Election or Selection of Leaders

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The Society for Cross-Cultural Research was initially planned by several founding members during the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association in November 1971. I did not attend that meeting, but I was informed by a participant soon afterward that a meeting to inaugurate the organization was scheduled at the University of Pittsburgh. It occurred on 19-20 February 1972.

During the interval of three months, Ronald P. Rohner, at the University of Connecticut, drafted the Constitution and By-laws for the prospective organization, with participation and approval by George Peter "Pete" Murdock, Mellon Professor of Anthropology at the University of Pittsburgh. Election of the leader was specified by the requirement for the Nominating Committee each year to nominate at least two members for President Elect. One would be elected in a mail ballot sent to all the members. This requirement is consistent with the policy of election by all eligible voters for President of the United States, for Governor of each State, and for local political officials.

The President Elect becomes the President the next year. One of the duties of the President is to appoint two members of the Nominating Committee. The next year, the President becomes the Past President. One of the duties of the Past President is to chair the Nominating Committee.

An unusual policy for the organization is to request members to designate their affiliation with three disciplines: Anthropology, Psychology, or other Social Sciences. The representatives for the three disciplines serve staggered three-year terms. The Nominating Committee also was required to nominate at least two members for the discipline whose representative was scheduled that year for election in the same ballot as for the President Elect. The nominees for President Elect were not permitted to be affiliated with the same discipline as the current President Elect

The meeting to found the organization was chaired by Ward Goodenough, who was Chairperson of the Anthropology Department at the University of Pennsylvania. He had been a student of Murdock at Yale University. Another former student of Murdock at Yale was John W. M. Whiting, who was at Harvard University. Whiting was the leading practitioner of psychological anthropology. Murdock and Whiting were friends, but Murdock's adverse feelings about psychology were expressed by his multiple recitations of a humorous characterization. "An anthropologist studies other cultures because he cannot stand his own. A sociologist studies other societies because he cannot stand his own. A psychologist studies other people because he cannot stand himself."

After the draft provisions of the proposed Constitution and By-laws were made available to the founding members, John Whiting made a motion for an alternative structure of the organization. An elected Council of five members would choose its chairperson and be responsible for the meetings and other activities of the organization.

Murdock stated his objections to Whiting's proposal. After prolonged, vigorous debate about the rival proposals, Murdock announced his selections of the initial officers of the proposed organization. Beatrice B. Whiting, the spouse of John Whiting and an active psychological anthropologist at Harvard, would be the first President. John L. Fischer, at Tulane University, would be the first Past President. I would be the first President Elect. Also, James M. Schaefer, at the University of Montana, Secretary-Treasurer. Ronald P. Rohner, at the University of Connecticut, Anthropology Representative. Leigh Minturn, at the University of Colorado, to Psychology, would be the first Psychology Representative. Dorrian A. Sweetser, at the University of Massachusetts, would be the first Other Social Sciences Representative.

Murdock correctly expected that his list of selected officers, especially Beatrice Whiting as the first President, would increase support for the draft Constitution and By-laws. Soon afterward, the vote on the structure of the organization was 19 for Whiting's proposal, 28 for the previously drafted Constitution and By-laws. Murdock's selection of the initial officers was then approved without dissent.

On the next day, 20 February 1972, the founding members approved the name of the new organization: Society for Cross-Cultural Research. The alternative proposal was Society for Comparative Studies. The members also agreed that John L. Fischer's title would be Vice President instead of first Past President.

Murdock certainly would have been elected the first President if he had desired that office. At the age of 74, he was a vigorous and productive leader of cross-cultural research. He probably preferred to avoid the responsibility of leading the new organization. Instead, he tried to control the future of the Society for Cross-Cultural Research by his role in preparing the draft Constitution and Bylaws and by selecting the initial officers.

I was astonished but grateful to be Murdock's selection for President Elect. He had not previously informed me of his intention. Beatrice Whiting and I therefore were selected by Murdock to be the initial leaders of the Society for Cross-Cultural Research. For more than ten years afterward, the leaders were elected by the members, who chose between two nominees.

Throughout my three years as President Elect, President, and Past President, I strove to justify Murdock's choice of me. The second annual meeting, 1973, was at the University of Pennsylvania. I served as program chair for the 1974 meeting, at Boston University. I functioned as editor of the Newsletter all three years.

I remember a statement to me by Murdock that when I was Past President, he and I would need to select which two members would to be nominated for the election as the next President Elect. The next Presidents Elect after me were John M. Roberts, at the University of Pittsburgh, and William W. Lambert, at Cornell University.

While I was Past President, one of the female founding members complained to me that after Beatrice Whiting, all four subsequent Presidents Elect were males. As Chairperson of the Nominating Committee, I suggested to the other two members, who had been appointed by John Roberts, that we select two female members for the next President Elect. They agreed on Barbara A. Ayres, at the University of Massachusetts, and Margaret K. Bacon, at Rutgers University. In my opinion, both were excellent choices. Barbara Ayres had been a student of John Whiting. While I was a graduate student at Yale, Margaret Bacon had worked with me on a project directed by Irvin L. Child. When I told Barbara Ayres that she was one of the two nominees, she initially objected against opposing her friend Margaret Bacon. Barbara Ayres then agreed because she expected Margaret Bacon be elected.

Barbara Ayres was elected, contrary to her expectation. I believe that I did the right thing. I also believe Murdock felt disappointed because I did not consult with him in advance about that decision. My conjecture is that he would have preferred two different nominees.

Several years later, one of the founding members of the Society for Cross-Cultural Research felt convinced that elections resulted in excessive hurt feelings for the loser. The Constitution and By-laws accordingly were revised to state that the Nominating Committee would nominate at least one candidate for each open position. As one of the nominees, after Carol Ember became President Elect in 1984, Joel Aronoff in 1985 became President Elect as the only nominee. Michael Burton was the only nominee as Anthropology Representative. The option for a single nominee immediately became preferred. A single nominee has been selected in all the subsequent years thus far. Three years after 1984, when Alice Schlegel was one of the two nominees for President Elect, she was nominated and elected to be President Elect.

Selection of a single nominee has attractive advantages for professional organizations whose purpose is not to govern nonmembers and whose officers receive no salary or other material benefits. The loser of an election may become bitter and may withdraw from the organization. The current leaders usually know who is best qualified to be the next leader.

A technique for minimizing the disadvantage of elections is to offer more than two nominees. The American Anthropological Association has three nominees for President. The American Psychological Association has five nominees for President. The losers feel encouraged to accept a subsequent nomination, especially the one who had received the second most votes. In the Division of Psychopharmacology of the American Psychological Association, during a succession of years, two members were nominated for President, but the loser was usually a nominee and the winner in the next year.

While serving as President of the Society for Cross-Cultural Research, William Lambert appointed me to a nonvoting renewable one-year position on the Executive Committee as Archivist and Parliamentarian. I have thereafter felt a special affiliation with this organization. A more important benefit is that James Schaefer, as the first Secretary-Treasurer, mailed to me his records on the initial meeting in 1972. He thereby contributed for this essay many items of information that I had forgotten or misremembered.