Report of the Special Committee

A suggestion for simplifying a procedure, now almost traditional, by which various agencies reach decisions.

Warren Weaver

Various organizations—foundations, government agencies, research institutes, universities—from time to time face the question: Should we or should we not undertake a new or a much larger and more intensified program of activity "X." Now *X* may stand for "the design and construction of a much larger, faster, and more flexible computer," or "a crash attack on cancer," or "an adequate program in oceanography," or "the building of a larger radio telescope," or "structural studies of proteins," or the production of "a higher energy linear accelerator," or "long-range studies of the genetic effects of x-rays," or "boring a hole through the earth's crust," or "arctic and antarctic research," or "a large new attack on atmospheric physics," or "an improved program for mental health," or "the conquest of space," or—well, you get the idea.

A common procedure is to set up a Special Committee of experts on *X* in order to find out whether *X* is a good idea. This committee is, characteristically, national or even international in scope, is formed of external experts of recognized standing (external as regards the agency in question but most emphatically internal as regards *X*), and always contains a comforting proportion of what might be called right names. These are men intensively interested in *X*, often with lifelong dedication to *X*, and sometimes with a recognizably fanatic concentration of interest on *X*. Quite clearly, they are just the lads to ask if you want to know whether *X* is a good idea.

To support the work of this committee, an appropriation is obtained, ranging from, say, $10,000 to $25,000, in the case of timid and inexperienced groups, to $200,000 to $500,000 or more in the case of far-sighted and imaginative groups.

This money is used by the Special Committee to finance a "Feasibility Study."

Each such feasibility study results, after a period of months or even years, in a Report. This Report usually opens or closes with a short Summary Report, and also includes a long and impressive technical section, complete with charts, tables, quotations, footnotes, and so on.

This now almost standard procedure requires both time and money. It is, furthermore, embarrassingly true that those at the decision level may be impressed, but seldom are enlightened, by the long technical section, and therefore they usually have to depend largely on the Summary Report.

Having arrived at this point in describing the procedure of special committees to study the feasibility and importance of placing more emphasis on *X*, one is suddenly struck with an idea. Could this whole procedure not be simplified, made more prompt, more efficient, and less expensive?

Having had the unusual privilege of reading a good many such documents, I would like to suggest the possibility that, at least in many instances, these special committees, and their feasibility studies, can be eliminated entirely.

This does, of course, involve foreswearing the intellectual luxury of the long Technical Appendix. (Many years ago the then president of the University of Virginia, Edwin A. Alderman, described a *tea* as a social event designed to give minimum pleasure to the maximum number of persons. The Technical Appendix to a report stands at the other end of the spectrum, since it gives maximum pleasure to the minimum number of persons. In certain limiting cases of what might be called a "Pure Technical Appendix," the contents give extreme pleasure, but to the author only.) The shorter procedure, which I wish to suggest, consists of utilizing a standard, universal form (presently to be available at 2 cents a copy in lots of ten or more) for the Summary Report.

To indicate the practicality of this procedure, I venture to suggest here a tentative draft for such a universal Summary Report. It can be adapted to a very wide variety of circumstances, simply by replacing *X* by a word or phrase suitable to the special case in hand.

Summary Report of Special Committee on *X*

1) This is a scientific field of critical importance, with obvious and widely ramified interconnection with national defense and with the health of our national economy. The intellectual and esthetic importance of deepening our knowledge in this area cannot be over-emphasized.

2) This field has been meagerly supported in the past. And there is every reason to expect that modest but suitable financial support (say, roughly 20 times the present level) could lead promptly to results of the highest significance.

3) There is ample evidence that recent scientific leads and exciting new experimental techniques are now available which combine to make the present moment a particularly fortunate and promising one for undertaking an energetic attack.

4) The long and careful study which your committee has carried out has resulted in assigning a very high priority to *X*. A substantial development must proceed without delay if we are to capitalize on the enthusiasm of the experts who are devoted to this field, and who have developed a momentum which is a great present asset, but which might decay rapidly if encouragement is not promptly supplied.

5) Your Committee deeply deplores—indeed condemns—international rivalries in science. But we nevertheless feel compelled to point out that the Russians appear to be, in this field *X*, well ahead of us.

6) Your Committee thus recommends the immediate creation of a National Institute on *X* [the forms will provide space here for other terminology, but it is expected that the phrase given will serve in most instances], together with a broad program of research grants, fellowships, travel grants, and so on [here again, there may be exceptional instances which will require minor changes in wording], to be carried out . . . [the form will offer an assortment of phrases here, from which the users may choose; for example, "in all suitable institutions," throughout the waters of the

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oceans of this planet," "within the deep core of the earth," "in the arctic and antarctic areas," "throughout the troposphere," "in space," etc., etc.]. Your Committee estimates that roughly one hundred million dollars will be needed for initial capital facilities, including $850,000 for architects' fees, plus annual operating sums of ten to thirty million dollars [these estimates are necessarily preliminary—that is, too small].

In conclusion, it may usefully be remarked that when the Summary Report of the Special Committee is transmitted by operating officers to their governing boards, it is traditional to make some such statement as: "It will be recognized at once that the members of the Special Committee which rendered this admirable and challenging report are scientists of the highest standing, with broad and impressive experience. As the leading experts in the field *X*, the competence of their judgments on this topic cannot be challenged. It seems difficult indeed to see how we can afford to disregard their firm and constructive recommendations."

As a final note of caution, it should perhaps be pointed out that this procedure of concentrating attention on one single field, and utilizing the advice of those already committed to it, does have its complications. If one permits oneself to fall in love, one at a time, with a sequence of individually glamorous ladies, it is difficult to avoid multiple bigamy.

In addition to those who quite naturally consider *X* to be of first priority, there are equally competent groups who would assign the same top priority to *A*, *B*, *C*, . . . *Z*. If there is, in fact, a finite and limited amount of money available nationally for science, who is it that sits down on a hard chair and soberly weighs the alternatives? Is there a Special Committee for this?

V. Korenchevsky, Father of Gerontology

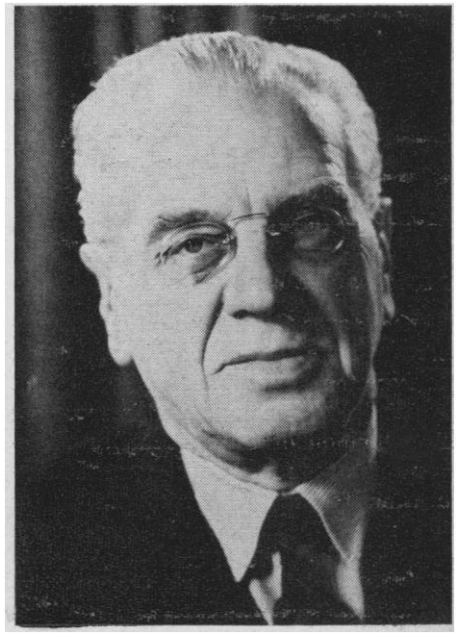
V. Korenchevsky's life was a gift from Russia to humanity of far-reaching consequences. He was the pioneer in the investigation of the problems of aging which have now grown to be of such gigantic proportions.

In 1880 he was born in Lida, Russia. It was apparently from his mother that he inherited his fighting qualities. He graduated from the Imperial Medical Academy in Petrograd in 1903. After having served as head of a military chemicobacteriological laboratory in Manchuria during the Russo-Japanese War, he visited in 1906 a Russian infirmary for old people in Moscow. He was appalled by their premature and abnormal aging. He tried to estimate the human wastage by comparing these unfortunates with others who enjoyed healthier, more useful, and longer lives. He pictured to himself what they might have been. His life during the next 53 years was one of striving somehow to discover how people can best be enabled to realize their full potentialities in their later years.

But after the Russo-Japanese War life for him became very unsettled. He worked, however, toward his goal, with Mechnickov in Paris on gastrointestinal autointoxication and with Pavlov in the Institute of Experimental Medicine in Petrograd, where he was appointed professor of experimental pathology in 1911. He devoted himself mainly to the effects of sex and thyroid hormones on somatic organs and their functions. He was obviously bringing to bear on the problems of aging the rapidly developing science of endocrinology when he was suddenly condemned to "liquidation" in 1919. He escaped to the White Army, fighting in Southern Russia; after the defeat of this army he emigrated to Britain and became a naturalized British subject.

In Britain Korenchevsky continued his important investigations in the Lister Institute of Preventive Medicine in London, in a special laboratory provided for him in Oxford, and in the department of physiology of St. Bartholomew's Hospital Medical School in London until his retirement in 1952 at the age of 72. He soon discovered that the sex hormones have manifold effects on somatic tissues and probably on the processes of aging. He investigated antagonistic hormones and their actions, the accelerating effects of gonadectomy on aging, and the antiaging properties of androsterone and testosterone propionate. Above all he tried, with some success, to devise objective tests for the processes of aging. His was a dynamic personality. He attracted people to work with him, and he helped them enormously. His view expanded into an appreciation of gerontology as a superscience depending on the basic sciences of anatomy, pathology, physiology, biology, biochemistry, psychology, sociology, and others, and he distinguished gerontology sharply from geriatrics, which is the general practice of medicine with old people, just as pediatrics is the general practice of medicine with young people.

Korenchevsky's greatest service to humanity was in the world-wide promotion of gerontology. In this he received much assistance from perhaps the greatest of Britain's millionaire phil-



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