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Professionals in Bureaucracies: Causes and Consequences

ROBERT L. KLINE
Eastern Kentucky University

Every census of the United States taken during the twentieth century has shown an absolute increase in the number of persons within the occupational classification "professional, technical, and kindred workers."¹ More significantly, the proportion of the total work force classified as professional, technical, and kindred workers has increased from 4.25 percent in 1900 to 14.44 percent in 1970. If Robert Presthus' definition of organizations as "miniature societies"² and its implications are correct, then the possibility that there might be an increasing number of professional personnel in bureaucratic organizations would seem reasonable. Indeed, the ties between the growth of the professions in the twentieth century and of large-scale bureaucracies as an organizational form have been recognized by scholars studying professions for some time. A.M. Carr-Saunders and P.A. Wilson, although bemoaning the fact, in their classical work *The Professions* acknowledged that "the signs of the times . . . point to an increase in large-scale organizations. . . ."³ Everett C. Hughes, a noted student of the sociology of occupations, has observed that "professions are more numerous than ever before. Professional people are a larger proportion of the labor force. The professional attitude, or mood, is likewise more widespread; professional status, more sought after. These are components of the professional trend . . . (which) is closely associated with the bureaucratic (trend). . . ."⁴

Peter H. Blau and W. Richard Scott have noted that "the professional form of occupational life and the bureaucratic form of organizational administration are two institutional patterns that are prevalent today and that in many ways typify modern societies."⁵ Their separate growth would assure their significance for the students of organizational theory but the fact that they are tied together merits special attention.

¹ U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1957* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1960), p. 74; and, *Statistical Abstracts of the United States: 1970* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1970), p. 225.

² Robert Presthus, *The Organizational Society: An Analysis and a Theory* (New York: Random House, 1962), p. vii.

³ A.M. Carr-Saunders and P.A. Wilson, *The Professions* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 449.

⁴ Everett C. Hughes, "Professions," *Daedalus*, XCII (Fall, 1963), p. 655.

⁵ Peter M. Blau and W. Richard Scott, *Formal Organizations: A Comparative Approach* (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Company, 1962), p. 60.

Indeed, as Herbert A. Shepard has observed “. . . the professional model is at such variance with the state of affairs in industry that a discussion of professionalism would seem irrelevant if it were not for the fact that a large proportion of scientists and engineers in industry think of themselves as ‘professionals.’”⁶ It is safe to assume, at least on this count, that what is true of scientists and engineers in industry is also true for scientists and engineers in public bureaucracies. In 1967 J. D. Bernal stated that “the scientist is no longer, if he ever was, a free agent. Almost universally he is now a salaried employee of the State, or an industrial firm, or some semi-independent institution . . . which itself depends directly or indirectly on the State or industry.”⁷

REASONS FOR THE FUSION OF PROFESSIONALS AND LARGE-SCALE ORGANIZATIONS

The proliferation of role specialization is one of the major characteristics which describes American society in the twentieth century (indeed characterizes most industrialized and urbanized societies in the twentieth century).⁸ This proliferation of specialized roles “. . . which characterizes both society and bureaucratic administration, also typifies recent developments in most professions.”⁹ It has been suggested that large-scale bureaucratic organizations have emerged either to “. . . make possible specialization and division of labour”¹⁰ or “. . . as a social invention which is eminently rational in its fitting together component parts, and in its carefully planned pattern of related functions serving an overall organizational goal.”¹¹ Whatever the case may be the point to be noted is that both the larger society and its constituent bureaucratic organizations can be characterized in part by a growing number of professionals.

With the increasing prevalence of role specialization the function of integrating diverse specialties becomes more significant for both the larger society and the bureaucratic organizations within it. The need for this integrating function is particularly manifest in highly industrial-

⁶ Herbert A. Shepard, “Nine Dilemmas in Industrial Research,” in *Administering Research and Development*, ed. by Charles D. Orth, III, Joseph C. Bailey, and Francis W. Wolek (Homewood, Illinois: Richard D. Irwin, Inc. and The Dorsey Press, 1964), p. 382.

⁷ J.D. Bernal, *The Social Function of Science* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1967), p. 387.

⁸ For example see Talcott Parsons’ essay “The Professions and Social Structure,” *Essays in Sociological Theory* (Revised ed.; New York: The Free Press, 1954).

⁹ Mark Abrahamson, ed., *The Professional in the Organization* (Chicago: Rand McNally & Company, 1967), p. 7.

¹⁰ Carr-Saunders and Wilson, *The Professions*, p. 449.

¹¹ Robert Kahn, “Human Relations on the Shop Floor,” in *Human Relations and Modern Management*, ed. by E.M. Hugh-Jones (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1959), p. 43.

ized and urbanized societies. This is the case precisely because it is these societies which are experiencing the greatest growth in professionalism. Bernard Barber has observed that ". . . only in the modern industrial system, with its elaborate division of labor, is there a socially recognized and highly approved place for the 'worker' whose job it is, and whose only job it is, to know science and to advance it."¹² As a result of the rapid proliferation of specialized roles man has moved from a state of relative self-sufficiency to a condition of high interdependence. The emergence of large-scale organizations as an institutional response of highly industrialized and urbanized society is an attempt to integrate and utilize specialized roles in a highly interdependent society. "Industrialization requires an enormously complex accumulation of trained, educated personnel. Certain of these symbolize their unity by common titles, and with the more highly educated, these titles tend to be professional."¹³ Role specialization, particularly as exemplified by the growing number of professions and professionals, and the ascendancy of the bureaucratic form of organization with the industrialized and urbanized societies of the twentieth century should be viewed as interdependent phenomena rather than as simultaneous but separate phenomena.

Another factor in the fusion of professionals and large-scale organizations has been the decreasing opportunity for the professional, indeed anyone, to practice his skill in other than a large-scale organization. Simply, the increasing prevalence of the large-scale organization within societies characterized by high levels of role specialization that appears to go hand-in-hand with urbanization and industrialization enhances the likelihood that an individual will be employed by a large-scale organization. For example, in the United States the average number of individuals employed by establishments increased from 23.7 in 1899 to a high of 60.5 in 1967, the most recent year for which data are available (see Illustration 1). In 1909, 82.4 percent of the establishments employed twenty or fewer employees. However, by 1967, the proportion of organizations employing twenty or fewer employees had decreased to 64.9 percent of the total number of establishments (see Table 1). During this same period the proportion of establishments employing 250 or more employees increased from 1.8 percent of the total number of establishments to 4.3 percent.

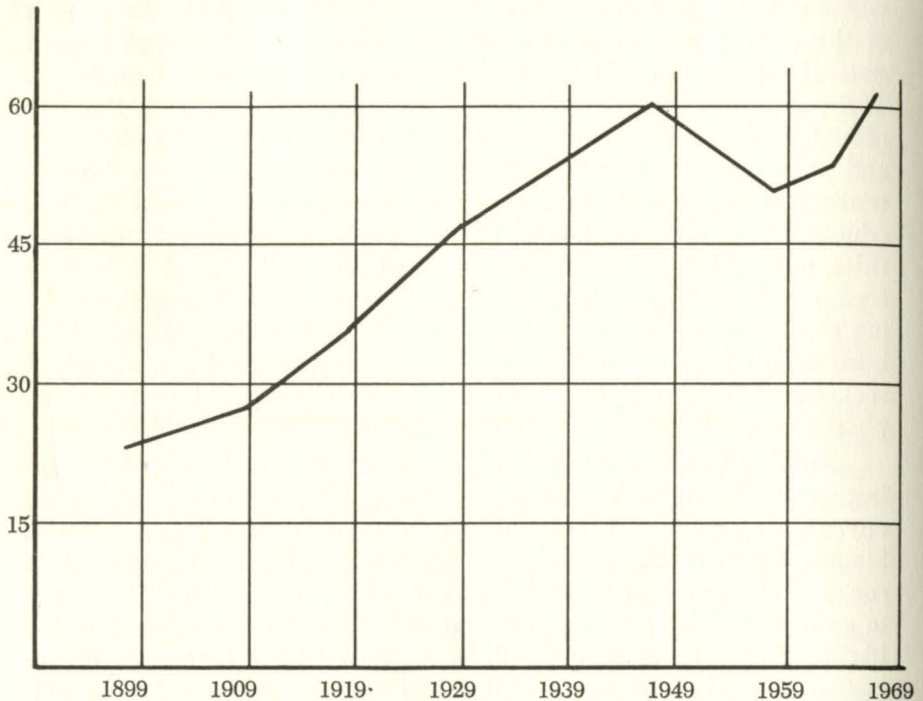
In his essay entitled "Bureaucratic Structure and Personality" Robert Merton has observed that "more and more people discover that to work, they must be employed. For to work one must have tools and equip-

¹² Bernard Barber, *Science and the Social Order* (London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1953), p. 69.

¹³ Anselm L. Strauss and Lee Rainwater, *The Professional Scientist: A Study of American Chemists* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1964), pp. 12-13.

Illustration 1

Average Number of Employees in Manufacturing Establishments: 1899-1967



* The data used in constructing this illustration are taken from the following U. S. Bureau of the Census publications: *U. S. Census of Manufactures: 1954*, Vol. II *Industry Statistics, Part 1 General Summary and Major Groups 20 to 28* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1957), p. 3; and, *Census of Manufactures, 1967, Subject Statistics: Size of Establishments* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1970), p. 2-4.

TABLE 1. Percent of Manufacturing Establishments by Number of Wage Earners or Employees: 1909-1967 *

	20 or less	250 or more	500 or more	1000 or more
1909	82.4	1.8	0.7	0.2
1914	82.7	1.8	0.7	0.2
1919	81.4	2.2	1.0	0.4
1921	75.4	2.5	1.0	0.3
1923	72.4	3.4	1.4	0.5
1947	65.5	4.2	1.9	0.8
1954	68.4	3.8	1.7	0.7
1958	68.1	3.7	1.6	0.7
1963	66.5	3.8	1.6	0.6
1967	64.9	4.3	1.8	0.7

* For the years 1909-1923 the data on employees in establishments includes a category entitled "No Wage Earners."

The data used in constructing this table is taken from the following U. S. Bureau of the Census publications: *U. S. Census of Manufactures: 1954*, Vol. II *Industry Statistics*, Part I *General Summary and Major Groups 20 to 28* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1957), p. 3; and, *Census of Manufactures, 1967, Subject Statistics: Size of Establishments* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1970), p. 2-5.

ment. And the tools and equipment are increasingly available only in bureaucracies, private or public. Consequently, one must be employed by the bureaucracies in order to live."¹⁴ Thus, the attention of the student of organizations is focused upon the demonstrated capacity of bureaucratic organizations to shoulder the costs of the "tools and equipment" necessary for work. What is true for occupations in general is likewise true for those occupations which are called the professions. An additional cost, which bureaucratic organizations have demonstrated the ability to assume, is the cost which derives from integrating both the diverse role specialties within the professions and the various professions for cooperative efforts. For a number of reasons, therefore, the fusion of professionals and bureaucratic organizations can be partially explained because of the absence of alternative possibilities.

IMPACT OF THE FUSION OF PROFESSIONALS AND LARGE-SCALE ORGANIZATIONS

Although the problems resulting from the clash of the aspirations of the individual and the organization's requirements had been pointed out as early as 1844 by Karl Marx,¹⁵ widespread awareness and concern with the resulting conflict has been a relatively recent phenomenon. The primary focus, even with this recent concern, has been upon the state

¹⁴ Robert K. Merton, "Bureaucratic Structure and Personality," *Social Theory and Social Change* (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1949), p. 152.

¹⁵ Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, ed. by Dirk J. Struik, trans. by Martin Milligan (New York: International Publishers, 1964).

of affairs existing after the strain or conflict inducing confrontation has passed. This resulting state of affairs has been variously described as a state of "organizational equilibrium" or as the product of a "fusion process." Chester I. Barnard has suggested that ". . . the efficiency of a cooperative system is its capacity to maintain itself by the individual satisfactions it affords. This may be called its capacity of equilibrium, the balancing of burdens by satisfactions which results in continuance."¹⁶ Herbert A. Simon adopted, essentially intact, this same point of view in his *Administrative Behavior*.¹⁷ The point which is of special interest is that both Barnard and Simon conceive of organizational equilibrium as the state which is the result of the organization's offering the employee enough of the right kinds of inducements and thereby persuading him to sustain the burdens engendered by employment in the organization.

E. Wight Bakke has suggested that the fusion process ". . . is simply simultaneous operation of the socializing and personalizing processes. Their simultaneous operation reconstructs *both* the individual and the organization."¹⁸ Thus, both the individual and the organization are involved in the adaptation to the demands of the other. While the differences between organizational equilibrium and the fusion process may appear to be slight they are none the less significant. The fusion process focuses explicit attention on the reciprocal aspects of adjustment while the focus of organizational equilibrium is explicitly upon the adjustment of the individual to the inducements of the organization and only implicitly, if at all, on the responses of the organization to the demands of the individual.

Kenneth E. Boulding has stated that an "organization cannot survive . . . unless its constituent persons are willing to serve its ends. . . . A man works for [any organization] . . . for essentially the same general reason, that it is 'worth his while.' . . . [Yet] there must always be some small element of identification with the purposes of the organization if effective cooperation of an individual is to be obtained."¹⁹ An analogy can be drawn between the "worth his while" aspect and the "personalizing process." The personalizing process consists of the assertion of those claims which would in fact make it worth the while of an employee to remain within a bureaucratic organization. An analogy can

¹⁶ Chester I. Barnard, *The Functions of the Executive* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1938), p. 57.

¹⁷ Herbert A. Simon, *Administrative Behavior* (2nd ed.; New York: The Macmillan Company, 1957).

¹⁸ E. Wight Bakke, *Organization and the Individual* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952), p. 17.

¹⁹ Kenneth E. Boulding, *The Organizational Revolution* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953), pp. xxx-xxxi.

also be drawn between the "socializing process" and "identification with the purposes of the organization." The organization through the use of various techniques attempts to persuade the individual employee that the objectives which the organization believes to be in its best interest are also in the best interest of the individual. Whether one focuses on a state of organizational equilibrium or the product of a fusion process, the point to be noted is that some minimum amount of congruence of purpose must exist between the individual and the organization.

However, it must be pointed out that an element of strain, if not open conflict, is always present in the process of adjustment of the individual and the organization to each other. Since this element of strain or conflict is present in all processes of fusion or equilibrium one should not be surprised to find it in the relationship of the professional to bureaucratic organizations. Indeed, as noted above, given the extreme differences in attitudes of the professions and large-scale organizations this situation is likely to be even more pronounced.

The condition of strain resulting from the process of adjustment to the personalizing and socializing forces seems to be a generalized phenomenon. In the case of the professional employee in the bureaucratic organization, however, there are two areas where this strain may be particularly pronounced. The first area is the generally unique aspects of a professional career and the allegiances of that career. The second area where the strain resulting from the adjustment of the personalizing and socializing process may be particularly significant for the professional employee in a bureaucratic organization is the nature of authority.

The differences in career orientation noted above can be examined as the product of three distinct elements. First, the reference groups to which the professional looks for clues to appropriate behavior patterns are more likely to be located outside the bureaucratic organization than is the case for the nonprofessional employee. Furthermore, the common characteristic of the professional reference group is that it is composed of members of the profession rather than members of a particular organization. The fact that the primary reference group of the professional is located outside of the bureaucratic organization in which he works leads to a situation in which there is an additional, and usually competing, force attempting to socialize the individual. This socialization into the profession is the particular product of the prolonged period of formalized training which the professional undergoes. On the other hand, "persons for whom the employing organization is the primary reference group are apparently more likely to stress 'organizational and

financial values and rewards, to emphasize organizational prestige and influence, (and) job security within the organization. . . ." ²⁰

The second element which underlies the distinctive career orientation of the professional employee is the valuation which he places on work. "Professional men most frequently [explain] their wish to continue working in terms of their interest in their professional field, or the sense of accomplishment which they [gain] from exercising their professional skills." ²¹ This high evaluation of work for its own sake rather than as a means to an end reflects a similar view held by the professional reference group generally. For the professional work is not only something which is highly valued in itself but also as part of a professional obligation. Not only is the professional's valuation of work in conflict with the pattern generally associated with bureaucratic organizations but the obligation that valuation of work engenders also often conflicts with the needs of bureaucracies.

A third element which emphasizes the difference in career orientation between the professional and other employees in large-scale bureaucracies is the level of involvement in the setting of organizational goals to which each aspires. As a general rule the professional employee believes that either he or his professional colleagues should exercise significant, if not exclusive, influence in setting organizational goals which affect him or his work. The interdependence of organizational goals and work tends to reinforce the professional's aspirations to exercise influence in the setting of organizational goals. A successful career for the professional employee depends in large measure upon a favorable judgment of his work by his professional colleagues rather than organizational superiors. Given the interdependence of organizational goals and his work, the concern of the professional employee with controlling the setting of organizational goals is to be expected.

"The theme of autonomy versus integration of professional activity in organizations . . . is the central problem posed by the interdependence of professions and organizations." ²² This theme is particularly apparent in the second major area where strain between the professional employee and the bureaucratic organization may be pronounced, the nature of authority. When examining the causes of strain between a professional employee and a bureaucratic organization over the nature of authority the three elements used to examine strain existing because of the unique career orientation of the professional can also be employed.

²⁰ Howard M. Vollmer, *A Preliminary Investigation and Analysis of the Role of Scientists in Research Organizations* (Menlo Park, California: Stanford Research Institute, Report to the Air Force Office of Scientific Research, 1962), pp. 55-56.

²¹ Kahn, "Human Relations," p. 54.

²² William Kornhauser, *Scientists in Industry* (Los Angeles: The University of California Press, 1962), p. 195.

The professional's reference group is a particularly significant force in shaping his attitudes toward various modes of authority. The authority which the professional exercises is acquired as a result of his skill or professional expertise. Thus, the authority of the professional in an organization derives from a source which is outside, and not dependent upon, the organization. Professional skill is dependent upon professional training and socialization into the profession. Furthermore, since the professional holds as a tenet of faith that only his professional colleagues are capable of judging the quality of his work it follows that the professional reference group in large measure grants or withholds authority. That this separate source of authority may come into conflict with the authority structure of bureaucratic organizations should come as no surprise. Indeed, as Max Weber has pointed out, "a bureaucratic organization may be limited and indeed must be by agencies which act on their own authority alongside the bureaucratic hierarchy."²³

If the source of authority of the professional was the authority of sanctions, the professional reference group would still exercise significant if not preponderant influence. This is so because of the significance of professional expertise as a source of authority and because of the unique career orientation of the professional. Since the bureaucratic organization is neither the source nor the ultimate judge of professional expertise it is obvious that it cannot make a direct attack on the professional's authority. It is the favorable evaluation of one's work by professional colleagues which can result in positive sanctions (rewards) and their unfavorable judgment can result in negative sanctions. If the professional looks to a reference group outside the formal organization in which he works for both positive and negative sanctions of his work, the authority of the organization must be adversely affected. "Whereas professions find the pattern of 'colleague control' most suitable, the required pattern of authority for formal organizations is 'superordinate control.' . . . As a result of these different types of required authority, it is inevitable that there be a certain amount of strain when professional roles confront organizational necessities."²⁴

For the professional in a bureaucratic organization "the occurrence of arbitrary, direct, and paternalistic authority not only evokes resentment but resistance to such working conditions." This can be understood in light of the points noted above. Furthermore, the strain be-

²³ Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, ed. by Talcott Parsons, trans. by Talcott Parsons and A.M. Henderson (New York: The Free Press, 1964), p. 392.

²⁴ Bernard Barber, "Some Problems in the Sociology of Professions," in *The Professions in America*, ed. by Kenneth S. Lynn (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965), p. 25.

tween the professional and the organization can be examined not only as the result of the three elements above but also as a stimulus which reinforces those elements. That is, in rejecting the authority structure of a bureaucracy the professional turns even more to the professional reference group and in turn the evaluations of the reference group with regard to attitudes toward work and involvement in the setting of goals are reinforced.

WHAT HAPPENS THEN?

One of the most distinctive consequences of the fusion of professional personnel and bureaucratic organizations is the existence of a condition of either strain or conflict. The condition of strain or conflict is the result of the competition of the aspirations of the professional employee and the demands of the bureaucratic organization. The condition of strain or conflict can be viewed as either the result of a contest between the professional employee and his employing organization (as such it resembles a conflict between two antagonists) or as strain or conflict induced within the professional as the result of the competing demands of the professional reference group and the employing organization. This second classification of strain or conflict merits particular attention because it is reasonable to believe that it is this category of strain or conflict which is the underlying cause of the more overt form of strain or conflict between the professional employee and the bureaucratic organization.

If one accepts as valid the premise that the psychologically healthy individual desires to reduce the strain which results from the demands of competing reference groups, what kinds of behavior can one expect from the professional employee employed in bureaucratic organizations? One general response is that the individual will attempt to modify the condition which induces the strain by modifying the demands which are placed upon him by either one or both of the reference groups. An example of this pattern of behavior is the personalizing process of the individual which is one of the elements of the fusion process which is discussed above. That is, the individual may attempt to modify the demands of the organization and thereby either reduce or eliminate the conditions which produced the strain in the first place. It must be pointed out of course that the personalizing process can be directed at any reference group, the professional as well as the organizational.

A second general response which is available to the individual is to embrace one or the other of the two competing reference groups. Implicit in this alternative is the notion of rejecting the remaining set of demands. An often noted example of this particular alternative is the enactment of an "organization man" role by individuals. This would be

an example of the successful socialization of an employee by the employing organization. Conversely, the professional reference group attempts to socialize the individual in the development of the professional role. In any case an individual's role is in large measure the product of a successful socialization process by a reference group.

A third response that an individual might choose to pursue in an attempt to reduce the strain or conflict resulting from the demands of competing reference groups is to remove himself from the position which induces the strain or conflict. This implies that either of two courses of action is available to the individual. First, the individual can join an organization where the demands of the organization are not in conflict with the requirements incumbent upon the individual because of his professional status. Second, he can embrace an occupational reference group which does not make demands upon him which are inconsistent with the requirements of the organization in which he is employed. It is also possible that the individual may achieve this congruence between the demands of his professional reference group and the large-scale organization by undertaking adjustments in both. The theoretical possibility of achieving congruence between the demands of these two competing reference groups is particularly significant for the development of organizational theory in an era in which the growth of the numbers of professionals in large-scale organizations is an increasingly widespread phenomenon.

²⁵ Simon Marcson, *The Scientist in American Industry* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960) p. 125.