with doing well, claim that the task is not difficult, and do not try to avoid it. At the same time they say that they do not like the task, think that the Service Assistant could have improved in her instructions, think that it is a worthless activity, feel that they may have not done very well, and state that they were not trying hard to do well. Notice that they do not say that the task is difficult, that one worries about such assignments or that one should avoid them. Nor are they worried about the attitude that the Service Assistant may have about them. They are concerned with keeping up a good front under threat, and with how well they performed according to their own standards. Since they have very high hopes for themselves, as a result of their feeling that they can handle most situations which come their way, they tend to feel that they did poorly on this "job." Their response, in short, is one in which they repudiate the experience, and tell themselves that they do not really care to succeed in such a silly task - thus they save face and maintain their level of high self-esteem.

(b) The reaction of operators with low self-esteem. In the unstructured conditions the girls with little self-confidence, however, are more concerned with the way that the Service Assistant acts toward them and are soon ready to give up. Having low self-esteem means that the operator lacks positive feelings about herself and is unsure that she will be able to meet new situations with poise.

Thus, when they are put into the unstructured situation their lack of faith in themselves leads them to accept the task with all seriousness since it was given to them by a superior and they do not feel that they have the ability to judge whether or not it is a worthless activity (as do those with high self-esteem). They do not need to save face as much as those with much self-confidence, thus, they readily admit that the task was difficult, they would usually try to avoid such an experience, they worry about such tasks, and finally that they would not want to do it again if they had their choice. Their major concern is the way they were treated by the Service Assistant and with the opinion that the Service Assistant may have formed about them. At the same time they feel negatively about the Service Assistant.

The girls with little self-confidence then, are more ready to blame themselves for any inadequacies in their performance and are greatly concerned about the impression they may have made in the eyes of the authority figure.

Attitudes toward the Service Assistant

We have said that the girls with little self-confidence are more likely to be concerned about the impression they are making on the Service Assistant especially in an unstructured situation. Let us conclude the description of the findings with several other pieces of data concerning the girl's feelings toward the Service Assistants.

It will be recalled that all the operators, no matter what type of experimental conditions they were in, felt that the Service Assistant had a good deal of control over their fate. They had, of course, been told that this was true in the experiment and the results indicate that they believed this. It is interesting, however, that the operators in general thought very well of the Service Assistants. When asked if they liked the Service Assistant, or if her performance could be improved, they were uniformly approving in their evaluation of the power figure's behavior except for the girls with high self-esteem in the unstructured situation. Apparently it is very difficult for the operators to "see" the Service Assistant as intending to be anything but helpful. The inconsistent behavior of the Service Assistant was ignored. It would seem, then, that the "complaint" about inconsistency of the Service Assistants stems from the necessity of working with a variety of Service Assistants in the day-by-day work of the office rather than feeling that a given Service Assistant is careless, since inconsistency within one individual is not consciously observed even though its impact is felt.

Discussion of Results

We have described the effects of a telephone operator when the clarity of the job, the consistency of Service Assistant instructions, and the self-esteem of the girl (herself) are systematically varied. In general terms we can say that these three "causes" create behavior which is indicative of the fact that they feel threatened when in a close relationship with a power person. The amount of this behavior and its nature depends upon the combination of variables which the girl experienced. Let us review these and discuss their practical implications for the Traffic Department. First however, it will be worthwhile to consider further the significance of such threat oriented behavior.

In practical terms the appearance of such reactions in the operator may be important since they drain energy, which might be used on the effective completion of calls, into behavior which is intended to make the girl feel more at home with herself. Saying it differently, if the operator is deeply involved in feelings of anxiety, dislike for the task, aggression, insecurity, and others she is less likely to be attentive to her job. Indeed, along with such feelings went a decreased desire to improve the operator's efficiency or pride in her work.

Part of the findings from the study in the Battle Creek office are relevant here. Ross organized the office so that the "boss" functions (i.e. the sources of potential threat) were removed from the Service Assistant's role. It was assumed that the operators would feel safer with a Service Assistant who was clearly a coach rather than one who decided

the fate of the employee. As a result, it was predicted, the girls would feel freer to communicate with the Service Assistant and would ask for help more readily. The findings are that this happened to a significant degree. In the terms of the present study, we can say that the potential threat of the Service Assistant in Battle Creek was reduced when her role was simplified. Thus the operators were less threatened and devoted more energy to activities which were related to the accomplishment of the job.

The behavior which is indicative of threat is important for another reason. It may determine the attraction of the job for the girl. Whether or not an operator remains as an employee of the telephone company depends upon the needs she brings to the job and the probability (as she sees it) that this job will satisfy these needs. It seems obvious that a situation which creates threat-oriented behavior is unlikely to meet many needs, no matter what they are. The data, in fact, indicate that the girls who showed the most threatened behavior were least attracted to the task. A job, then, which creates feelings of threat for the operator, is one which will have little attraction to her. This of course, is speculation but could be put to further test in the real-life situation in a way we shall suggest in a moment.

Let us now turn to a review of the results and to a consideration of the practical procedural problems which these findings suggest.

1. Uncertainty of the task was more potent in creating threat-indicative behavior than either Service Assistant-inconsistency or operator self-esteem.

It will be recalled that task-uncertainty is assumed to be psychologically similar to the situation at the board when the girl has no idea whatsoever as to how to handle an unusual call. At such a moment she will be uneasy, of course, because she is afraid that she will not do well. She is ready for advice or instruction at that moment, but at the same time she will find her relations with a Service Assistant (which by definition must be sought just at that time) more threatening to her. The Service Assistant, whether or not her behavior deserves it, is likely to be seen as a potentially critical person. Her attempts to be helpful at such a stressful juncture are likely to be misunderstood.

It seems clear, then, that the Service Assistant who is asked for help must be exceedingly aware of the possible difficulties inherent in her interactions with the operator. Her help must be unusually supportive and understanding in order that she might not increase the threatening aspects of the situation.

The Traffic department is now faced with the task of determining what practices will best reduce the possibility that threat is aroused when an operator is required to deal with a call which is completely unfamiliar to her. Several suggested procedures are worth consideration here.

(a) Service Assistants may be trained to understand the effect of uncertainty for the operator and in ways of displaying supportive and non-threatening behavior. Such skills can be taught and practiced. Doubtless many Service Assistants would benefit from such training.

(b) The simplification of the Service Assistant's functions, as done by Ross in Battle Creek, may be useful in other offices. If the Service Assistant is required to be only a coach or a teacher she is less likely to be a source of threat to the operators since the control she has over the future of the employees is reduced and the girls are, thus, more likely to be comfortable when discussing errors or uncertainties with the Service Assistant.

(c) The consequences of being in an unclear situation can be reduced somewhat by making it less likely that the girl will meet calls that she cannot handle. We cannot aspire to have each girl 100% trained when she goes on the board. The next best procedure would be that of carefully checking operator performance to make sure that each girl is given the training that she needs when she needs it - and especially when she requests it. This is common practice, of course, but the findings of this study serve to underline the significance of "observations" not only for the reason of giving good service but also in order that the operator will feel most comfortable at the board.

It is noteworthy that these considerations concerning the behavior of Service Assistants are also applicable to ACO's and CO's since the latter persons have considerably more power than the Service Assistant.

2. The girl with little confidence in herself is likely to find an unclear situation one in which she blames herself and worries about the Service Assistant's impression of her. The considerations described above concerning possible ways for reducing the potential threat in an unclear

situation are relevant here. The point highlighting, however, is that such a girl is likely to cause little trouble and thus get little attention from a Service Assistant. The problem is somewhat comparable to the school-room in which the teacher is required to give much attention to the students who make difficulties for the rest of the class. The teacher devotes undue attention to such students and may overlook the quieter, self-blaming, more withdrawn child. A most capable Service Assistant, thus, may need to know enough about the various operators so that she can understand the nature of the operator's feelings.

3. The girl with much confidence in herself is likely to meet an unclear situation by blaming causes other than herself. The girl with high self-esteem, then, shows threat oriented behavior when she meets a call which she cannot handle, but she reacts in a quite different fashion from the operator with little confidence in herself -- she blames the situation rather than herself.

These findings (2 and 3) suggest that one cannot expect that all girls will react the same to an unclear situation. However, there is no reason to believe that practices which reduce the threat of an unclear situation for those with low self-esteem will not work equally well for operators with high confidence in themselves. It is likely, however, for reasons described above, that a Service Assistant may spend more time with an operator who has high self-esteem than one who has low self-esteem -- simply because the latter would be more likely to show her irritation and the Service Assistant and the company are more likely to be the target of these feelings. This is strictly speculation -- but is a matter which could be checked.

One wonders if girls with high self-esteem are more likely to leave the company (because of their tendency to blame their environment) than are those with low self-confidence? This matter could be easily checked next Fall. Since there is roughly a 35% annual turnover in the Traffic Department, we could determine if a larger number of those who have left the company in the year since the self-esteem test were given, are of high, medium, or low self-esteem. We have self-esteem measures on approximately 500 girls in Detroit and Battle Creek. While these data would not answer the question with finality, they would give us some further insight into the effect of self-esteem on the way that a girl adjusts to the office requirements.

4. Inconsistency in the instructions offered by a Service Assistant are a cause for threat-indicative behavior. While inconsistency is not as strong a cause of emotional reactions as is unclarity (perhaps because they find it difficult to conceive of a Service Assistant as being deliberately inconsistent) it is nevertheless an important way of stimulating discomfort for the operators.

Doubtless inconsistency among Service Assistants is an old familiar problem. The findings in this study can serve to underline its importance. The problem which Traffic Management people must consider is that of developing means whereby they can check on the consistency of the instructions given by the various Service Assistants in the office and the development of an awareness among the Service Assistants that consistency is important. Perhaps inconsistency could be reduced if an operator works

with one Service Assistant for a greater length of time than the current practice allows.

The results of this investigation clearly indicate some of the causes of emotional reactions among operators, which we have called threat-oriented behavior. They give us confidence in diagnosing the causes of certain feelings among them and in explaining the importance of unclarity and inconsistency in a Central Office. The next step is for those persons in the Traffic Department who are responsible for developing personnel activities and training procedures to consider what specific practices are needed in order that the negative aspects of these three problem areas may most effectively be reduced. We at the Research Center for Group Dynamics will be glad to help in this matter, if we can, and if we are needed.