

WHAT DO PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYEES WANT? //

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Professor Arthur M. Ross

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by
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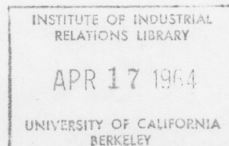


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I. THE PROFESSIONAL

Years ago, careers in the clergy, military, law, medicine, and science were considered the primary professions. Today, more and more people are calling themselves professionals. Where there was once the manager and the worker, there are now countless numbers of occupations in between.

The nature of the job has changed. Hours are shorter; work conditions are better; and, compensation is more just. A vast number of jobs today have a professional connotation. They each have their own training and technical language.¹ At the present time it is difficult to determine whether some occupations could be considered professions or not.

Theodore Caplow says that almost all white-collar jobs, those which are non-routine, are in the process of being professionalized to some extent. Newspaper reporters are now known as

¹Arthur M. Ross, in a lecture for B.A. 255, Seminar in Industrial Relations (University of California, Berkeley, September 16, 1963).

journalists; real estate agents are known as realtors; undertakers are known as morticians; and, junk dealers are known as salvage consultants.² Caplow lists four necessary steps leading to the professionalization of an occupation.

First, a professional association is established. Qualification standards are set to keep out those individuals who are not qualified.

Second, the occupational name is changed.

Third, a code of ethics is adopted.

Fourth, prolonged political agitation is carried on in order to secure favorable legislation to support the occupational barriers which the association has established.

At the same time these developments are taking place, a training facility for the occupation is established by the association.

The public is generally in agreement when considering law, medicine, clergy, engineers, and scientists as professions and professionals. At the present time, teaching is becoming accepted as

²Theodore Caplow, The Sociology of Work (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1954), p. 139.

a legitimate³ profession.

The public seems to accept those occupations as professions which: (1) involve advanced learning, usually in the liberal arts or sciences, and usually obtained at a college or university, and, (2) usually involve mental rather than manual work. But on the more academic level, William Kornhauser's views are more explicit.⁴

Kornhauser says that professionals hold at least four values: expertise, autonomy, commitment, and responsibility.

Expertise means that specialized knowledge and skills are required in order to perform a specialized function. The knowledge and skills must be obtained through extensive training and experience.

Autonomy means that the qualified professional is better able to determine how his job should be performed.

³"Legitimate" is used to distinguish a true profession, such as law, from an occupation like salvage consultant, which may not be a profession in the true sense of the word.

⁴William Kornhauser, Scientists in Industry (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), p. 1.

Commitment means that the professional occupation is worthy of a lifetime of devotion, and it carries its own reward.

Responsibility means that the professional must maintain the professional standards of his occupation.

What I am attempting to do here is give an impression of what a professional is. A thorough and accurate definition is beyond the scope of this report, for it is a highly complex and sophisticated problem. However, the above material forms a base from which to work. In the following consideration of what professional employees want, the study of the problem will exclude professions like the salvage consultants or morticians. It may be applied to those occupations which are generally accepted by the public and those in academic circles as professional.

The title of this report includes the word "employee." Therefore, the independently practicing lawyer and doctor will not be considered, but only those professionals who are employees of an organization will come under consideration.

Perhaps the ideal method of approaching the

problem would be to interview representatives of the various professions. This is impossible for this study due to the limited time available. Therefore, a "back door" approach has been used. An examination of the literature available on professional problems and conflicts has been made. In this manner, I will attempt to discover, by means of examining professional conflicts and problems, what these people want.

The greatest amount of literature on the subject deals with engineers and scientists. Consequently, most of the material which will be presented in this report will deal with these two types of professional employees.

II. PROBLEMS, CONFLICTS, AND FRUSTRATIONS OF PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYEES

Each professional employee brings with him to his work, the values and attitudes he developed during his former experiences. This is true for all employees. But there is a difference between the professional and other employees. The professional has had a minimum of four years in college. He is a member of a profession which has long standing traditions, attitudes, and codes. These codes, standards, and ethics were originally established to meet the needs of independent professionals; and when the professional becomes a salaried employee in industry, he finds that there are conflicting demands placed on him by the industrial organization on the one hand, and his profession on the other.⁵

George Strauss spoke of the "ideals of science versus the ideals of business"; a summary

⁵Bernard Goldstein, "Unions and the Professional Employee," Journal of Business, XXVII, No. 4 (October 1954), p. 277.

of these conflicting ideals illustrates the many problems these professional employees face.⁶

Ideals of Pure Science

furthering knowledge
research as an end in
itself
rewards through prestige
research findings belong
to the scientific com-
munity and should be
disseminated
publishing of results
evaluation by peers
through free discus-
sion in scientific
journals
senior colleague who
guides
status based on know-
ledge (status car-
ries no power of
command)
decisions made by group
all findings subject to
criticism; nothing
ever final
acceptance based on
logic and proof

Ideals of Pure Business

making money
research as a means to
an end
rewards through pay
research findings belong
to the company and
should be guarded
trade secrets
evaluation by boss
boss who directs
status based on position
decisions made by higher-
ups
boss's decisions are final
acceptance based on power

⁶George Strauss, "Managing Engineers and Scientists" (unpublished report presented to the class of B. A. 190, Organization and Administration, University of California, Berkeley, Spring 1963.)

Ideals of Pure Science

perfectionist - black and
white answers

strong taboos against
commercialization and
popularization

Ideals of Pure Business

practical - compromise

taboos against theoretic-
al thinking

When these ideals are observed in real-life situations, many problems, conflicts of interest, and frustrations become evident. The professional employee desires recognition from his professional colleagues, even though the firm may give him financial reward. He gains this recognition and prestige by publishing the findings of his work in scientific journals, and by presenting his findings before various professional groups and societies. But the business ideals of the organization he is employed by cannot permit this. The organization is a business where competition is keen and research findings must be kept closely guarded secrets. Consequently, the professional employee is prevented from attaining recognition from his profession, and he is also frustrated because of his professional ideal of furthering knowledge. He cannot pass on his knowledge to his professional community.

Professionals involved in research work want

to some day have the opportunity to work on a problem of their own choosing. "Perhaps the single most important professional incentive is freedom to pursue one's own research."⁷ When a person is working in a university laboratory, he usually finds time to work on his own ideas. But this is generally not the case in industry. The business firm is concerned with developing a marketable and profitable product. In its development, the individual professional employee, in many cases, is only one of many working on a narrow aspect of a big project. In many cases his work might be very routine. This would cause much concern and dissatisfaction among the professional employees occupying the lower positions. "...those higher up do perform more challenging tasks, (but) few have the authority to pursue independent kinds of research."⁸

The professional employee holds certain standards of performance in line with his occupation. In science, it may be precision and accuracy and thoroughness. The professional would want to get

⁷Kornhauser, op. cit., p. 131.

⁸Goldstein, loc. cit.

to the very base of a problem, taking what ever time is necessary to accomplish this goal. The business firm, however, needs answers to the immediate problem. The firm needs the answer now.

A traditional reward in industry is that of promotion. And in industry, as organizations have increased in size, managerial talent has been developed to handle the many complex problems of control, coordination, policy formulation, decision making, personnel, etc. The professional employee has been trained in a highly technical field. When a scientist or engineer is promoted into the managerial hierarchy, he must devote much of his time to these managerial functions, and a smaller portion of it to his professional work. The promotion, in these cases, is made on the basis of the employee's excellence in scientific work. The skills of this man, as a good scientist or engineer, are no longer being put to the highest and best use. Furthermore, there is no guarantee that he will be a good manager.⁹

⁹George Strauss, "Professionalism and Occupational Associations", Industrial Relations, II, No. 3 (May 1963), p. 13.

Peter Drucker has shown that many of the difficulties which have come about between employers and professional employees are a result of establishing personnel programs for the professional employee. It is not unusual for a company to apply the same programs used for production and clerical workers to the professional employees.¹⁰ Little effort is made to find out what parts of these programs should be revised to fit the professional needs. And, many professional employees feel that they should be consulted about any plans which involve them and their work environment.

William Kornhauser points out conflicts between the "client" and the professional employee concerning his professional values of expertise, autonomy, commitment, and responsibility.¹¹

Expertise: the client wants immediate results and does not care for the professional procedure; the client feels he should decide who is competent.

Autonomy: the client wants control of the

¹⁰Peter F. Drucker, "Management and the Professional Employee," Harvard Business Review, XXX, No. 3 (May-June 1952), pp. 80-90.

¹¹Kornhauser, op. cit., p. 2.

work and wants to direct how it is to be done.

Commitment: the client wants the loyalty of the professional employee.

Responsibility: the client feels he is responsible for discipline.

These conflicts, frustrations, and problems are more likely to occur among some scientists and engineers than others. Herbert Shepard separates these professionals into two classifications, the cosmopolitans and locals.¹² The cosmopolitans identify themselves with their profession and colleagues. The locals are good "company men." They take less of an interest in their work and are more concerned with personal advancement. The local falls somewhat short of being a pure scientist and consequently experiences fewer of the problems confronting the cosmopolitan.

Still more desires of professional employees come to light in a study of research and development

¹²Herbert Shepard, "Nine Dilemmas in Industrial Research," Administrative Science Quarterly, I, No. 3 (December 1956), pp. 296-298; also see, Robert Dubin, The World of Work (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1958), pp. 225-258.

personnel by Shepard. Under project organization, a group is formed to do a particular job, to solve a particular problem. When the mission has been completed, the group is dissolved. On the other hand, the functional organization is of a more permanent nature. Permanent specialist groups are formed and problems are routed to particular groups.¹³

The project organization has some advantages and disadvantages. It builds team spirit and obtains better results in the areas of invention and innovation. However, this group provides no clear lines of advancement for its members and status is not clear. The group gets the credit rather than the individual.

With the functional organization, the most effective skills of each professional employee are being used most efficiently, and effectively. The group, in this case, will be more professionally oriented, and its members will have a greater sense of security because of the group's permanence. Reward, recognition, and advancement are all more

¹³Herbert Shepard, "Pattern of Organization for Applied Research and Development," Journal of Business, XXXIX, No. 1 (January 1956), pp. 52-58.

clearly preceived.

Examination of the literature concerned with the supervision of professional employees reveals several factors which are very important. A professional employee has need of an "authority system which recognizes the characteristics of his professional role."¹⁴ The system must give him autonomy. The professional employee will resent direction by non-professional. The professional needs the opportunity to participate in decisions concerning his work environment. These factors stem from the manner in which control is generally exercised by the two systems of management (i.e., management by a non-professional and management by a professional).¹⁵ Under the executive authority system, control of the employee is usually achieved by means of direct instructions and domination. The colleague authority system, however, exerts control through the use of indirect persuasion and

¹⁴ Simon Marcson, The Scientist in American Industry (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), p. 143.

¹⁵ Simon Marcson calls these two general types executive authority systems and colleague authority systems, respectively.

manipulation.

Salaries are, of course, of importance to the professional employee. Both the absolute level of salaries and their relation to those paid elsewhere are of great concern.¹⁶ There are a number of problems in this area which result in conflicts between professional employees and employers. Management must keep salaries flexible enough so they may be fitted to each individual. But, at the same time, management has to maintain close control of the expenses incurred.

The second major problem is the evaluation of each professional. The employee must be made to feel that the evaluation is a fair one. Ideally, from the professional employee's point of view, peers would make the evaluation and grant salary increases on the basis of the employee's contribution.

George Strauss maintains that while this may be what the professional employees want, they "reject management's use of salary increases as a means of inducing them to work for management's

¹⁶Graduate School of Business Administration, "Motivation of Scientists and Engineers" (Stanford: Stanford University, April 1959), p. 19.

objectives." And he goes on to say that this results in salaries often being determined "...on a salary-curve basis, which is almost straight seniority."¹⁷

The foregoing discussion of the various problems, conflicts, and frustrations experienced by the professional employees points out many of their wants. I do not believe that all professional employees necessarily share the values and beliefs brought out by this report.¹⁸ Perhaps there exists an over-emphasis of the professional employee's desire for freedom, and an under-emphasis of the desires for security.¹⁹

Nevertheless, the wants of the professional

¹⁷George Strauss, in a lecture for B.A. 257, Management Policies and the Labor Factor (University of California, Berkeley, May 15, 1963).

¹⁸Furthermore, such a conclusion cannot be validly drawn on the basis of the evidence presented here, for the scope of this inquiry has been too narrow. It has been limited to engineers and scientists; and, they unquestionably differ in many respects from lawyers, doctors, and other professional employees.

¹⁹Leif Gjestland, "Unionism Among Professions" (unpublished report, B. A. 256, Seminar in Collective Bargaining, Industrial Relations Library, Berkeley: University of California, January 14, 1959), pp. 12; also see, Bernard Goldstein, op. cit., p. 282.

employee, as expressed here, can be very useful to those employers who might have these people working for them.

III. SUMMARY

This report has indicated a large number of wants which might be applicable to most professional employees. Some, I feel, are of greater importance than others, and would be very important to keep in mind when dealing with the professional. These cover three main areas: the ideals and values generally held by the professional employee, supervision, and advancement.

Ideals and values: the professional values and ideals are most important in understanding this kind of employee. A good idea of how these people feel would aid in establishing and maintaining good relations with them.

Supervision: technically trained managers would be best for the professional employee. The best method of control is one which recognizes the characteristics of the employees. A system of supervision which is permissive, allows the individual employee autonomy and some freedom to pursue problems of his own choosing, and treats employees on an individual basis would probably be more desirable.

Advancement: the professional employee

wants to be evaluated by his peers. Advancement should be made on the basis of individual contribution. And, the employee should be permitted to advance in the direction for which he is best suited, and likes the best. If the man wants to remain in research, he should be able to achieve a salary and status comperable to another who has taken the administrative path.

The factors indicated here, and their application, will differ from situation to situation. They are not meant to be inflexable rules, but only guides.

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