

Some Unfinished Business in the Professionalization of the Personnel Man

Le spécialiste du personnel, un professionnel ?

Oswald Hall

Volume 16, Number 3, July 1961

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1021768ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1021768ar>

[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

Hall, O. (1961). Some Unfinished Business in the Professionalization of the Personnel Man / Le spécialiste du personnel, un professionnel ? *Relations industrielles / Industrial Relations*, 16(3), 315–327.

<https://doi.org/10.7202/1021768ar>

Article abstract

Personnel men tend to define themselves as professionals. To find out whether they are justified in so doing, the Author describes the earmarks of a profession: specialization, specific and unstandardized nature of the service to the client (who is more than just a customer), episodic and direct relationship between professional and client. With such criteria in hand, the Author argues that it is improbable that personnel work can be practised along the lines of a professional model; the bureaucratic model here appears more relevant.

Some Unfinished Business in the Professionalization of the Personnel Man

Oswald Hall

Personnel men tend to define themselves as professionals. To find out whether they are justified in so doing, the Author describes the earmarks of a profession: specialization, specific and unstandardized nature of the service to the client (who is more than just a customer), episodic and direct relationship between professional and client. With such criteria in hand, the Author argues that it is improbable that personnel work can be practised along the lines of a professional model; the bureaucratic model here appears more relevant.

The title of this paper implies that Personnel men are concerned with what lies ahead of them in their work. It also implies that they are in some way dissatisfied with their work as it stands at present, and are striving to professionalize it.

If Personnel men are concerned on this score, they are by no means alone in their troubles. Indeed one of the remarkable features of our work world is the number of occupations striving, some diligently, some desperately, to be recognized as professions. Moreover, many of the kinds of work presently recognized as professions, such as teaching and engineering, are facing troublesome dilemmas; they are encountering problems for which the readiest solutions may lead them to give up some part of their claim to professional status.

Why Professionalization

The question that occurs to the social scientist is: « Why professionalization? Why not some other choice? What other models are there available for occupations to copy »? The itch for professionalization has roots that go deep into presentday society. Ours has be-

HALL, OSWALD. Professor in the Department of Political Economy, University of Toronto.

come a society of enormous urban communities, of almost countless occupations, and of immensely large corporations. In such a society modern man tends to become an anonymous digit in the enormous community; an undistinguishable specialist among a myriad of specialists; and a mere cog in a bureaucratized corporation. It is against this background of changes in society, in the world of occupations, and in the world of corporations that we can see the conditions that encourage the growth of professions. The professions represent the most luminous patterns in the total web of occupations; they are peculiarly distinct in contrast to the amorphous features of the bureaucratized job in the corporation.

Over and above all this, the professions have another dominant feature which is reflected in the adjective, frequently applied to professions, « independent ». Historically, the ancient professions had this characteristic. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that they had something more, they had a kind of social power. The doctor could *command* the patient to follow his orders, the lawyer could *specify* what was proper advice, and the priest could issue orders which cut across two worlds. Indeed under the label of independence the historic professions wielded so much in the way of social power that they stand in stark contrast to the modern worker, whatever his technical or intellectual level, who is caught up in the web of assorted bonds which characterize the modern industrial or commercial corporation.

These observations permit us to frame the earlier question in a modified fashion: « Which occupations in society *can* become professionalized? How far would they have to change to become professions? What are the earmarks of a profession? »

The Earmarks of a Profession

The classical professions, to which the newer ones aspire, all possess a few distinctive characteristics which have, in the past, set them off sharply from the general run of occupations. It is worthwhile to consider these in orderly fashion in order to estimate how far other occupations would need to change themselves in order to be ranked as genuine professions. Six items stand out clearly.

The *first* matter of note is the high degree of *specialization* involved in the work of the professions. It is of course a truism that *all* modern occupations are highly specialized; indeed it is virtually impossible for a person today to make a living as a « Jack of all trades ». Nevertheless

the work of the professional man displays specialization of activity in an extreme degree. Hence training for the professions is a complex matter. It cannot be secured except by a long period of teaching and indoctrination, which of itself involves isolation from the rest of society while the training is undergone

Each of the professions provides a specialized service of a distinctive sort. Although these services differ sharply from one another in terms of their content, they have one feature in common. The service is provided for persons directly. It has to do with the welfare of persons rather than with the manipulation of impersonal objects, or the use of tools and machinery. Hence professional relationships are always inextricably bound up with social and personal relationships.

The *second* noteworthy feature of the profession is that the service provided is of a very specific sort. It is sharply distinguished from comparable services utilized by the members of society. The core of the matter is that the professional is the *only* person permitted to perform the service in question. This means, in part, that the profession enjoys a legitimate monopoly over the provision of the specified service. It also implies that in most cases the client will not try to perform the service for himself. The established professions enjoy a kind of double monopoly; they are protected both from their potential competitors and from their self-reliant clients.

There is something more to the monopoly position of the profession that indicated above. The professional cannot be legitimately requested to perform any duties that lie outside his specific area. One may not request legal or medical advice from a priest or teacher. The refusal is not based primarily on the fear of the latter that they are trespassing on medical or legal ground, but rather because the dignity of the profession is built around its own specific type of service. Hence its members feel indignation if they are identified with some other sort of service. What this means is that the established profession has the prerogative of specifying the character of the service it will provide, with minimum interference from other occupations, from the client, or from the larger society.

A *third* characteristic of the professional service is its unstandardized nature. Many of the services purchased in the market place can be provided in routinized fashion; indeed routine and ritual are the mark of the work of many of the service occupations. But for the professional

no two cases are identical. Hence, over and above the technical virtuosity demanded of the professional, an element of judgment enters into the rendering of service. Presumably, it is precisely those occupations in which the service has this character that have been professionalized earliest and to the greatest degree.

Moreover, since the service is rendered to a client, the service is always a blend of two kinds of skills: a technical and social. Indeed, the client may be highly uncertain as to where the one ends and the other begins; in the actual work situation the practitioner too may be uncertain as to which are his social skills as opposed to his technical skills. The doctor who can inspire confidence, or the priest who can inspire faith, each makes use of both to an undetermined degree. The service that the professional provides is therefore not an ordinary service such as that which one buys or sells in an impersonal market; into it go the social skills of the practitioner, plus his assessment of what the client requires from this point of view.

The *fourth* major aspect of the professional has already been alluded to. Professional services are always provided for *clients*. It is highly useful to distinguish between the concept of a client and that of a customer. Presumably the consumer obtains his services in an impersonal market, in which he feels free to be the judge of the quality of the service performed and moreover can himself decide as to the kinds of services he requires. By contrast the client of the professional is unable to determine just what services he stands in need of. To determine this he must trust the judgment of a professional. He must also trust that the professional will not take a market advantage of his ignorance. Clients and professionals stand in a very different relationship to each other than do customers and salesmen; indeed a professional could scarcely function effectively if his clients insisted on acting like customers.

If one inquires further as to why the client behaves as he does, the answer presumably resides in the condition of the client. If we may assume that the customer comes to the market armed with wants, the client comes to the professional burdened with needs. The person who feels threatened in his health, or his property, or the state of his soul, or the future of his children, can have only a vague notion of what is needed to remove the threat. In many cases the threat is even more than a need on the part of the client, and indeed may be a positive danger to his life, property, soul, or family. In such a situation he is

all the more likely to place himself in the hands of the professional and depend unreservedly on the judgment of the latter. If it so happens that the service the professional provides is, in its own right, a dangerous service, the willingness of the client to accept the appropriate relationship toward the practitioner is thereby enhanced.

The *fifth* item for attention has to do with the fact that the relation of the professional and his client is not generally a continuous relation. Rather it is episodic in nature. One needs the services of a surgeon or a confessor only on infrequent occasions. But as noted above, when one needs these services one tends to need them desperately. Moreover, there is a high probability that although one will need them infrequently, one will certainly need such services at some time or another. Hence it is the case that most members of a society make use of such services, under the conditions of urgent need, but only at infrequent intervals. This set of conditions is in part responsible for the notable eminence of the professions. All members of society get to know them, but few indeed deal with them on a basic of intimacy.

The *sixth* point has to do with another facet of the professional-client relationship, the fact that it is a direct relationship. This sets the professional service off from a great range of services which in various senses can be delegated through intermediaries. Indeed in much of the work world there have arisen whole chains of intermediaries who intervene between the customer and the person making the fateful decision for the customer. But in the area of the profession, there are pressures on both sides to enforce a personal and direct relation between practitioner and client. For example, the medical doctor or medical consultant will not diagnose unless he has personal, direct contact with the patient. And the patient, on the other hand, even though the services have been successful, will feel indignant and outraged if he learns that the surgeon has delegated the task to a «ghost». Whereas in most occupations the development of a minute division of labour has resulted in fragmented and impersonal work relationships, in the professions the relationships have remained personal and direct.

In summary, the historic professions have a set of distinguishing characteristics. Their work is highly specialized, and the service is restricted to a very specific bundle of tasks; the work is unstandardized rather than routinized, and is performed for a client rather than a customer; the professional service is one that is required episodically by

the client, and is provided directly to him rather than through intermediaries.

A recital of the earmarks of a profession indicates that it is a special type of occupation; only a limited number of different kinds of work could be organized on such a basis. On the other hand, as noted earlier, they are widely copied by a great variety of occupations. It is a further contention of this paper that many newly emerging or developing occupations are busily copying, not the essentials of the professions but, mainly their incidental aspects.

Incidental Features of Professions

Many of the most luminous features of professions are relatively inconsequential to their actual functioning in society. On the other hand, these may be the very features that are most likely to attract the attention of newly emerging occupations. Such, for example, is the practice of training new members within the university setting. In general, professional schools have tended to settle into, and attach themselves to, historic universities. Many newer occupations likewise are placing some part of the training of their new recruits in the university, even if only in the extension courses. By so doing, they attempt to take unto themselves some of the aura of prestige associated with higher learning. Whether or not the association with the university is helpful is another matter; that would depend on the degree to which the training is narrowly specific in character, or the degree to which it requires the general range of facilities of a university to become effective.

Another readily noted feature of professions is the fact of licensure. This provides a highly visible mean of distinguishing one type of worker from another. The parchment, the diploma or certificate, is a kind of guarantee that the owner partakes in the mystique associated with the profession. The licence links the holder with all others in his work, even while it separates him dramatically from those outside the field in question. The licence is in a very real sense symbolic; it is an indicator that society has entrusted to a particular group of people the responsibility for organizing some highly consequential feature of social life. But this symbol is merely the indicator that these arrangements have taken place; in no sense is the license the moving force behind such arrangements.

Most established professions develop an association in which the practitioners hold membership. These may be local in scope or national and international in character. They provide occasions for the members to meet and to celebrate their common membership. In a sense this distinctively sets the group off from the rest of society. The association may also be the device by which various levels of members are differentiated one from another. There may be fellows, full members, associate members, neophytes, and subdivisions thereof. The association both indicates the solidarity of the group and emphasizes the divisions within it. The association may also be the vehicle by which the members meet for conferences and conventions. It permits the members to escape from the routine of daily work life and to dramatize the element of leisure and prestige which the group enjoys. Such associations are obviously by no means limited to professional bodies; however, they are such a highly visible element in the life of professional groups that they are likely to be one of the most readily copied elements thereof.

All of these elements — licenses, associations, conventions, classifications of members, and training in the university setting — are to some degree features of established professions. They are likewise features of many other parts of society. However, they are not essential parts of the historic professions. Rather, they are ancillary features of such. This paper contends that they are the features of professions most easily copied by self-conscious occupations; but, they represent the shadow rather than the substance of professional organization.

Whither Personnel Work?

The above discussion has been presented in some detail in order to focus attention on the relevant questions to ask about the present status of Personnel work. The first consequential question can be stated thus: Is Personnel work a kind of service that can be organized for specific clients, or is it largely a matter of helping to administer an organization? Is it essentially a matter of making a « going concern » out of some part of a large organization, so that the latter in turn can flourish as a « going concern? » Will it move in the direction of the bureaucratic model or of the professional model?

This larger query can be made somewhat more specific by looking at the service performed by the Personnel man and asking: Is the service largely a routinized matter, or is it fundamentally an unstandardized set

of activities? Is the service of a highly specific nature, or is it a diffuse set of obligations? Does it require direct contact between the Personnel man and those whose fate he influences, or can much of the work be delegated to intermediaries? Is the work carried out autonomously by the Personnel man, or does he work under a specific set of regulations and under policies set down by functionaries above him in an organization? Are the consequences of his work highly fateful for those who make use of his services, or are the consequences mainly of a casual sort?

Specific answer to these questions can come only from the actual participants in the work itself. It is presumptuous for the writer to claim specialized knowledge of what is happening in the changing, shifting field of Personnel work. His own impressions lie along the following lines. The duties of the Personnel Manager seem to be becoming more diffuse rather than more specific in nature. They tend to spread out to include a variety of welfare functions over and above the traditional matter of selection and training. Part of these duties represent novel and unstandardized items, but much of the work tends to be routinized, and can be turned over to subordinates. Indeed Personnel men are becoming the managers of staffs and spend a good deal of their time administering the affairs of their staffs. The work of personnel tends to become less autonomous and to represent in part an expression of policy of the company and in part an arm of policy. This implies that fundamentally the Personnel man is progressively less concerned with the welfare of the client and becomes a middleman between the eventual employer and the employee. This narrows the scope for adopting a professional orientation toward his tasks and duties. The fact of the matter is that the Personnel man tends more and more to share many functions with the steward and other union representatives who are also the spokesmen for the interests of the employee. This makes the Personnel man even more the « man in the middle », sharing the middle with an active competitor.

Conclusion

This paper has tried to outline what is happening to Personnel work by considering the matter of occupational dissatisfaction as a general phenomenon. The lure of the professional model has been discussed, and the characteristics of the historic professions have been set forth. The paper argues that it is improbable that personnel work can be prac-

tised along the lines of a professional model; it is more likely to share increasingly in the progressive bureaucratization of the large-scale organization within which it occurs.

LE SPÉCIALISTE DU PERSONNEL, UN PROFESSIONNEL?

Les spécialistes du personnel s'interrogent sur leur occupation, qui ne les satisfait pas pleinement; ils s'inquiètent de ce que leur avenir professionnel leur réserve. Ce n'est là qu'une des nombreuses occupations qui tendent avec vigueur à acquérir les caractéristiques de la profession traditionnelle. D'autre part, certaines professions (comme l'enseignement et le génie) font face à des problèmes d'une ampleur telle que les solutions disponibles sont de nature à leur enlever des traits fondamentaux de la profession.

LES RAISONS DE CETTE TENDANCE VERS LA PROFESSION

Pourquoi chercher ainsi à se « professionnaliser »? N'est-il pas d'autres modèles qui s'offrent à l'imitation des occupations en général? Sans doute, mais le mouvement vers la profession plonge des racines profondes dans la société moderne aux villes tentaculaires, aux occupations innombrables et aux entreprises industrielles et commerciales géantes. Dans ce contexte, l'homme doit lutter pour ne pas perdre son individualité dans l'écrasant anonymat de la grande ville, de l'entreprise bureaucratisée et de la spécialité qu'il partage avec un très grand nombre de ses semblables. Dans cette lutte pour la personne, la profession apparaît comme un instrument de choix: au sein du réseau complexe des occupations, elle est ceinte d'une auréole lumineuse et enviable; et elle fait contraste avec les occupations amorphes de la bureaucratie moderne.

Un autre trait dominant de la profession qui en fait un point d'attraction presque irrésistible pour l'ensemble des occupations « inférieures » ou intermédiaires, c'est son indépendance, son autonomie. Les professions traditionnelles exerçaient sur la société un pouvoir efficace. Et le professionnel d'autrefois, libre de toute subordination, donnait des ordres, ou au moins des conseils vigoureux, à son patient ou à son client. Cette image, qui est restée bien vivante sans égard aux accrocs récents à l'autonomie de nombreux professionnels, fait contraste avec celle de l'employé technique ou intellectuel, aux lourdes et nombreuses servitudes, de la grande entreprise industrielle ou commerciale d'aujourd'hui.

Dans cette optique, il importe de se demander quelles occupations peuvent devenir des professions, et à la suite de quelles modifications. En somme, quels sont les traits essentiels de la profession?

LES TRAITS ESSENTIELS DE LA PROFESSION

La profession est le point terminus supérieur dans la hiérarchie des occupations. En décrire les caractères fondamentaux, c'est donc définir concrètement par quels cheminements les occupations non professionnelles atteindront peu à peu à la profession pleine. Les caractères spécifiques de la profession sont les suivants:

1. *La spécialisation poussée*

C'est un fait d'évidence que toutes les occupations modernes atteignent à un haut niveau de spécialisation; mais c'est surtout au plan de la profession même que la division du travail est le plus complexe et le plus évident. Ceci explique pourquoi la formation professionnelle est si prolongée et si élaborée, obligeant le candidat-étudiant à de longues années d'isolement du reste de la société. Chaque profession fournit donc un service spécifique. De l'une à l'autre, la nature ou le contenu du service variera, bien sûr. Mais le service professionnel, quel qu'il soit, s'adresse toujours à des personnes directement; il vise le bien-être des individus plutôt que la manipulation d'objets impersonnels, d'outils ou de machines. C'est dire que les relations professionnelles sont toujours des rapports éminemment sociaux, interpersonnels.

2. *La spécificité du service*

Le service que dispense une profession donnée se distingue clairement de tout autre service professionnel. Effectivement, le professionnel en cause est le seul qui soit autorisé à fournir ce service; c'est une autre façon de décrire le monopole légitime que détient la profession sur son service. Comme corollaire, on peut avancer que, dans la plupart des cas, le client n'essaiera pas de s'administrer à lui-même le service en question. Voici donc un monopole à deux têtes: la profession se trouve protégée à la fois contre des concurrents éventuels et contre des clients qui se suffiraient à eux-mêmes. D'autre part, on ne peut légitimement exiger d'un professionnel qu'il s'acquitte de fonctions qui dépassent sa compétence spécifique: ainsi, il n'est pas dans l'ordre de demander à un prêtre ou à un instituteur des conseils d'ordre médical ou légal. La dignité même de chaque profession repose sur la spécificité du service qu'elle rend; de sorte qu'un professionnel se sent insulté si on l'identifie par un service autre que celui qui est propre à sa profession. En d'autres termes, la profession a le privilège de spécifier la sorte de service qu'elle entend fournir, sans ingérence de la part d'autres occupations, du client ou de la société globale.

3. *L'originalité du service*

Pour le professionnel, il n'est pas un cas qui soit en tous points semblable à un autre. Ici, pas d'uniformité ni d'identité, à l'encontre de la plupart des services non professionnels disponibles sur le marché: la routine est étrangère au service professionnel. Au delà donc de la virtuosité technique que doit manifester le professionnel s'introduit un élément de jugement dans chaque cas. Et plus l'exercice spécifique du jugement marque une occupation, plus vite et plus complètement celle-ci se professionnalise. Et comme le service professionnel s'adresse à un client, on y trouve toujours deux ingrédients: le technique et le social, aux frontières souvent confuses et pour le praticien et pour le client. Il ne s'agit donc pas d'un service quelconque qu'on trouve dans un marché impersonnel: le professionnel est plus qu'un technicien qui vend de l'habileté ou de la compétence; il est un homme en interaction avec son prochain.

4. *Le client, bénéficiaire du service*

Les services professionnels s'adressent toujours à des clients, et non pas à de vagues consommateurs interchangeable; c'est la distinction anglaise entre le « client » du professionnel et le « customer » de l'épicier du coin. Ce dernier se sent libre et capable de juger de la qualité du service fourni et de la nature du service qu'il requiert. Le client du professionnel, au contraire, n'est pas en mesure de déterminer seul la nature des services dont il a besoin; pour ce faire, il doit s'en remettre au jugement du professionnel, confiant que ce dernier n'abusera pas de son ignorance. En fait, le professionnel aurait beaucoup de peine à fournir efficacement son service si son client insistait pour se comporter en consommateur ordinaire, impersonnel ou critique. Le client du professionnel se présente avec des besoins profonds, personnels, qui portent sur la santé de l'âme et du corps, sur les possessions terrestres, etc. Il se sent menacé, personnellement ou familialement. Comment éliminer la menace? Plus elle est grave, et moins le client sait la combattre; c'est alors surtout qu'il se confie entièrement aux soins du professionnel dans une relation d'étroite dépendance.

5. *La discontinuité du rapport client-professionnel*

D'ordinaire, la relation entre professionnel et client n'est pas continue, permanente. Elle est plutôt faite de contacts *ad hoc*, en des circonstances spécifiques et contraignantes, et à l'égard de besoins urgents et sérieux de caractère intermittent, donc de besoins ressentis à des intervalles peu fréquents. Ce caractère discontinu du service professionnel ne contribue pas peu au halo de la profession: car si tous les membres d'une société donnée prennent éventuellement contact avec elle, ce contact n'a aucun caractère d'intimité.

6. *L'absence d'intermédiaire entre professionnel et client*

La relation client-professionnel est directe, immédiate. Le service professionnel est rendu sans intermédiaires, sans délégation. Ainsi, le diagnostic médical est impensable sans le contact personnel avec le patient; et ce dernier s'indignera à juste titre s'il apprend que le chirurgien de grande réputation sur lequel il comptait s'est fait remplacer par un second.

On le conçoit sans peine, la profession est un type bien spécial d'occupation, avec des traits précis qui la distinguent de toute autre occupation. Or, dans leurs efforts vers la professionnalisation, nombre d'occupations imitent systématiquement, non pas ces traits essentiels de la profession que nous venons de décrire, mais plutôt des détails accidentels, des éléments qui ne sont pas vraiment spécifiques à la profession.

LES CARACTÈRES SECONDAIRES DE LA PROFESSION

Il est des traits superficiels et particulièrement brillants de la profession que les occupations cherchent activement à s'approprier, souvent au détriment de l'essentiel. Voici quelques-uns de ces caractères non spécifiques:

1. *La formation universitaire*

Dans l'ensemble, les écoles professionnelles ont eu tendance à se rattacher étroitement à de grandes universités. Certaines occupations nouvelles confient au moins une partie de leur formation à l'université, au moins sous forme d'enseignement post-scolaire. C'est une façon pour ces occupations de s'auréoler du prestige qui s'attache aux institutions de haut savoir. Encore faut-il se demander si ce lien avec l'université est vraiment utile à la profession en devenir: la réponse sera négative si l'enseignement dispensé est étroitement technique, excluant ces connaissances générales, cet universalisme culturel qui sont la définition même de l'université.

2. *L'octroi d'une licence*

L'octroi d'un permis de pratiquer est un moyen très visible de distinguer un type de travailleur d'un autre. Le parchemin, diplôme ou certificat est comme une garantie de la participation de son détenteur à la mystique professionnelle; s'il relie tous ceux qui le détiennent, il les sépare du même coup de tous ceux qui n'en ont pas. La licence a valeur de symbole: elle est le signe que la société confie à un groupe particulier la responsabilité d'organiser un secteur très important de la vie sociale.

3. *L'association professionnelle*

L'appartenance à une association est un des traits secondaires de la profession. Le groupement peut être local, provincial, national ou international. Il permet aux membres-professionnels de se serrer les coudes, de se distinguer du reste de la société. Il permet aussi une certaine stratification chez les membres eux-mêmes: c'est ainsi qu'en médecine on trouvera les grands patrons, les membres de plein droit, les membres associés, les débutants, etc. Donc, l'association est à la fois instrument de solidarité et cadre de hiérarchisation interne. Par elle et en elle s'organisent les congrès de la profession, dont la fonction est à la fois technique et sociale. Bien sûr, de telles associations se retrouvent ailleurs que dans les professions; mais chez ces dernières elles possèdent un tel lustre qu'on cherche un peu partout à les reproduire.

Les caractéristiques secondaires plus haut décrites appartiennent aux professions, mais aussi à d'autres secteurs de l'activité sociale. Les occupations qui tendent vers la profession sont tentées de s'approprier d'abord et surtout ces traits accessoires, avec grand danger de délaissier ainsi la proie pour l'ombre.

OÙ VA LE SPÉCIALISTE DU PERSONNEL?

Les critères essentiels et accessoires de la profession sont maintenant établis. Où se situe, à cet égard, le spécialiste du personnel? Fournit-il un service à des clients bien spécifiques, ou si plutôt il ne contribue pas surtout à la bonne marche d'une entreprise bureaucratique par une activité spécialisée? S'inscrit-il dans le moule professionnel ou dans le moule bureaucratique? Le service qu'il rend est-il avant tout routinier, ou s'il est fondamentalement spécifique et original? Suppose-t-il un contact direct entre le spécialiste du personnel et ceux sur lesquels il influe, ou si plutôt il est fourni au moyen d'intermédiaires plus ou moins nombreux? Le

spécialiste du personnel est-il professionnellement autonome, indépendant, ou s'il doit se soumettre à des règles précises mises au point par des supérieurs? Quelles conséquences (très graves ou peu importantes) ont ses gestes ou ses décisions pour ceux qu'il sert?

Il appartient au spécialiste du personnel lui-même de répondre à ces questions, dans le contexte mouvant qui est le sien. Il semble cependant que ses fonctions deviennent de plus en plus diffuses et variées: embauchage, sélection, placement, formation, rémunération, négociation collective, mise en application de la convention, bien-être, etc. Si certains aspects de ces tâches diverses sont nouveaux et originaux, le gros du travail du personnel n'en reste pas moins routinier, et peut être accompli par des subordonnés. Effectivement, le directeur du personnel typique se découvre vite à la tête d'une équipe qu'il passe un temps précieux à diriger. Le travail du personnel, de moins en moins autonome, doit se soumettre à des politiques globales de l'entreprise dont il est à la fois l'expression et l'instrument. C'est dire que le spécialiste du personnel agit surtout comme intermédiaire entre employeur et employé; et même dans ce rôle, il est en concurrence avec les représentants syndicaux.

CONCLUSION

Il est peu probable que le spécialiste du personnel réussisse à insérer ses fonctions dans le cadre précis du modèle professionnel. Il participera de plus en plus activement à la bureaucratisation graduelle de la grande entreprise moderne.