

The Direction of Personnel and its Responsibilities

La direction du personnel et ses responsabilités

T.P. Dalton

Volume 8, Number 3, June 1953

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1022945ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1022945ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Département des relations industrielles de l'Université Laval

ISSN

0034-379X (print)

1703-8138 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Dalton, T. (1953). The Direction of Personnel and its Responsibilities. *Relations industrielles / Industrial Relations*, 8(3), 288–296.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1022945ar>

Article abstract

After a short historical summary of the evolution of industrial relations and the direction of personnel, the author defines the functions of personnel management. He then points out the particular obligations of the personnel director himself, in regard to the negotiation of collective agreements, the settlement of grievances and the training of employees. In conclusion, the author reminds us of the numerous and important qualities required to fill properly this function of personnel director.

The Direction of Personnel and its Responsibilities

T.P. Dalton

After a short historical summary of the evolution of industrial relations and the direction of personnel, the author defines the functions of personnel management. He then points out the particular obligations of the personnel director himself, in regard to the negotiation of collective agreements, the settlement of grievances and the training of employees. In conclusion, the author reminds us of the numerous and important qualities required to fill properly this function of personnel director.

History

To trace the history of Employer-Employee relations would be a subject in itself. Suffice it to say that since the beginning of the so-called industrial era there has, of necessity, been a need for such relationships. With the evolution of Management throughout the years, the nature of the relationships has changed. First of all there was:

- 1 — The state of *savagery* in industrial relationship as in other spheres of life. Under this state all men in competitive fields were considered as enemies and should be destroyed. It was a case of the survival of the fittest.
- 2 — Then there was the era of *slavery* in which the other fellow was to be conquered and put at the service of the owner.
- 3 — There followed the state of *servitude* where the worker should serve for a stipulated consideration and ask for no more.
- 4 — Then we had the *welfare* state when the concept was that the worker should be helped up when down without too much concern for what got him down.
- 5 — Following this was the *paternalistic* state in which the other fellow should be cared for, the boss deciding to what

T.P. DALTON, Personnel Manager,
The Shawinigan Water and Power
Company, Montreal.

6 — Then there is the concept of *participation* in Industrial Relations. Under this ideology, the employee is considered as being capable of contributing something to the enterprise and thus help the boss.

7 — Another idea is that of *trusteeship* in which the boss recognizes that he is administering something which does not belong to him and that he is administering the enterprise for the benefit of others.

8 — The ultimate is the era of *statesmanship* in Industrial Relations which sees the other fellow as being capable of far more than he is and it is the boss's responsibility to help him develop to his fullest potential.

It would be well for all of us in administrative positions, especially in Personnel Administration, to sit back and take stock in order to determine where we stand with regard to these eight stages in Employer-Employee relationships. It is fairly safe to say that most of us have passed the first three stages but from thereon some may have difficulty in deciding whether they are still in the state of welfare, paternalism, participation or trusteeship. Few will claim that they have reached the stage of statesmanship but that is a goal which we should all try to attain and that is where the Personnel Director can be most helpful.

Birth of Personnel Departments

The personnel function, as it is known today, is a relatively new profession. As I pointed out earlier, there has always been some form of Employer-Employee relationship whether it was under any one of the forms mentioned, such as welfare, participation, paternalism, etc.

Prior to the establishment of Personnel Departments, as we have come to know them, the Personnel function was performed in varying degrees by any number of officials in a given company. One has seen a senior official looking after employment, another interesting himself in group insurance, discipline was administered according to the whims of supervisors at various levels, while wages were determined by various department heads without too much effort at co-ordination. As companies expanded and their managements recognized the growing importance of co-ordination of personnel policies, the tendency grew to establish specialized Personnel Departments. Another factor in the development of the specialized Personnel function was undoubtedly the expansion of the labour movement and the introduction of collective bargaining on a large scale, particularly after the 2nd World War.

New Profession

Perhaps it is because the profession of Personnel Director is so relatively new that few people indeed really know what the function consists of. Of course, the duties can vary from one company to another depending on the size of the company and the need for a Personnel Department. However, the title of Personnel Manager appears to be abused by all sorts of interpretations. There are people who look upon the Personnel Manager as an employment interviewer and no more while others look upon him as the power behind the throne who can accomplish anything. There are actually some who see the Personnel Director as an individual who walks through the office or shop correcting employees or encouraging employees on their jobs. All, of course, are erroneous. But what then are the duties of the Personnel Manager?

Personnel Function

The Personnel Department is essentially an administrative department as distinguished from the Production departments. It is the medium through which the functions of general management in the administration of human relations flow to the heads of the various other departments. These department heads pass management's decisions on to their subordinate officials for application. It must be noted here that these subordinate officials, superintendents and foremen (I hoped) are the real Personnel Managers.

One experienced executive has said it this way:

« However, though personnel experts are invariable as staff advisers, it is the line executives who are the real captains of our human management problems. If the concept of modern and scientific human organization is to become woven into the scheme of our business life, it must become a matter of first importance in the minds of these executives. It must not be regarded by them as a fad or fancy, but as a major part of their job. These executives are, after all, the influential factors in determining the day in and day out routine of factory operations and in conducting our financial, sales, and office departments. They must be entirely convinced of the importance of these matters before real progress can be made on a large scale. »

It is important that line officials accept the fact that they are managing human beings and not machines. The Personnel Director must

be most careful never to usurp the functions of line executives in the administration of human relations. On the other hand, some line supervisors try to pass their responsibilities on the Personnel Department. They also, at times, neglect or refuse to avail themselves of the services of the Staff Personnel Organization. When any of these things happen, the human element cannot receive proper attention and efficiency suffers.

Duties of Personnel Departments

The chief responsibility of the Personnel Department is to co-ordinate all policies and activities affecting relationships with employees. More specifically the Personnel Department undertakes to perform a number of functions, including:

- 1.—Formulate principles of procedure and develop a technique for the effective recruitment, selection, and placement of employees.
- 2.—Provide for necessary job descriptions and classifications so as to facilitate the work of selection and placement.
- 3.—Draw up a general set of rules and practices for the promotion and protection of employees' health, physical well-being, comfort, and safety.
- 4.—Stimulate interest in the job and the company.
- 5.—Encourage joint conferences between the representatives of the workers and representatives of management concerning problems of mutual and general interest.
- 6.—Develop adequate opportunities and facilities for the training of executives, supervisors, and various classes of workers.
- 7.—Develop a workable system of transfers, promotions, and separations.
- 8.—Create effective machinery for the hearing and adjustment of complaints.
9. Formulate a plan of communications, both up and down, throughout the organization.
- 10.—Represent the firm in the negotiation of collective labor agreements.
- 11.—Present or assist in presenting the company's position in all individual or group grievances and disputes that are adjudicated under the collective agreement.

- 12.—Assume responsibility for the interpretation and application of the provisions of the labor contract.
- 13.—Advise and assist the line or operating organization in comprehending and implementing proper personnel attitudes, policies, and practices.
- 14.—Analyze the causative factors in unsatisfactory morale, as evidenced in chronic absenteeism, high accident-frequency and severity rates, and low productive efficiency.
- 15.—Take the initiative in developing an effective degree of coordination of all personnel functions.
- 16.—Encourage a high degree of correlation of all departmental activities which in any way affect personnel relations.
- 17.—Make available to employees adequate counseling services.
- 18.—Set up a system of wage and salary administration.

Organization of Personnel Department

In order to carry out these and related duties, the Personnel Department must itself be organized with several divisions, such as, Industrial Relations, Medical, Safety, Training, Employment, Employee Services, Records, all under the direction of the Personnel Manager. The internal organization of the Personnel Department should be an example of efficiency, morale and good employer-employee relationships to the rest of the organization. A company is frequently judged by its Personnel Department. This is certainly true in the case of job applicants. First impressions are usually lasting.

This then is the type of personnel organization I wish to write about where the Personnel Director heads up these various divisions and he himself reports directly to the top executive. I would submit, that in a moderate sized company, employing from three to five thousand people, a personnel staff of approximately one for each one hundred and twenty-five employees is required.

Management's Objective

When a company decides to establish a Personnel Department, it may generally be taken for granted that its objective is to either develop good employer-employee relations or to maintain and improve existing relationships. Unfortunately, this is not always true. Some companies have been known to create Personnel Departments with the sole intent

of establishing a negative and defensive attitude towards the Union. This is perhaps the greatest sin of some managements and has given rise to a lack of confidence and respect, and the development of critical attitude towards the Personnel Manager and his Department on the part of some Unions. I have a great deal of pity for the Personnel Manager who finds himself in this position. In order that the Personnel Manager may fulfil his function properly and ethically, management must create the proper atmosphere. Any reason for the establishment of a Personnel Department other than the desire to establish, maintain or improve good employer-employee relations must eventually result in chaotic relations.

The Personnel Director himself must enjoy the full confidence and support of top management and he must, by sincere, honest and straightforward dealings, gain and keep the confidence of all levels of supervision, the rank and file of employees and the Union officers. Without this confidence, the Personnel Manager is continually frustrated in his work.

Functions of the Personnel Director

I have given a list of the principal functions of the Personnel Departments. I would now like to comment briefly on the position of the Personnel Director with regard to a few of these responsibilities.

a) Negotiation of Collective Agreements

Perhaps the negotiation of Collective Labour Agreements is the most important of all these functions. To my mind, the Personnel Director should have the direct responsibility of conducting negotiations with the advice and assistance of a number of carefully chosen line executives of the highest level possible in the organization. The Personnel Director should co-ordinate the thinking of all members of his committee, then formulate a recommendation to Management. He should never approach the bargaining table until he has obtained a complete mandate which he and his committee feel is satisfactory, just and reasonable. There is little doubt that the lack of this mandate is another reason for the Union's lack of respect and of confidence in Personnel Directors.

b) Settlement of Grievances

Then how about the settlement of grievances? In my opinion, unsettled grievances should be routed through the Personnel Director to the final stage of the grievance procedure and, at this stage, the case should be referred to the top executive of the company. This permits the Personnel Director to study the case objectively and his recommendations may save the company from many an embarrassing situation and unnecessary arbitration. Generally speaking, the Personnel Director should support the line officials' decisions, but there have been cases in which their decisions have been wrong, judged not only on the written word of the collective agreement but on the basis of common sense, justice and charity. It is a delicate matter for the Personnel Director to get a line executive to change his decision and this must be done tactfully and in a manner so that he will not lose prestige.

c) Employee Training

I would next mention the Personnel Director's role with regard to Training. With the objective in mind of attaining the ultimate degree of « statesmanship » in Industrial Relations, I believe it to be highly important to devote more and more attention to the training of employees at all levels, particularly the supervisory staff. Without good supervision you cannot have a successful organization and after all, if employees are to be happy, the enterprise for which they work must be successful. Here again, I would say that the function of Training is a direct responsibility of the line organization. The Personnel function is to discover training needs, develop programs, suggest these plans to the heads of departments concerned, arouse their interest, stimulate their thinking and, in general, create an atmosphere favourable to the acceptance of an idea. An exception to this general rule is the Training of Union Officers and Stewards. I have seen an interesting and successful experiment carried out by a Personnel Department in conducting a course in Human Relations for their benefit. Immediate results were noted in a more effective Union organization, a better handling of grievances by the Union and the cementing of relationships between Union and Company.

Characteristics of a Personnel Director

I feel that it is fitting, before concluding, to add characteristics of a Personnel Director. One writer I have read on this

subject says that every time he attempted to list the most desirable qualities in a Personnel man he ended up with a description of a Superman. However, without wishing to inflate any Personnel Directors, I am writing this.

The Personnel Director is necessarily dealing with the security, the happiness, the careers of people. He must, therefore, have the quality of attracting people to him so that they will, without hesitation, submit their own personal problems to him with confidence in his judgment. In other words, a kind of Father confessor. He must be a man to whom employees will go for advice and to whom management goes for guidance in framing its Human Relations policies and in discharging its functions.

One may ask what education should he have? What work experience should he have had? J. J. Evans, Jr., says « that such men just « emerge ». They are not the product of any particular course of study although education whether formal or self-procured, undoubtedly contributes to the development of the capacities he must possess. »

But in order to attain a proper appreciation of human reactions, the University graduate in Industrial Relations must have worked on the job and experienced the same hopes, fears and frustrations as his fellow employees. He must have encountered the same problems and developed solutions to them as those who now come to him for advice.

In summary, the Personnel Director must have a pleasing personality, an understanding of human nature, patience, diplomacy, persuasiveness, the courage of his convictions, a desire to serve, the ability to keep confidences, ingenuity, imagination, power of expression, altruistic motives, good business judgment, a broad knowledge of Personnel Administration and the ability to gain and hold the respect of all persons with whom he is associated. He should be big enough to subordinate his own personal ambitions to the common good. He must be prepared to let others have the lion's share of any glory which may result from his work.

It is no doubt a lot to ask of any one person that he group so many and important qualities but these are related to the responsibilities of the Personnel Manager. The person who possesses, to the highest degree, the largest number of these qualifications will, no doubt, make the best Personnel Manager.

SOMMAIRE

LA DIRECTION DU PERSONNEL ET SES RESPONSABILITES

Depuis le commencement de cette soi-disant ère industrielle, on a toujours senti le besoin pressant de relations entre patrons et employés. Cependant, la direction a évolué avec les années en passant à travers les divers stades de la barbarie, de l'esclavage, de l'asservissement, du bien-être, du paternalisme, de la participation, de la fiduciaire pour en arriver à celui de la prévoyance.

La direction du personnel est une nouvelle profession dont le développement est dû à l'accroissement de l'importance de certaines compagnies, à l'expansion du mouvement ouvrier et à l'introduction de la négociation collective sur une grande échelle, tout particulièrement après le deuxième conflit mondial. Les attributions de cette fonction varient suivant l'importance de chaque compagnie. D'ailleurs, le service du personnel est essentiellement un service administratif, donc totalement distinct des services de production. C'est par son intermédiaire que les fonctions de gestion générale dans l'administration des relations humaines convergent vers les chefs des autres services; ces derniers transmettent les décisions de la direction aux autorités inférieures qui les mettent en pratique. Il est essentiel que les responsables de la production envisagent le fait qu'ils dirigent des êtres humains et non des machines.

La responsabilité première qui incombe au service du personnel est de coordonner les directives et activités qui impliquent les relations avec les employés. Pour s'acquitter de toutes ses fonctions, l'organisation du service du personnel doit comprendre plusieurs divisions, telles que les relations industrielles, la santé, la sécurité, la formation, l'embauchage, les services généraux, les registres, toutes sous la juridiction du directeur du personnel. Le but d'une compagnie en formant un tel service est de développer de bonnes relations patronales-ouvrières ou encore de conserver ou d'améliorer les relations actuelles. S'il est institué pour un motif autre, les relations seront éventuellement désorganisées.

Le directeur du personnel doit posséder la confiance et l'appui illimités de la direction supérieure et, par ses agissements sincères, honnêtes et sans détours, il doit gagner et conserver la confiance de tous ceux qui ont des charges responsables, des employés en général et des officiers de l'union, autrement, il échouera sans cesse dans son travail. Il doit assumer la responsabilité absolue de la conduite des négociations en tenant compte de l'aide et des conseils d'un certain nombre de responsables de la production soigneusement choisis. Les griefs se rendant à l'étape finale de la procédure doivent être soumis au directeur du personnel qui réfèrera le cas au chef de l'entreprise. Ainsi, le directeur pourra l'étudier d'une manière objective et ses recommandations pourront éviter à la compagnie des situations embarrassantes et des procédures arbitrales inutiles.

En ce qui a trait à la formation des employés, le service du personnel se charge de découvrir les besoins de cette formation, de développer des programmes adéquats, de suggérer ces projets aux chefs de services et de les y intéresser particulièrement, d'encourager leurs idées et leurs vues et, en général, de créer une ambiance favorable facilitant l'acceptation du projet conçu.

Comme le directeur du personnel se préoccupe constamment de la sécurité, du bonheur et de l'avenir de ses employés, il doit posséder les qualités requises pour que les employés soient attirés vers lui et lui soumettent leurs difficultés personnelles sans hésitation et en toute confiance dans sa décision. Il sera l'aviseur des employés, leur conseiller et le guide de la direction dans l'élaboration de ses directives et de leur mise en vigueur. En résumé, il doit être sympathique, avoir une bonne compréhension de la nature humaine, être patient, diplomate, persuasif, anxieux de servir, avoir le courage de ses convictions, de l'ingénuité, de l'imagination, des sentiments désintéressés, la facilité de s'exprimer, le sens des affaires, le respect des confidences, une connaissance approfondie de l'administration du personnel et l'habileté d'acquiescer et conserver le respect de tous ceux avec qui il est en contact. Ces exigences découlent des grandes responsabilités de la tâche du directeur du personnel.