

A Combined Qualitative and Quantitative Approach for Analyzing the Informal Leadership of a Choral Society

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Abstract

Complementary procedures for generating data are presented here as an optimal research strategy. Qualitative data is obtained through intensive familiarity with the social setting under investigation and reflects inside, unavailable to a casual outside observer, into mutual understandings mediated with that setting. On the other hand, quantitative data elicited from the same setting through survey procedures can reveal, through statistical analysis, structural characteristics which are not revealed through direct observation of behavior.

This paper combines qualitative and quantitative data in the analysis of informal leadership in a choral society. Qualitative data was elicited through participant observation by a member of this chorus - Akademski pevski zbor Tone Tomšič. Tentative conclusions derived from these observations regarding the composition and characteristics of the chorus's informal leadership were then evaluated against survey data, collected through a self administered questionnaire, and subsequent statistical analysis, using a procedure of network measures of centrality. This latter procedure represents the quantitative component of the analysis.

1 Introduction

Research strategy in an analysis is usually qualitative or quantitative. This is mainly due to differences between the two approaches in views of cases, understanding of causation, offered explanation and above all goals of the research itself. In a qualitative approach, each entity among a small number of cases is observed, whereas in quantitative research, variables in numerous cases are observed. It is variable oriented, therefore extensive. On the other hand qualitative research is case oriented, therefore intensive-integrated. Because of the differences in both research strategies, the inter-play between the two methods is fruitful, especially in the analysis of informal groups.

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In qualitative research it is very important to understand the situation clearly, to uncover the meaning and significance of social phenomena for people in the area under observation. For a sociologist it might involve long periods of observing and talking to people in one setting. Research procedures, designed to produce qualitative data require in-depth knowledge and explanation based on the perspectives of the people being studied. For that reason the explanation offered is interpretive and historically specific.

Quantitative approach is static, the main idea behind is that the best way to understand basic patterns and relationships is to examine patterns across many cases. Looking over many cases gives a picture of social life. Such a picture is a purified phenomena specific to singular cases or small groups of cases. Only the general pattern remains. Explanation of a quantitative analysis is therefore radically analytic and parsimonious. The difference in approach is also in goals - one of the goals of qualitative analysis is the understanding of diversity, on the contrary, the goal of quantitative analysis is to explain variation.

The article is an attempt to combine two approaches, qualitative and quantitative, in one research. The object of the analysis is the students chorus *Tone Tomšič* of the University of Ljubljana, which has a long tradition of gathering students of the University of Ljubljana. The formal structure and formal activities of the chorus are well established, but one of the main reasons of its popularity and success is in its informal activities which made this chorus last for 70 years irrespective of the changes in singers and conductors.

The analysis of informal structure is based upon the empirical investigation of informal leadership within this highly formalized organization. In literature definitions of political leaders are common. They associate the term with concepts of power, influence, command, control and authority in different and sometimes contradictory ways (Edinger 1990:511). Qualitative research is fruitful in the study of leadership, because it introduces a wider range of contextual variables into the research.

In the qualitative part of the research, the main question is who the informal leaders are and what are their characteristics. The term 'informal leader' is complex and hard to define, it is very important to understand the context in which the term is used. For that reason we analyze informal activities of the chorus that help us to find the leaders. We ask the question how much importance should be attached to an individual member in the interpretation of the informal activities. Does it make a difference and, if so, how much of a difference? Gained results are explanatory. Since in-depth knowledge is needed for the qualitative part of the research it is almost necessary to be a member of the chorus.

In the quantitative part, we analyzed the informal structure of the chorus with network analysis. All members of the chorus were given a questionnaire containing questions about relations among members. Measured networks were analyzed by Freeman's in-degree measure of centrality. By this method we expected to get the most popular, friendly and efficient members of the chorus.

2 Methods

We concentrated on the informal structure of the students chorus Tone Tomšič of the University of Ljubljana. The goal of the qualitative part of the research was to find informal leaders of the chorus. In the paper we distinguish two kinds of leaders - formal and informal. The authority of formal leaders is defined in the statute and regulations of the chorus, but informal leaders have real influence inside the chorus.

In the paper we present formal structure, formal activities and informal activities of the chorus. The evaluation of the role of an individual member of the chorus is based on these activities. In the next step we selected the informal leaders and describe their characteristics.

The informal structure was analyzed with the help of photos, chronicle,¹ video records and list of singers. As documents cannot reveal the true richness of informal events, participant observations were an essential part of the qualitative research. The list of important events and the evaluation of the role of involved members was made. To select important members of the chorus and to evaluate their significance an informed participant observer did in-depth interviews with active members who know the background of the events very well.

The list of important events and evaluations of involved members for each event were the basis for finding informal leaders. Informal leaders were defined as the most active members in the majority of listed events. The final selection was made according to their influence in the chorus in conflict situations or decision-making processes. Further analysis revealed their common characteristics. As a result of qualitative analysis a list of informal leaders and their qualities were made together with general dimensions of the chorus' informal life.

The purpose of the quantitative analysis was to evaluate the findings of the qualitative analysis e.i. to discover informal leaders of the chorus by a quantitative approach. According to the results of the qualitative research, there is an informal structure in the chorus beside a formal one. Members are involved in informal activities with different intensity, some are especially active whereas others are not.

Very active members of the chorus have specific characteristics and are expected to have specific types of relationships with the rest of the members. Data about their characteristics were collected by qualitative approach showing that informal leaders have, beside being very good singers, lots of common and distinctive qualities. They should are often asked for help by other members of the chorus when preparing for audition, organizing a party or picnic, etc.

Network analysis is the method used to discover, measure and analyze relationships in groups. It can be treated as a qualitative or quantitative method depending on the analysis level. Since the group is rather large (86 members), it was appropriate to gather data about the relationship among members with a survey and analyze them with some statistical methods. Freeman's in-degree measure of centrality (relations are directed)² was used to discover informal leaders. Finally the results of

¹Chronicle is written every year about all important events for the chorus with all sorts of humorous details.

²Freeman's in-degree index tells how often a particular member is asked for help or chosen as desired friend by other members of the chorus.

both methods were compared and discussed.

3 An ethnography of informal leadership and its evaluation in terms of Freeman's in-degree measure of centrality

3.1 Formal activities and formal structure

Among formal activities of the chorus some are obligatory for all singers:

- rehearsals twice a week,
- regular auditions, that take place several times during the year for all concert programmes,
- intensive rehearsals before competitions,
- concerts,
- tours and
- annual assembly.

To make all these activities possible, some beside the conductors are especially active. These members are elected in annual assemblies in the following committees that represent the formal structure of the chorus:

- executive committee that does organizing and administrative work (takes care for the execution of the yearly plan, decides about every action, takes care of regular rehearsals and auditions, organizes concerts),
- artistic committee - the conductors and some members with music education help in the realization of rehearsals and auditions,
- and supervizing committee that controls the work of the executive committee, financial policy and discipline.

3.2 Informal activities

Besides formal activities there are informal activities too, that are an important part of the chorus culture. There are some singers that actively organize those activities and have influence over important decisions of the chorus.

Let us look closely at the activities not described in the regulations but occur every year and are traditional. The important traditions of the chorus activities are:

1. Initiation rituals:

- welcome to new singers,
- freshmen's eve,
- giving an oath at New Year's Eve,
- giving an oath on the first tour and
- final test for freshmen in Premantura (Slovenia).

These are events dedicated to all new members of the chorus. Besides greetings at the beginning of the year new singers have to prove their knowledge and abilities at all chorus activities that they participate in for the first time (first concert, tour). Special emphasis is PUT upon the final test - a whole day's procedure for freshmen in the summer at the seaside. The procedure is kept secret and used as a threat for freshmen in case they break the chorus unwritten rules. These rituals have symbolic meaning for the singers when becoming true members of the chorus (and some of them are quite hard to pass).

2. Another nice custom, specific for the chorus Tone Tomšič, takes place at the end of the concert where male members of the chorus gather in front of the concert hall and sing a national Slovene song (Vse najlepše rožice) while the public is leaving.
3. Birthdays of members are also important to celebrate. Each member that celebrates has the right to select her/his favorite song which is then performed by other members of the chorus.
4. There are also some other important events celebrated within the chorus that are also part of the Slovene national tradition:
 - Women's Day - 8th March
 - 40 Martyrs - 10th March
 - Carnival in February
 - New Year'party.
5. In case two chorus members get married, singers usually participate in the ceremony and sing to the newly wed couple.

3.3 Selection of informal leaders and their characteristics

There are some members of the chorus that make the informal activities possible. An informed participant observer subjectively chose five active members³ for in-depth interviews that helped to select this list of activities. In the process of selection of informal leaders, we asked how much importance should be attached to individual member in the interpretation of informal activities. Does it make a difference and, if so, how much of a difference. With the help of in-depth interviews, the list of the most active members was made. The list was quite long, so we could not name them all as informal leaders. While evaluating their role in the chorus, in-depth interviews revealed the influence that some of the selected members have in decision-making processes and conflict situations although they are not part of the formal structure. Both dimensions - influence in informal activities and occasionally in formal decisions of the chorus - were taken as criteria for selecting the informal leaders. The second criteria reduced the confusion about who the informal leaders are, and on that basis

³Beside being active members, they were expected to be especially cooperative and open about the topic.

consensus was easily reached on the five most important members of the chorus. They were described in detail in order to find the common characteristics of the informal leaders.

The selected informal leaders and their characteristics are presented below.

- Leader A:
 - male,
 - an excellent solo singer, sings also in another good chorus,
 - teaches other singers in the chorus, willing to help before regular auditions,
 - one of the old singers (10 years) - once was a president,
 - nice, participates in all sorts of jokes,
 - leader of most of the rituals in the chorus,
- Leader B:
 - male,
 - very good singer,
 - one of the old singers (8 years), A's best friend
 - nice, ready for all sorts of jokes,
- Leader C:
 - male,
 - very good singer,
 - nice, calm,
 - one of the old singers (8 years),
 - lazy, usually late for rehearsals,
 - present at most parties,
 - very good actor, participates in most party programmes,
- Leader D:
 - female,
 - an excellent solo singer,
 - teaches other singers in the chorus,
 - one of the old singers (8 years) - in a controlling commission,
 - does not hesitate to express her opinion straight on,
- Leader E:
 - female,
 - an excellent singer,
 - teaches other singers in the chorus especially all freshmen,

- nice, very temperament,
- willing to help others.

Selected leaders differ from one another but we can notice some similarities among them. They are all very good singers, which is probably the reason why they are so dedicated to the chorus. They are among the oldest members of this chorus and have a lot of knowledge and experience concerning. Of course all old members are not informal leaders. Contribution of selected leaders is very important, they are usually very friendly and always willing to help. This is the general remark but this is not an unique pattern of an informal leader. There are great differences in style among them, each of them contributes according to her/his abilities and talent. The last very important characteristic, common to all leaders, is their participation in the organization of informal activities.

3.4 Evaluation of informal leadership with Freeman's in-degree measures of centrality

The qualitative analysis revealed four desired characteristics of informal leaders. Beside being good singers, informal leaders are supposed to also be good friends, organizers in case of informal gatherings and have a sense of humour. They should be asked for help by other members of the chorus very often when preparing for audition, organizing a party or picnic etc.

According to the described qualities, the following questions were formulated to measure social support exchange relations among members of the chorus:

1. Who would you like to share a bus-seat with on a longer tour?
2. Who would you like to ask for help when preparing for regular audition?
3. Who would you like to ask for help when organizing a birthday picnic?
4. Who would you like to ask for help to realize your idea about the chorus New Years Eve party?

The analyzed network consists of social support exchange relations among 86 members of the student chorus - Akadamski pevski zbor Tone Tomšič. Data were collected with self administered questionnaires. Survey was carried out in June 1994. The respondents were instructed to read the questions carefully and to ask for further explanations if necessary (instructors were present in the chorus rehearsal room until the respondents filled in the questionnaires). They were provided with the membership list and simply marked the persons selected for each question. The scale applied was a binary scale, only yes or no answers were allowed. Freeman's in-degree measure of centrality was applied to find informal leaders.

Although five informal leaders were selected, other members are active too, friendly, willing to help etc. An important quality of informal leaders that differs from other members is their influence in some formal activities the chorus (in the decision-making process, in case of conflicts).

Table 1: Freeman's in-degree index

Good Friends	Excellent Singers	Best Organizers	Party Leaders
M82 (23)	Leader A (26)	Leader A (20)	Leader A (31)
M27 (20)	M27 (26)	M29 (20)	Leader B (25)
Leader A (19)	Leader D (25)	Leader B (17)	Leader C (21)
M12 (19)	M8 (19)	M12 (15)	M27 (20)
M13 (17)	M34 (15)	M27 (13)	M12 (19)
M29 (16)	M64 (10)	M5 (12)	M5 (16)
M14 (15)	M15 (8)	M72 (11)	M13 (14)
M57 (15)	M28 (7)	M47 (10)	M29 (14)
Leader B (15)	M37 (6)	M1 (9)	M27 (14)
Leader C (15)	M13 (5)	M13 (9)	Leader D (13)

In Table 1, members most often chosen, are presented in rank order. Only the top 10 are selected for presentation, since informal leader are expected to be those most desired.

It can be seen that informal leaders found by qualitative analysis are among the top ten persons in the chorus considering the four dimensions. As mentioned before each informal leader has specific characteristics and style and they are not all equally important in all dimensions except for leader A. All leaders except for leader E appear in the table at least twice among "top 10". Leader E was not included in the membership list because by the time quantitative analysis took place, she was no longer a formal member of the chorus. It can also be seen that members M27 and M12 appear very high on all (M27) dimensions (like leader A).

4 The complementarity of qualitative and quantitative procedures

In the article it was shown that both approaches together give the best results. Each approach has specific advantages and disadvantages.

Only a member of a group can define important dimensions of a group structure and gives an input to a quantitative analysis. But for a participant observer it is very hard to separate the role of a member from the role of an objective researcher, although the research procedure is known and partly structured in advance. Being an active observer can be very informative and inspiring, it is quite a new dimension to membership in the chorus. The observer puts emphasis on a broad variety of events and gets to know colleagues in-depth.

On the other hand, in quantitative analysis subjective judgment is avoided, but its inputs depend on qualitative analysis. Basic dimensions for formulating questions were drawn from there. Also only a limited number of questions (presumably

substantial) can be asked in a survey. We cannot avoid some measurement errors specific to survey methodology. The questionnaire was rather long and filled in after a two and a half hour rehearsal at 10 p.m. It is also possible that freshmen do not know all of the members by their names.

Despite the difficulties the quantitative analysis confirms the hypothesis derived from in-depth investigation. There are some differences in results which can be attributed to special characteristics of each method. In quantitative research, we measured the most desired members of the chorus, whereas more dimensions were included in the concept of the informal leader measured by qualitative research (influence in the decision-making process or solving conflicts).

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