

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE ROLE ORIENTATION OF
THE EMPLOYEES OF A PARTICULAR BUREAUCRACY

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ABSTRACT

Factors Influencing the Role Orientation of the Employees of a Particular Bureaucracy

In this study an attempt is made to measure the relationship between the roles bureaucratic employees have enacted in the past, and/or are enacting in the present, and service orientation. It was hypothesized that the independent variables: (1) formal contact with the client-farmer; (2) having served in a high contact position; (3) social contact with farm people, and (4) farm background, would be positively related with the dependent variable - service orientation. Data were gathered by personally interviewing eighty-seven employees of four selected Branches of the Manitoba Department of Agriculture. Service orientation was measured by a three item Guttman-type Scale.

The findings indicate little or no relationship between the roles bureaucratic employees have enacted in the past, and are enacting in the present, and service orientation. The author suggested one of two reasons for these findings. Either the three item scale was measuring another variable or variables and not service orientation, or it was due to a major proportion of the employees studied being professionals (85 per cent). The author chose to direct his attention to the latter suggestion. This was based upon preliminary evidence found in the data.

The professional has internalized an "ideology of service" based upon "affective neutrality". Therefore, personal factors, i.e., formal contact with the client-farmer, having served in a high contact position, having social contact with farmers, or having been raised on a farm, had

no impact upon the already existing service orientation of these professionals. The affective neutrality of these professionals was not affected by these personal factors.

However, it was found that other variables had an effect upon service orientation, and the affective neutrality of these professionals. These factors are: (1) sex, (2) residence, (3) having on job contact with relatively the same client-farmers, (4) mixing business with pleasure, and (5) having social contact with family members who are farming.

Finally, it was suggested by the author that the service ethic which the professional has internalized was being reinforced by the Manitoba Department of Agriculture. Preliminary evidence suggests that this organization provides its employees with a great deal of freedom in the belief that this will enable them to provide the most effective and best possible service to the farming community of Manitoba.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Problem

Robert K. Merton, in his article "Bureaucratic Structure and Personality," discusses various types of dysfunctions which have a tendency to arise in the ideal-type bureaucracy as set forth by Max Weber. One of these dysfunctions is the tendency of bureaucratic employees "to adhere to the rules of the bureaucracy, originally conceived as means, transforming them into an end-in-itself." (Merton, 1957: 199) The rules and regulations of the bureaucracy take on supreme meaning (exaggerated importance) for the employee, and they, rather than the goals, become the guiding principle in his interaction with the bureaucracy's clientele. Francis and Stone state: "Merton implies that an emphasis upon procedure (rules) is a frequent if not inevitable result of bureaucratic organization. Rule orientation is a widespread, persistent phenomenon in bureaucracy." (Francis and Stone, 1956: 30,31)

Merton's thesis concerning the impact of bureaucracy upon the employee is a logical extension of Max Weber's classical theory of the ideal-type bureaucracy, not a bureaucracy which actually exists or can exist. In studies of actual bureaucracies, Page (1946), Turner (1947), Davis (1948), Reissman (1949), Gouldner (1954, 1957-1958), Blau (1955), Francis and Stone (1956), Blau and Scott (1962), these authors found that variation exists not only in the formal structures of bureaucracies but also in the role orientation of their employees. They found that the role

orientation of bureaucratic employees will vary from rule orientation to service orientation.

These studies have dealt with factors which contribute to the variation in the formal structures of bureaucracies, but they did not study fully those factors which may contribute to the variation in the role orientation of the bureaucracies' employees. Thus, the purpose of this study was to contribute to that body of knowledge which deals with variation in the role orientation of bureaucratic employees.

Specifically, this thesis concerns itself with the study of certain factors which may contribute to the variation in role orientation of employees of a particular bureaucracy. Role orientation was defined for this study as being either rule orientation or service orientation.

The author defined rule orientation as "the tendency of an individual to make following rules an end-in-itself." Service orientation was defined "as the tendency to place service to clients as paramount over rule-following." (Francis and Stone, 1956: 126)

Main Objective

The main objective of this thesis was to enlarge upon Robert K. Merton's theory concerning the impact of bureaucracy upon the employee. In extending Max Weber's classical theory, Merton was primarily interested in the dysfunction known as "rule orientation" which can arise when the employee performs the bureaucratic role (defined as the prescribed role the employee is expected to perform in the bureaucracy). As this was not an actual or real situation, he did not concern himself with actual

variations in role orientation which do arise because of individual definitions by each bureaucratic employee on how the prescribed role should be performed. Turner (1947), Reissman (1949), Francis and Stone (1956), and Gouldner (1957-1958) have shown that variation in role orientation of bureaucratic employees does exist, and this variation is due to individual definitions derived from the person's experiences.

Therefore, the first objective of this study was to measure the variation in the role orientation of the employees of four selected branches of the Manitoba Department of Agriculture. The author intended to determine the degree to which role orientation varies from rule orientation to service orientation. The second objective was to determine whether certain factors, specifically the past and present experiences of these bureaucratic employees, were related to role orientation.

Survey of the literature, Gouldner (1954), Blau (1955, 1960-1961), Francis and Stone (1956), Thomas (1959), Blau and Scott (1962), suggest that it is necessary to control on certain variables as they may exhibit a relationship to our dependent variable, role orientation. These variables are (1) educational background, (2) length of governmental employment, (3) position in hierarchy, (4) role orientation of immediate superior, and (5) degree of bureaucratization of the organization.

Theoretical Framework

A clear understanding of the thesis problem and subsequent hypothesis can be derived by an exploration of Max Weber's classical theory of bureaucracy, Robert K. Merton's extension of Weber's classical theory,

and studies which were undertaken as a result of these theories and which have enlarged upon them.

Robert K. Merton, et al. (1952: 17), consider Max Weber to be the founder of the systematic study of bureaucracy. "Beyond all others, Max Weber may be regarded as the founder of the systematic study of bureaucracy; his formulations have been the fountainhead for much theoretical and empirical enquiry into bureaucracy."

Max Weber, in his exposition of bureaucracy, explained that this type of organization is unique in that it is able to attain maximum efficiency in its operation and accomplishment of its goals. The problem of any large, complex organization, is the ability to control the actions of its members, and thereby orient their actions towards accomplishing the specific goals of the organization. According to Max Weber, bureaucracy is able to solve this problem most efficiently because of its structural characteristics.

The superior administrative efficiency of bureaucracy is the expected result of its various characteristics as outlined by Weber. Max Weber stated:

Experience tends universally to show that the purely monocratic variety of bureaucracy is, from a purely technical point of view, capable of attaining the highest degree of efficiency and is in this sense formally the most rational known means of carrying out imperative control over human beings. It is superior to any form in precision, in stability, in the stringency of its discipline, and in its reliability. It thus makes possible a particularly high degree of calculability of results for the heads of the organization and for those acting in relation to it. It is finally superior both in intensive efficiency and in the scope of its operations, and is formally capable of application to all kinds of administrative tasks. (Weber, 1964: 337)

According to Weber, various characteristics define his concept of bureaucracy. They are:

(1) Fixed and official areas of jurisdiction. Each organization has definitive positions with corresponding rights and obligations. Also, each position demands its occupants to exhibit technical competence in a particular area of specialty.

(2) A graded system of authority. This means that there is a firmly ordered system of super- and subordination in which there is supervision of the lower offices by the higher ones.

(3) A system of central files.

(4) A set of special skills called office management.

(5) Official activities which demand the full-time personnel, and as a corollary the official life of the employee is divorced from his personal life, particularly with reference to finances.

(6) Systematic and general rules which define procedure, and which are followed.

"There are, moreover, a set of secondary characteristics summed up in Weber's discussion of the "position of the official." The official is appointed not elected; he received a fixed salary, and the concept of career is fully established. All these characteristics taken together represent bureaucracy in its full form." (Gerth and Mills, 1958: 196-8, Francis and Stone, 1956: 5)

According to Peter M. Blau, Max Weber's ideal-type bureaucracy" . . . does not represent an average of the attributes of all existing bureaucracies, but a pure type, derived by abstracting the most characteristic

bureaucratic aspects of all known organizations. Since perfect bureaucratization is never fully realized, no empirical organization corresponds exactly to this scientific construct." However, one thing must be kept in mind; Weber intended this ideal-type construct ". . . . as a guide in empirical research, not as a substitute for it. By indicating the characteristics of bureaucracy in its pure form it directs the researcher to those aspects of organization that he must examine in order to determine the extent of their bureaucratization." (Blau, 1968: 34)

Sociological literature abounds with studies which have utilized Max Weber's classical theory of bureaucracy as their guide, and have found variation in the extent of bureaucratization of the various organizations investigated. The authors of some of these studies are: Page (1946), Davis (1948), Gouldner (1954), Blau (1955), Francis and Stone (1956), Blau and Scott (1962).

Robert K. Merton stated: ". . . . the positive attainments and functions of bureaucratic organizations are emphasized by Weber and the internal stresses and strains of such structures are almost wholly neglected." (Merton, 1957: 197)

In discussing one of the dysfunctions which arises as a result of the employee performing the bureaucratic role, he stated:

The bureaucratic structure exerts a constant pressure upon the official to be methodical, prudent, disciplined. If the bureaucracy is to operate successfully, it must attain a high degree of reliability of behavior, an unusual degree of conformity with prescribed patterns of action. Discipline can be effective only if the ideal patterns are buttressed by strong sentiments which entail devotion to one's duties, a keen sense of the limitation of one's authority and competence, and methodical performance of routine activities. The efficiency of social structure depends ultimately upon infusing group participants with

appropriate attitudes and sentiments. In order to ensure discipline, these sentiments are often more intense than is technically necessary. This very emphasis leads to a transference of the sentiments from the aims of the organization into the particular details of behavior required by the rules. Adherence to the rules, originally conceived as a means, becomes transformed into an end-in-itself. Discipline, readily interpreted as conformance with regulations, whatever the situation, is seen not as a measure designed for specific purposes but becomes an immediate value in the life-organization of the bureaucrat. Formalism, even ritualism, ensues, with an unchallenged insistence upon punctilious adherence to formalized procedures. This may be exaggerated to the point where primary concern with conformity to the rules interferes with the achievement of the purposes of the organization, in which case we have the familiar phenomenon of the technicism or red tape of the official. An extreme product of this process of displacement of goals is the bureaucratic virtuoso, who never forgets a single rule binding his action and hence is unable to assist many of his clients.

Definite features of the bureaucratic structure may be seen to conduce to these sentiments. The bureaucrat's official life is planned for him in terms of a graded career, through the organizational devices of promotion by seniority, pensions, incremental salaries, etc., all of which are designed to provide incentives for disciplined action and conformity to the official regulations. The official is tacitly expected to and largely does adapt his thoughts, feelings, and actions to the prospect of his career. But these very devices which increase the probability of conformance also lead to an over-concern with strict adherence to regulations; and such over-concern induces timidity, conservatism, and technicism. Displacement of sentiments from goals into means is fostered by the tremendous symbolic significance of the means (rules). (Merton, 1957: 198-201)

Merton's thesis was primarily concerned with the impact of the structural characteristics of bureaucracy upon the employee as he performed his bureaucratic role. However, if one is to realistically consider the impact of role enactment upon the person (defined by Sarbin as the overt performance of a person), one must also consider the person's previous experience, derived from past role enactments, which contribute to variation in his role enactment in bureaucracy. (Sarbin, 1954: 223-258)

Leonard Reissman in his study, "Role Conceptions in Bureaucracy,"

enlarged upon Merton's thesis. He stated: ". . . allowances must be made for a range of individual role fulfillment based upon that person's experiences and values, if the concept of a social role is to be more adequately expressive of an actual individual. The alternative is rejected - that of structuring the social role exclusively in terms of the situation and ideal behavior derived therefrom with little or no concern for modification due to individual definitions. Such an approach would lead to formulations of behavior based solely upon logically derived extension of the ideal-type concept of bureaucratic organizations." (Reissman, 1949: 306) He found in his study of state bureaucrats a variation in role orientation; employees were professionally oriented, service oriented, and rule oriented. This variation was due to individual definition.

Alvin W. Gouldner (1957-1958) found in his study of faculty members of a small liberal arts college, which he implied was a bureaucracy, a variation in role orientation. The role orientation of the faculty members ranged from professional orientation to bureaucratic orientation. Those employees who were professionally oriented exhibited least rule tropism (rule orientation), while those who were oriented to the bureaucracy which employed them varied in degree of rule tropism. According to Gouldner, this variation in role orientation is accounted for by roles which are enacted simultaneously with the prescribed role, even though they are not prescribed by the situation. The faculty member is expected to enact the "faculty role"; however, such factors as membership in a professional group, dedication as a local citizen, faculty ranking (i.e.,

professor, associate professor, etc.), ethnic background, sex, age, race, all tend to modify his enactment of the prescribed role.

Ralph H. Turner (1947), in his study of the United States Navy Dispersing Officer, found variation in the role orientation of this bureaucratic official; this variation ranged from rule orientation to service orientation. One of the factors which had an impact upon how he enacted his prescribed role was his friendship patterns. Close friends would make demands upon him for extra supplies which he could not refuse. Thus roles which a bureaucrat enacts outside the organization have an impact upon how he enacts his prescribed role.

Roy G. Francis and Robert C. Stone conducted a study of a Federal-State Division of Employment Security. They found a variation in the role orientation of the bureaucratic employees which varied from rule orientation to service orientation. Also, they found a significant relationship between rule orientation and the employee's not having contact with organizational clientele (people who were seeking employment). They suggested from this finding the possible crucial role of the client in determining how the employee will enact his prescribed role. (Francis and Stone, 1956: 72)

These studies have directed the author's attention to certain factors which modify the employee's enactment of his bureaucratic role. These factors consist of the experiences derived from the enactment of roles. Employees bring with them individual definitions of the situation which tend to modify the enactment of their prescribed roles. Therefore bureaucratic employees can be expected to exhibit a variation from rule

orientation to service orientation, depending upon their experiences.

General Propositions

1. Role orientations of bureaucratic employees will vary from rule orientation to service orientation.
2. Variation in role orientation of bureaucratic employees will be associated with roles the employees have enacted in the past and are enacting in the present.

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

Population Studied

The population studied were the eighty-seven employees in four branches of the Manitoba Department of Agriculture and who are located in the main offices in Winnipeg. These four branches are: (1) Animal Industry, (2) Economics and Publications, (3) Extension Services, and (4) Soils and Crops.

The main offices of the Manitoba Department of Agriculture are located in Winnipeg. The Department is divided into the following branches:

- (1) Veterinary Services
- (2) Soils and Crops
- (3) Extension Service
- (4) Animal Industry
- (5) Economics and Publications
- (6) Co-op and Credit Union Service
- (7) Administrative Services

The following commissions, boards, and corporations, although not part of the Manitoba Department of Agriculture, report to the legislature through the Manitoba Minister of Agriculture:

- (1) Hog Marketing Commission
- (2) Crop Insurance Corporation
- (3) Agricultural Credit and Development Corporation

- (4) Manitoba Marketing Board
- (5) Milk Control Board
- (6) Arda-Fred Administration

As mentioned previously, this thesis concerns itself with eighty-seven employees of the (1) Soils and Crops Branch, (2) Extension Services Branch, (3) Animal Industry Branch, and (4) Economics Branch. On the basis of discussion with the assistant deputy minister of Agriculture, the assistant director of Extension Services and the former assistant director of the Economics and Publications Branch, it was felt that the employees of these four branches exhibit those characteristics or factors this author was interested in studying.

Three of the four selected branches, Soils and Crops, Extension Services, and Animal Industry, are located in the Norquay Building, while the fourth, the Economics Branch, is located a few blocks away in the Broadway Building. The publications section of the Economics Branch is located in the Norquay Building.

The overall objective of the Manitoba Department of Agriculture is "to help farm people make a better living from the resources at their disposal." (Department Bulletin, 1968: 2) The objectives of these four branches, which have been formulated to accomplish the general objective, are: (Department Bulletin, 1968: 3-9)

(1) Soils and Crops Branch - responsibility for information related to the production and marketing of cereal crops, oil-seeds forage, fruits and vegetables, as well as administration of many programs in the Province.

(2) Extension Service Branch - responsibility for the provision of extension education programs relating to agriculture, youth development and rural life, for people living in rural Manitoba.

(3) Animal Industry Branch - responsibility for the provision of production information to enable producers to increase their income, and to benefit the overall economy of the Province. Major emphasis is given to livestock improvement programs for dairy and beef cattle, sheep, swine and poultry.

(4) Economics Branch - responsibility for the dissemination of farm management and marketing information in the Province, and the enactment of projects in applied research.

Manitoba Department of Agriculture as a Bureaucracy

The author defines the Manitoba Department of Agriculture as a bureaucracy. It contains those characteristics as set forth by Max Weber in his classical theory of bureaucracy.

In reviewing the Department's private and public literature, the Manitoba Civil Service Act, and in discussing matters with some of its employees, it has been found that the Manitoba Department of Agriculture exhibits the following characteristics:

(1) Official positions requiring special areas of competence and which have clearly defined rights and obligations. The occupants of such positions are appointed, rather than elected, and these appointments are based upon some measure of evaluation of their technical competence.

(2) A hierarchy of authority which is monocratically structured beginning with the Deputy Minister followed by the Assistant Deputy

Minister, the Directors and Assistant Directors of the various branches, and the employees of these Branches. The Deputy Minister is responsible to the Minister who is an elected member of the legislative assembly and who is appointed by the Premier of Manitoba.

(3) A system of files which contains documents of what has occurred, and which serves as an accessible memory for the conduct of future business.

(4) The expectation that each employee will exhibit skill in the management of his office in relation to the other offices in the Department of Agriculture.

(5) The existence of set hours in which the employee is to fulfill the responsibilities of his position, and for which he receives a fixed salary. The employee of the Manitoba Department of Agriculture is a civil servant, and under the civil service act he is required to take an oath of allegiance which forbids misuse of his official position for private gain. (Act, 1960: 24)

(6) The existence of systematic and general rules governing how an employee is to conduct himself as a civil servant as set forth by the Manitoba Civil Service Act, the agreement between the Manitoba Government and the Manitoba Government Employees' Association, and the Department of Agriculture. Also, the existence of systematic and general rules concerning how each Department of Agriculture employee is to conduct his office in relation to other departmental offices, and with the public whom he serves. (Agreement, 1969: 11-12)

(7) Promotion based upon merit and security from arbitrary dismissal.

Employment by the Manitoba Department of Agriculture can be viewed by the employee as a career. The Manitoba Civil Service Act (1960) explicitly states, "Selection for appointment, promotion or transfer to a position shall be based on merit with a view to developing a civil service comprising well qualified personnel with abilities, skills, training and competence required to advance from the level of initial appointment through a reasonable career consistent with the type of work and the classes of positions pertinent thereto." (Act, 1960: 13)

As was mentioned in the first chapter, studies by Turner (1947), Reissman (1949), Sarbin (1954), Francis and Stone (1956), and Gouldner (1957-1958), directed the author's attention to certain factors which modify the employee's enactment of his bureaucratic role. These factors consist of the experiences derived from the enactment of roles. Employees bring with them individual definitions of the situation which tend to modify the enactment of their prescribed roles. Therefore, bureaucratic employees can be expected to exhibit a variation from rule orientation to service orientation, depending upon their experiences. Thus,

General Propositions

1. Role orientations of bureaucratic employees will vary from rule orientation to service orientation.
2. Variation in role orientation of bureaucratic employees will be associated with roles the employees have enacted in the past and are enacting in the present.

These general propositions were further refined through a statement of the specific hypotheses which the author wished to test.

Specific Hypotheses

The author suggested that in his empirical investigation of the role orientation of Manitoba Department of Agriculture employees, the following hypotheses would be found tenable:

(1) There is a positive relationship between formal contact with client-farmers and service orientation.

(2) There is a positive relationship between having served in a high contact position and service orientation.

(3) There is a positive relationship between social contact with farm people and service orientation.

(4) There is a positive relationship between farm background and service orientation.

Instrument (See Appendix II)

An interview schedule was constructed, the data from which were used to test these hypotheses. The eighty-seven employees were personally interviewed by the author.

Dependent Variable: Operationalized

Role orientation is the dependent variable of this study. Seven hypothetical questions were constructed to measure the variation from rule orientation to service orientation among employees of the Manitoba Department of Agriculture in the enactment of their prescribed role (expected behavior associated with an occupational position).

Orientation is defined as the predisposition or tendency of the person to act in a particular manner in relation to a specified object.