

9. Personnel

I

Questions of personnel management have long been overshadowed by other forms of decision premise. The organization was identified in terms of its goals (and thus largely in terms of purposive programs), and rationalization considerations were therefore concerned primarily with the hierarchical structure of the organization, and thus with responsibilities and communication channels. The issues were centralization or decentralization, steep or flat hierarchies, the relationship between staff and line organization, the inclusion of the group principle in all too individualistic job descriptions (criticism of "Taylorism"), and the like.¹ The selection of personnel had presupposed the relevant decisions about the other components of the position.² It had to comply as best it could with the principles of rational decision-making. Personnel management was regarded as a special responsibility - both in description of the tasks to be performed and in the organizational endowment with decision-making authority. The guiding principle was "the right man in the right place."³ The principle of its rationality was thus the correlation between two unknown variables, and the principle of its practice was consequently oscillation between stipulations on the one hand and, on the other, between staff assessments and job descriptions. And because people are difficult to move and difficult to change, it could never be put into practice fast enough to satisfy the hopes set in rationality under constantly changing conditions.

Moreover, these maxims do not take the factual expectations of an individual into consideration. Such expectations are formed by the individual's assessment of the possibilities for and obstacles to a career. But superiors had to reckon with such expectations; they could play with them. For as soon as chances of promotion come to play a role, the relevant decision-making powers are difficult to separate from the superior's general powers. The authority to appoint and dismiss is (and naturally remains) an important tool of power, especially where subordinates can be left in the dark about how it is wielded. Group participation in personnel selection as demanded by the human relations movement has always been a contentious issue.⁴

The secondary importance accorded personnel questions has nurtured illusions about the propensity of organizations for change. Organization charts and job descriptions can be modified with a stroke of the pen, so to speak.

By contrast, the conglomerate of an individual's own expectations and those of others that is identified as a "person" is difficult to adjust, if at all. This is due not least to the circular interplay between one's own and others' expectations.

Even if the individual were willing to change, he sees himself defined by the social expectations he daily faces; and, similarly, changing demands are made of the same person, who has to preserve his identity for many social contacts. Personal and social memories are so closely interwoven that plans for change have difficulty discovering the asymmetry required to tackle the task. It therefore seemed an obvious course to set about change not in this domain but through organization charts and job descriptions - on the assumption that persons as individuals would somehow fall in with the changed realities. The problem of personnel decision premises was accordingly underestimated.

In recent times, this traditional view of personnel management appears to be changing.⁵ Tasks are defined in more complex terms, and greater attention is paid to how the willingness and the ability to work relate to the tasks set and where they are located in the system.⁶ This engenders new expectations and hence new chances for the subjectivity of those involved, for their utilization as "system regulators."⁷ For the public service it has been noted, for example, that greater demands are made on executive officers by more and more complex decision problems, and, in particular, by the shift in focus from conditional programs to purposive programs, with the result that their differing personal characteristics and decision-making styles have a stronger impact.⁸ But it is also less self-evident than in the past that white-collar and blue-collar workers perform their tasks properly and can, when necessary, be constrained to do so by directives and controls. This is not to say that directives and controls could be replaced by self-discipline. This, too, is less true than ever before. But the problem of bridging the system difference between individuals and organizations is attracting increasing attention as a component of "general management" that is difficult to hive off,⁹ which can probably also be said of the willingness to take risks. But, above all, the focus is shifting to cooperative problem-solving and thus to the question of how the expertise, experience, and contacts distributed in the system can best be used.¹⁰

Such changes - initially manifest only as desiderata and not with respect to existing personnel - are likely to have repercussions for what at all levels of the hierarchical classification we could term the core competence of personnel. Old virtues like commitment to organizational goals, discipline, and putting aside private interests may well be still important, but a sort of upstream competence could be more and more necessary, which would have to consist in the recognition of opportunities and in an extension of alternatives that is perhaps

only temporary, and therefore cannot be prescribed. The system would have to oscillate at all levels of its personnel structure between taking and not taking opportunities (opportunities are not in themselves necessarily positive), and would bring rationality considerations and communication with other positions into play only if decision problems arise at the level of this primary oscillation. But it is immediately apparent that this would produce far-reaching (and perhaps insoluble) problems for the organization of training and the labor market. In any case, it would be difficult to cover such primary competence with the usual certificates or job titles by which the educational and training systems and labor market job offers have hitherto prestructured recruitment possibilities.

Such changes probably have to do with growing willingness to engage in personal communication.¹¹ More than in the past, one now says what one feels, prefers, considers to be right with reference to one's own judgment, and thus with reference to oneself as premise of one's own deciding. And the authority for uncertainty absorption is weaker than in the organizations of the past that were still determined by stratification, or by education plus stratification. Circumstances change more rapidly than they used to, with the result that more voluntary, unenforceable adjustment to change has to be demanded. The limits of the "zone of indifference" (Barnard¹²) are now likely to be more blurred and more difficult to determine than in the past, and all this makes one less confident about which assumptions find consensus in the system and which do not. All this points to the need for open communication, to use a term much bandied about. And finally, the vogue for corporate culture, organizational symbolism, and corporate identity and the like draws its strength and popularity from this extended interest in persons.¹³ The hope is that culture will deliver more or less reliable inferences about motives.

This gives personnel management a great deal more to do. The classical tasks of requirements planning and suitable selection naturally remain, but they are supplemented by tasks of a more caring if not therapeutic nature. This includes a tolerable measure of agreement on mutual expectations; job specification that takes the working human being and not only performance into account¹⁴; the provision of help for personal problems (with alcohol, for example); the planning of familiarization periods for new arrivals and of cooling-off times for failures or the victims of job cuts; and the scrutiny of all positions with regard to the career opportunities they offer, including planning for new blood that offers prospects of promotion within the system and provision against poaching from outside. This includes providing people without prospects of advancement with substitute satisfaction, up to and including pseudo hierarchies that offer possibilities of promotion without there being any corresponding need at the competence level. In short, everything there is in the system

would have to be re-examined with regard to effects on people and their decisions.

However, such high-flying expectations come up against the unpredictability of individuals. The capacity of the individual for rational decision-making despite all limitations is also still overestimated (as if one could recruit better decision-making).¹⁵ Concepts of such broad responsibility for personnel therefore generate a reality that does not correspond to the one they seek to generate. This is not least because people are involved as individuals, because they observe how they themselves and others are treated, and because all personnel planning operates as self-fulfilling/self-defeating prophecy. It is observed that counseling is offered for alcohol problems, but also that there is nothing beyond the counseling; it is also noted whether the relevant programs are used in the upper echelons of the system or not. The intensive interest in persons, further fueled by official attention, sets off an abundance of causal attributions. If someone is promoted or, as a lateral entrant, attains a higher position, there must be reasons that do not necessarily have anything to do with the reasons stated (best possible choice). In this field more than in any other, the system writes its own history, and this organizational-culture forming effect is difficult to anticipate and take into account or correct in personnel planning.

In view of these difficulties, we have to seek a better explanation for the increasing and ever more complex interest in persons that take such problems into account. It is provided by analysis of the autopoiesis of decision-making. All decisions are confronted by an unknown future, by the leeway for oscillation that also points them in a certain direction and accordingly reproduces them. The unknownness of the future is the most important and the lasting, constantly renewed resource of decision processes. Persons, therefore, serve as tangible symbols for the unknownness of the future. It should therefore not come as a surprise if the official and informal interest in persons increases as the dependence of the system on decisions becomes a topic of communication, and as the change in decision premises comes to be included in daily routines. In persons one finds, as it were, a compromise between past and future (they are as they are, but one cannot know with any certainty how they will act) that the organization has to implement through decisions.

This then also applies all the more strongly for personnel decisions themselves. Realistically, we therefore have to assume that there are cognitive limits and technical decision-making limits to all personnel management. We therefore abide by the distinction introduced in Chapter 3 between individual human beings and organizations as social systems, and hence by the assumption that human beings in organizations gain operational relevance only insofar as they are indicated in communication.

II

This chapter about personnel therefore deals only with persons, not with individual "full human beings" in the performance of their living and mental autopoiesis.¹⁶ Persons are special forms of observing the coherence of situations; they are thus ordering patterns with highly selective properties. A person's name stands for a set of situations (inconceivable individually). Moreover, we limit ourselves to the treatment of persons as decision premises, and to this extent we follow the directives of Chapter 7 on decision premises. By decision premises we mean two things: premises that are communicated as personal in every decision communication, and premises that are anticipated in personnel decisions as premises for future decisions by certain persons.

At the level of operational uncertainty absorption, decisions are to a greater or lesser degree always attributed to persons, and (with considerable divergence) by both the decision-makers themselves and those who have to deal with their decisions, who await them, who seek to influence or explain them, in order to be prepared for the decision-maker's preferences and style in future dealings with him. Attribution to persons is possible only, but then obviously, if one expects that other persons would decide otherwise. This might well remain an implicit premise that is activated only when the issue of whether someone is to be involved in decisions or not comes up, or if personnel decisions are on the agenda.

Despite all legends about "impersonal" bureaucracy, it must be said that the orientation on persons within organizations is of considerable importance. The way in which the decision paradox is resolved by attribution to persons even suggests that the personal contribution to the decision-making process tends in practice to be overestimated rather than underestimated. How and in what forms persons are communicated about should therefore be examined more closely. Only then can insight be gained into the context into which personnel decisions, however made, have to be inserted and on which these decisions meeting either with understanding or disapproval depends.

As soon as persons become known, narratives are constructed about them that, in written documents, only to a very small degree are fixed - for example, in official staff assessments. These accounts operate above all with the distinction between constant and variable characteristics. They appear on the one hand as characters, on the other as motives. The observation schema also applies, incidentally, for the modern novel and has thus probably made its way into everyday experience. The character is treated as given, as a constant that can be relied on. Jean Paul advises novelists that "the character as such cannot be motivated."¹⁷

In the novel as in everyday communication about persons, the distinction between constant and variable, between characters and motives is also an

artifact without any basis in the bodily and mental reality of human beings. The construct simplifies communication about persons and leaves it to the success of communication whether and what motives are attributed and thus exposed to influence or reproach. Empirically verifiable speculation could furthermore posit that, upon closer acquaintance, the character condenses, so to speak, and motivatability decreases because more and more experience is registered as iteration of characteristics that have often been registered. Aging organizations, like aging marriages, can then suffer from a loss of hope that motives can be isolated and influenced. Far-reaching restructuring can then fail owing to the strength-of-character artifact developed in communication, and the realization of hopes can consequently be sought by recruiting fresh blood or by founding a new organization.

III

We shall speak of personnel decisions when talking about membership of the system or about filling vacancies. This is the case for decisions concerning entering (appointment) and leaving (dismissal) and for decisions about redeployment within the system with or without promotion. A positive choice requires assumptions about the match between the expectations of the organization defined in terms of positions and what a person offers in the way of skills and attitudes. Such expectations may arise from investigations during the process of deciding on appointment, or as a condensate of experience in dealing with the person, which is occasionally fixed in the form of written "employee assessments." But, since judgments about persons are not very reliable and, moreover, depend in considerable measure on whoever is doing the judging, a great deal of weight in personnel decisions is placed on the possibility of later correction.

Personal decision premises differ from decision programs in an essential regard: they cannot be broken down any further. We can distinguish analytically between the knowledge, skills, preferences, environmental contacts, ages, genders, cooperativeness, and rates of work, etc. of specific persons - important variables for every formulated employee appraisal. But these and other variables are applied compactly to one person at a time, are identified with them, and cannot (or rarely) be changed separately, to the disappointment of everyone who has to do with "personnel development." To the extent that this holds true, personnel planning has to concentrate on movement processes in the system, and this means above all operating with selective (rather than merely reward) promotions.

If the individuality of persons is so emphasized in recognition of the fact that each is different from all others, one could conclude that persons then also have to be treated individually. What stands in the way of this is that individuals

observe how other individuals are assessed and treated, and draw conclusions for their own situation from their observations. A dense network of gossip, of handing on information about personnel decisions and the overt or covert reasons for them, links up all information, recalls cases (however much in the short term), and compares. Condensing this information, the result is a demand for equal treatment, disclosure of the "real" reasons and, on top of it all, strong pressure on the decision process, which cushions it by schematization. Gossip produces the schematism of justice and hence the conditions for its own continuation in the event of supposed deviations; it also produces the expectation of common indignation and in this sense solidarity.¹⁸ The schematization this imposes explains marked preferences for seniority as the basis for promotion, for internal job advertisements, and for long-winded consultations, often in bodies, to prepare important decisions. Much of this is symbolic work on a decision that has long been made or as good as made. This imposed "objectivity" results in a certain formalism in the presentation of the decision, and banality in the expectations communicated, in criteria and explanations, and in the dubious manipulation of requirements with regard to the favored candidate. The impression has to be given that the decision has been made in favor of one individual over another both fairly and more or less by chance, be it only in order to obviate or at least deflect any suspicion of unobjective motives being in play. If the decision is presented as carefully considered, appropriate, and free from ulterior motives, the process of uncertainty absorption is reason enough to favor it; and the suspicion that ulterior motives are involved can then be aired only as an affront that has to be proved.

IV

Personnel decisions decide how vacancies are filled and thus decision premises. The contribution a person makes to decisions is hence also due to a decision. There are no principles for this decision and no guarantees for its correctness, no matter what communication within the organization has to say about it. What it produces is solely the decisions that the premise "person" enables and differentially pre-controls. Only on the assumption that different persons will decide differently does it make any sense at all to decide on personnel issues in the form of appointments. Since attribution to a person is difficult and will remain controversial, it is hardly possible to keep a record of success and failure, except in borderline cases. Later recognition of a choice as good or bad presupposes relatively clear deviation from normal expectations. The person is surprising - in a positive or negative sense. Only in such cases do the underlying personnel decisions attract the attention that leads to praise or blame. That a sort of belated surprise is necessary for this¹⁹ merely confirms that success or failure in the form of total results of the decision-maker cannot

be forecast - despite all the good reasons that can be mobilized for a particular choice. One must therefore be thankful if nothing untoward happens.

The most important distinction in this domain is that between recruitment decisions and redeployment decisions. Bernhard and Simon have proposed a general theory in the shape of a theory of balance between inducements and contributions in which non-members on whom the organization depends (thus its markets) can also be included.²⁰ The problems are hence broken down behavioristically into behavioral problems and then declared to be problems of maintaining a balance. However, this makes excessive demands on the concept of balance. If we understand this concept as the willingness to identify disturbances, it skips the level of programming,²¹ which provides the structures against which the organization can gauge disturbances. For the rest, this theory confronts the empiricist (whom it addresses) with the question of whether and how he can ascertain behavior except in relation to the organization and its contingencies (degrees of freedom). In what follows, we shall therefore leave aside this demanding concept of the order of relations between the organizational system and (personal) environments and set out from the difference between system and environment.

In the field of personnel decisions, this places the focus of theory on the difference between recruitment decisions and redeployment decisions, and with an opposing set of problems in relations between individual and person. The problem in recruitment decisions is that the person (as an individual) is unknown. In the case of redeployment decisions, the problem is that the person (as an individual) is known. And for objectivity-focused personnel management, both can prove fatal.

The problem with unknown persons is how to assess their suitability as decision premise despite their being unknown. Many tools have been developed for this purpose, notably the résumé, the reference, the external audit, the recommendation; then there is the job interview and the qualifying examination; finally there is the probationary period preceding longer term employment. In all these cases, the recruiter faces a mix of purposeful self-presentations and background information (e.g., about the authors of references or about the quality of examinations). In view of the uncertainty involved, selection tends to shift toward comparison between different applicants. A general preliminary qualification filter is applied before making a decision by comparing short-listed candidates. For important recruitment decisions, selection thus runs through a two-stage procedure for uncertainty absorption; conditions have to be kept variable depending on the candidate situation (depending on the self-selection of candidates).

This general problem is compounded by another variable, the indeterminacy of future requirements. We can exclude the borderline case of completely unknown persons being recruited to perform completely indeterminate tasks.

The organization always has experience - be it with its own requirements, be it with certain sorts of person, for instance, with lawyers or high school graduates in not very demanding activities. Decision situations without any guidelines are not to be expected. But it still makes a big difference whether recruitment is for positions or careers and what requirements profile the decision has to address. Recruiting a woman for the assembly line offers less of a risk than adding another member to the executive board.

External recruitment for higher positions can be avoided by advancement within the organization. But, as comparison of the functional equivalents of entry and advancement shows, this also poses problems. If a personnel system is geared to advancement, which is very much the case in most fields of government administration up to the point where political appointments come into play, corresponding expectations rapidly develop and, given the job hierarchy, corresponding disappointments. In order to keep the disappointment rate low, the system may well construct a functionally unnecessary stairway up which one advances in small steps.²²

This is joined by the general problems of internal redeployment decisions with or without promotion. They arise from the involvement of known persons who expect their own expectations to be honored.

V

Another division has only to do with recruited persons. It distinguishes between changing persons and moving them within the system from position to position. If the intention to change persons is concerned with individuals in the sense of organic and psychic systems, experience with training programs to this end is not very encouraging. After all, of interest is only what communication an individual triggers, which depends essentially on the social context in which communication is expected, received, and understood. There might be cognitive training ("further education programs") in which specific expertise, such as language skills, legal knowledge, police tactics, computer skills, is taught. But this makes sense only if these accomplishments can be immediately used; otherwise they rapidly go to waste.

The lesson from such experience, which we cannot document here in greater detail, is likely to be that an organization's personnel policy has to be oriented above all on positions defined in terms of premises, and that the wherewithal is to be found less in the practically hopeless endeavor to change (adult) human beings than in the selection of persons for positions, and thus in movement processes. But this, too, is difficult enough.

In abstract terms we can postulate that what matters is a match between job description and personnel assessment. The appraisal of a person must show him or her to be suitable to perform the tasks of a given position; and if the position

is attractive and there are many candidates, the person favored should be better suited than the others. In practice, however, at least three serious problems arise.

- (1) Non-formalized criteria always play a role in the process of filling a vacancy. Under certain circumstances, the candidacy of a person focuses attention on aspects that had hitherto been ignored or not taken into account in the job description - and the effects of such criteria can be both negative and positive. The decision premises a person represents are also a factor in defining the position. When the incumbent changes, a position takes on a different character; and why should this be left out of account in the selection process as a matter of principle? But this leads to not unproblematic ad hoc variation in the expectations associated with positions - to the advantage or disadvantage of the candidates under consideration. One therefore has to reckon with such ad hoc variation being perceived as unobjective bias in favor of certain persons, and hence as difficult to communicate. While decision-making positions may have the best of intentions for the organization, they can nevertheless find themselves under suspicion. And the more formalized the whole procedure is, the more this will be the case.
- (2) Redeployment and promotion processes within the system presuppose that proving oneself in a position provides sufficient indication of the likelihood of being able to prove oneself in another position. But this is more than questionable, especially when assessment criteria are tailored to the position that a person holds. There are two sides to this problem, too. It could be that proving oneself in one position gives the delusion of having prospects that cannot be realized in other positions. Whoever is judged to be good need not necessarily be suitable for promotion. But there is also the converse, perhaps more tragic case, which comes to light less easily because it leads to the prevention of promotion. Someone might prove unsuitable in all positions because he or she can unfold his potential only at the apex of the system. Selection processes in political parties certainly produce a great deal of miscasting; but they are likely to suffer most from their failure to further the advancement of persons suitable only for top positions (and who are perhaps themselves unaware of this).
- (3) Since individuals identified as persons are highly complex systems and since positions, too, represent systemic complexity, (forms for) personnel assessment and job description have to be multi-dimensional in design. This means that they do not produce unequivocal decisions: the one applicant will be better in some regards, another in others. This perhaps allows obvious nonstarters to be excluded, but does not lead to objective, well-founded decisions being made between several capable but not in every respect excellent candidates. The dimensions must rather be

reassessed ad hoc in relation to one another. This can easily give the impression of an arbitrary decision in favor of certain persons preferred for reasons impossible to explain. This can be avoided by quantifying the weighting of dimensions (for instance, qualifications 50%, cooperativeness 30%, intelligence 10%). But this shifts the arbitrariness to quantification, under certain circumstances singling out a person who would never have been chosen on the basis of direct impressions or experience in dealing with people. Such calculative procedures therefore tend rather to be used for commission decisions, since they obviate internal disputes. Schematizations are accordingly likely to serve principally to localize arbitrariness (alias decision paradox) and to conceal it in communicating the decision.

The more the selection process is driven by criteria, the greater is the danger of these problems being underestimated; this is especially true when criteria are conceived of as programming personnel selection²³ and their dysfunctionality perceived not as violations, not as errors in the handling of personnel affairs. This can be taken into account in certain measure in the formulation of standpoints (questions) for personnel assessment and in job descriptions. If personnel selection is programmed by criteria, decisions on individual cases can be delegated - and this demonstrates once again the close links between all sorts of decision premise. This need not necessarily lead to more rigid selection with losses of opportunity in individual cases.²⁴ Nevertheless, it can hardly be denied that the procedure itself has side effects because it has exclusion effects. It would therefore have to be ensured that the system evaluates its descriptions and learns from wrong decisions. And even automatisms of this sort must not be allowed to divert attention from the fact that there are problems that lie in rationalization and objectivization themselves. What had been designed to exclude arbitrariness ultimately has only the effect of relocating and restructuring arbitrariness.

Not least of all, efforts to rationalize attribution depend on the possibility of positions becoming vacant or new positions being established. This, too, means that personnel policy depends on factors like the death of members or the growth of the system that are not amenable to systematic planning. What is more, positions that become vacant have to be filled as quickly as possible if their superfluity is not to become too obvious. Even a sort of static rationality is hardly attainable under such conditions.²⁵ All in all, such objections confirm the suspicion that appeals to rationality at the level of the overall system serve rather to launch reform initiatives than to improve conditions - which does not mean that in particular cases better or worse decisions could be made.

VI

As soon as decisions are made about personnel deployment (recruitment, redeployment, promotion, dismissal) they are also observed and attributed. Attributed - to what? Even if personnel decisions are programmed in the system, they are not unequivocally determined by programs. Attribution therefore ends up not at the criteria but at the persons who decide about personnel. This is also the case when criteria have been objectively applied, since a margin of discretion is assumed. And this is all the more so when criteria are actively interpreted to adapt them to the persons favored - not least of all when in effect it makes no difference whether they are applied or not because they exist only on paper. In every case and in all organizations a patronage network is superimposed on "rational" personnel management. How decisions really come about cannot be established. Conjecture therefore counts and comes into play. Everyone is thus well advised to act as if there were patronage, and if situations are defined in this manner, then it is so.

Whoever disposes over personnel decisions *ex officio* can accordingly expect that others will expect that he has influence or can exert influence if he wishes. It may be a matter of mythology, of the products of gossip, and, above all, of provision for a future hidden in the unknown. It could be that investing in advantageous opinions pays off, and if not, the same mythology offers an explanation. It is confirmed by positive and negative experience.

Everything else is a matter of the form the variable patronage takes and the attitude of the system toward it. In extreme cases, which are, however, very typical for stratified societies and present-day so-called developing countries, personnel selection is guided largely by relations between patrons and clients external to the organization.²⁶ In Vatican terminology, we could speak of nepotism. It may be a question of family relations, extended families and their circle of clients, but also of ethnic and religious solidarity. Characteristic of this order is that external relations establish a sort of claim to preferential treatment and support, and that accepting it is no cause for embarrassment. Only modern judges see corruption in this. It should also be noted that the organization is thus provided with sources of solidarity that it could not itself tap in the given society. Another characteristic of this order is that it relies in large measure on mediation roles: on sponsors with good access to sponsors, so that favors can be asked not directly but "for others who deserve them." The system works altruistically and, to this extent, impeccably from a moral point of view, although on the basis of a particularistic morality, which is, however, usual in the society in question.

There is no clear-cut dividing line between such systems and the modern organizational system with universalistic decision criteria. One of the most important differences is that the possibility to practice patronage derives from positions internal to the organization and not from an external societal status.²⁷

The advantages of supporting persons then flow back into the organization itself. The concomitant gain in power can be re-invested in the system itself and only there, and does not flow back into the general societal networks of sponsorship, aid, and gratitude (just as under the conditions of an outdifferentiated money economy, capital gains have to be re-invested in the economy itself). Expectations of patronage can, above all, motivate unenforceable performance. For this reason, it is difficult to relocate personnel decisions away from the managerial positions of the system.²⁸ The party political spoils system also serves to consolidate career expectations in politics, which in turn makes service in political parties attractive for people aspiring to a career.²⁹

The double observation of personnel decisions is accordingly unavoidable, from formal and informal standpoints, programmable and non-programmable perspectives. By contrast, it remains an open question - contingent on the societal context - how far informal elasticity helps increase power within an organization and can be used as a leadership resource, or whether it serves to coordinate organizations with the systems of its societal environment: powerful family clans, the military, political parties, business enterprises, or, within the economy, with banks, for instance. Moreover, it makes a difference whether using margins of discretion in personnel decisions for external coordination is approved in the system or disapproved and decried as corruption.³⁰ From a sociological point of view, there appear to be narrow limits to rationalizing personnel decisions by setting criteria. It therefore has to be expected that potential for decision-making will be diverted for patronage purposes. This is not to be condemned already as a principle; one has to watch how the state of affairs is observed in the system and what effects this observation has.

VII

Under whatever criteria personnel decisions are made, as soon as positions are differentially evaluated, careers will develop. We have already dealt with careers³¹ in detail from the perspective of the now predominant form of integrating individuals and society. Here we turn to the topic once again to examine the importance of the intentional or unintentional development of careers for the personnel decisions of the system.

Career is a form of observation that sets out from the identity of a person (with which the individuals engaged in the career can identify themselves) and enumerates the positions that the person has held or has prospects of holding. The career form thus requires fixed and evaluated positions (or, at school: grades, levels of schooling, ranked types of school), which can be held by individuals or distributed among individuals, and which thus serve as indicators of success or failure. Since these conditions are institutionally entrenched in schools and organizations, one often does not realize what far-reaching

consequences they have. For they couple incentive and reward techniques with the form of career and leave little room to operate with incentives and motives independently of the ranking of positions. What remains are largely vain attempts to honor outstanding achievements at least symbolically by adding awards, prizes, or performance bonuses. Here, too, the difficult problem of individually attributing special merits cannot be avoided, particularly when special value is placed on "teamwork." In consequence, attention will be diverted from merit to attribution and the problem is then seen and treated in "political" terms.

This sort of experience suggests the wisdom of regulating incentives essentially through careers, thus tying them to the position structures of the system. At the same time, however, what is needed to order careers in the way of a rigid schema is not very motivating, because one soon becomes accustomed to any position attained and has difficulty adapting to the situation-dependent demand for special skills or special performance.³²

The construction of every career sets out from the position held at the moment and is divided from this perspective into past and future - past achievements relevant to the career and positions whose attainment is probable or at least possible on the basis of the person's career biography. Positions already attained are entered in the career account as achievements;³³ holding these positions is treated as a merit justifying claims to consideration or at least rendering them communicable. The extent to which such claims to consideration are institutionalized depends on the organizational culture³⁴; and it also depends on whether they can be asserted personally or whether an advocate has to be mandated to do so. Although, especially in the public service, the conviction is widespread that one has a right to a career simply by existing, this can at best have to do with titles and pay scales and not with shifting from one position to another.

Career is thus a form in which the past, and hence the present as future past, counts for the future. A career is a sort of capital formation, albeit of uncertain utility. For every station in a career depends both on self-selection and on other-selection - on applications, interest shown, and performance delivered, as well as on the occurrence of vacancies and the selection decisions of others. Careers are only possible if self-appointment is excluded.³⁵ Success and failure in a career can therefore always be attributed to two things: merit and fate. Future prospects can accordingly be divided into one's own efforts, good behavior, and performance, thus provisioning the career fund, and hopes that this will be honored. All of this can be oriented on the position structure of the system, which, owing to its hierarchical nature and due to the horizontal differentiation between better and worse jobs, keeps career opportunities scarce. Especially in the top echelons, careers depend in strong measure on chance - for example, on death or an opportune scandal providing the desired

opening. It could be said that career hopes form a reservoir of talent governed by chance.

An objective reality therefore underlies careers: the number and quality of positions available and the programs and practices of personnel decisions - for example, compelling selection conditions that are to be ignored only at the risk of illegality, or the option of recruiting both internally and externally. This sets the limits of the observation form "career." But the effects of this observation form do not consist in vacancies actually being filled. In other words, they do not lie in the current operations of personnel decisions, which take place only in the present. Their point of departure is an observation encompassing past and future that is oriented on the identity of persons and on the assessment of positions.³⁶ Since this applies to both the personal career of individuals involved as persons and, inseparably bound up with this, to the careers of other persons, we can speak of ongoing self-observation of the organizational system on the basis of the highly complex schema "career." The system regards itself as an ordering of career enablement.

To the extent that this form of self-observation is used (which depends not least on adequate reference to reality, thus also on sufficient mobility in relation to persons and positions), further variables are added to the observation schema. Thus the relative weight of professional culture and organizational culture could shift in favor of the latter if the organization offers career opportunities, while the profession tends to be built on equality among colleagues (all lawyers, all doctors, all nurses, or other professions defined in terms of educational qualifications). Above all, however, orientation on careers considerably deforms the official rationality-focused self-description of the system. Decision premises are subjected to secondary assessment, firstly as to whether they are objectively well-founded and secondly as to their career value. Tasks serve to draw attention to the person who performs them well or less well. Status hierarchies establish career opportunities and are elaborated with a view to this function.³⁷ Possible influence on personnel decisions is taken into account in advance. The communication network of gossip is concerned with persons, with regard, among other things, to deserved or undeserved careers. And every reform improves or worsens career opportunities, thus finding the corresponding proponents and critics. With all this, careers generate motives - also in the psychological sense but above all in the sense of a perceptive attribution of behavior to conditions.

The personnel management of an organizational system can attempt to develop criteria for assigning persons to positions, to refine these criteria through ongoing evaluation, and thus to control personnel movements in the system rationally. There is nothing to be said against trying. But there is no preventing the result from being observed in the career schema and producing corresponding reactions. And it must be doubted whether the rationality of

personnel management efforts to give due consideration to the tasks to be performed can go so far as to include direct and indirect effects on self-observation of the system in the career schema. And even if this happens, unplanned effects may well occur.³⁸

There are typical, widespread conditions under which career expectations amount to random forecasts. This is particularly true when jobs are scarce and suitable candidates are numerous. Under these conditions, even more careful regulation of selection would not counteract an impression of random choice. On the contrary, it would heighten it.³⁹ From the point of view of the individual, this very situation would make career forecasting (for himself and for others) a fascinating occupation. And this encourages communication, as if one could combat chance by exchanging ideas. Under these circumstances, regulation can produce only "perverse effects." The more systematic the planned intervention is, the greater will be the incentive to convert the resulting randomness into cognitions and motives through local speculation about chances and obstacles.

Career is accordingly the form that integrates individuals and organizations; by integrate we mean mutually limit. Every single position has to be so defined that it can be held by different "suitable" persons. From the point of view of positions, all individuals have doppelgänger. It is thus not the position, but only the career, that gives persons - and consequently the individuals who involve themselves as persons - an individual profile. This insight may help correct the questionable reputation of careers and careerism for the better.

Notes

1. References Chapter 1 n11.
2. For a classical statement against giving priority to orientation on persons, see Lyndall F. Urwick, *The Elements of Administration*, New York 1943, 38: "It is wasteful [to orient oneself on the particularities of persons] because unless jobs are clearly put together along lines of functional specialization it is impossible to train new men to succeed to positions as the incumbents are promoted, resign or retire. A man cannot be trained to take over another's special personal experience: and yet if jobs are fitted to men rather than men to jobs that is precisely what the employer must try to do. ... It is difficult enough to find suitable individuals to fill positions of responsibility when one half of the equation is 'given,' that is, when the job is defined. When both the job and the man are uncertain, unknown quantities, hours and days are likely to be expended in fruitless discussion and indecision."
3. This formulation is to be found in Walter Jost, *Das Sozialleben des industriellen Betriebs: Eine Analyse der sozialen Prozesse im Betrieb*, Berlin 1932, 6.
4. The opposing principle is to prevent the formation of cliques. See report on experience in the firm Bahlsen, Kurt Pentzlin, *Rationale Produktion: Methodik, Grundregeln und praktische Beispiele*, 2nd ed. Kassel 1950, 92 f.
5. See the suggestion by Herbert A. Simon et al., *Centralization vs. Decentralization in Organizing the Controller's Department*, New York 1954, 95 ff., always to take the

training and career value of positions into consideration when thinking about organizations.

6. For textbook-like business administration overview, see Wolfgang H. Staehle, *Management: Eine verhaltenswissenschaftliche Perspektive*, 4th ed. Munich 1989, 718-828. On changes see idem, The Changing Face of Personnel Management, in: G. Dlugos et al. (ed.), *Management under Differing Labour Market and Employment Systems*, Berlin 1988, 323-333. See also M. Kolb, Flexibilisierung und Individualisierung als neue personalwirtschaftliche Gestaltungsprinzipien, *Zeitschrift für Personal* . . . (1992), 37-48; Dieter Wagner, *Personalfunktion in der Unternehmensleitung: Grundlagen, Empirische Analyse, Perspektiven*, Wiesbaden 1994, esp. 293 ff. Overall, however, one has the impression that business administration in the sense of German "Betriebswirtschaftswissenschaft" cannot yet adequately capture the changes in enterprises themselves with its conceptual apparatus and analytical schemata. Nevertheless, it is at present difficult to judge the extent to which changes take place only at the rhetorical level, and the extent to which they affect actual behavior and the organization and programming of personnel management.
7. See Martin Baethge, Arbeit, Vergesellschaftung, Identität - Zur zunehmenden normativen Subjektivierung der Arbeit, in: Wolfgang Zapf (ed.), *Die Modernisierung moderner Gesellschaften: Verhandlungen des 25. Deutschen Soziologentages in Frankfurt am Main 1990*, Frankfurt 1991, 260-278.
8. See Rainer Koch, Entscheidungsverhalten und Entscheidungsunterstützung höherer Verwaltungsbediensteter: Zur Weiterentwicklung des Führungs- und Entscheidungsinstrumentariums öffentlicher Verwaltungen, *Verwaltungsarchiv* 83 (1992), 26-52; idem, Entscheidungsstile und Entscheidungsverhalten von Führungskräften öffentlicher Verwaltungen, *Verwaltung und Fortbildung* 21 (1993), 179-197.
9. See Rudolf Wimmer, Wozu brauchen wir ein General Management, *Hernsteiner* 6/3 (1993), 4-12 (11 f.).
10. See Michel Crozier, *L'Entreprise à l'écoute: Apprendre le management post-industriel*, Paris 1989, 201.
11. On this and the following points of view, see Emil Küng, Gesellschaftlicher Wandel und Unternehmensführung, in: Gilbert J. B. Probst and Hans Siegwart (eds.), *Integriertes Management: Bausteine des systemorientierten Management. Festschrift Hans Ulrich*, Bern 1985, 445-453; Theodor M. Bardmann and Reiner Franzpötter, Unternehmenskultur: Ein postmodernes Organisationskonzept?, *Soziale Welt* 41 (1990), 424-440; Theodor M. Bardmann, *Wenn aus Arbeit Abfall wird: Aufbau und Abbau organisatorischer Realitäten*, Frankfurt 1994, esp. 339 ff.
12. See Chapter 3, note 12.
13. See especially Mats Alvesson and Per Olof Berg, *Corporate Culture and Organizational Symbolism: an Overview*, Berlin 1992, esp. 35 ff.
14. See specifically Charles Perrow, The Organizational Context of Human Factors Engineering, *Administrative Science Quarterly* 28 (1983), 521-541, and Greg R. Oldham and Nancy L. Rochford, Relationships between Office Characteristics and Employee Reactions: A Study of the Physical Environment, *Administrative Science Quarterly* 28 (1983), 542-556.

15. This is likely to apply quite generally and as overestimation is, as it were, institutionalized. "The extraordinary modern built-in faith in the capacities of the self as decision maker is still amazing, and little justified by any experience," remarks John W. Meyer, *Self and Life Course: Institutionalization and Its Effects*, in: George M. Thomas et al., *Institutional Structure: Constituting State, Society, and the Individual*, Newbury Park 1987, 242-260 (248).
16. And it should be noted that this distinction is, for its part, a reaction in theory to excessive demands that would otherwise be made on personnel management. For as insight into the complex empirical individuality of individuals increases and society provides and approves communicational forms of expression for precisely this purpose, we have to abandon the notion that individuals are, in broad terms, dependent variables in a planning and administrative process.
17. See Jean Paul, *Vorschule der Ästhetik*, Werke vol. 5, Munich 1963, 245.
18. This is particularly striking in societies that produce little information and therefore concentrate communication on the generation of solidarity. See, e.g., Max Gluckman, Gossip and Scandal, *Current Anthropology* 4 (1963), 307-316. But see also the critique directed more at individual strategies, prestige interests, and information management by Robert Paine, What Is Gossip About? An Alternative Hypothesis, *Man* 2 (1967), 278-285.
19. See J. Richard Harrison and James G. March, Decision Making and Postdecision Surprises, *Administrative Science Quarterly* 29 (1984), 26-42.
20. See Chester I. Barnard, *The Functions of the Executive*, Cambridge, MA 1938, reprint 1951, esp. 139 ff.; Herbert A. Simon, Donald W. Smithburg, and Victor A. Thompson, *Public Administration*, New York 1950, 381 ff.; James G. March and Herbert A. Simon, *Organizations*, New York 1958, 84 ff.
21. Which, incidentally, applies only for this concept and not for the entire theory of Barnard and Simon. But programming then has to be introduced as an additional variable.
22. This is also the case, indeed particularly so, in private sector enterprises. Business consultants then find that they come across hierarchical levels for which they can discover no job description. They have to construct a sense for them or, in times of crisis, propose cutting such levels.
23. A program designed for use in the organization naturally differs from the results of the scholarly investigation of corresponding correlations. Scientifically demonstrated connections are unlikely to lower the practical risk of programming.
24. See Peter M. Blau, Decentralization in Bureaucracies, in: Mayer N. Zald (ed.), *Power in Organizations*, Nashville, TN 1970, 150-174. See also Peter M. Blau and Richard A. Schoenherr, *The Structure of Organizations*, New York 1971, 115 ff.
25. "Rational control is very difficult, even to plan; large systems of men and jobs evolve in complex paths responsive mainly to inputs of new jobs and deaths of men," as Harrison C. White sums it up in: Control and Evolution of Aggregate Personnel: Flows of Men and Jobs, *Administrative Science Quarterly* 14 (1969), 4-11.
26. See, e.g., Fred W. Riggs, *The Ecology of Public Administration*, London 1961.
27. See, e.g., Morris Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier*, Glencoe 1960, esp. 145 ff.; Peter G. Richards, *Patronage in the British Government*, London 1964 (with a very vague concept of patronage).

28. For German public administration, see Thomas Ellwein, *Das Regierungssystem der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, 3rd ed. Opladen 1973, 397 ff.
29. See, e.g., Daniel P. Moynihan and James Q. Wilson, *Patronage in New York State 1955-1959*, *American Political Science Review* 58 (1964), 286-301; Rudolf Wildenmann, *Macht und Konsens als Problem der Innen- und Außenpolitik*, 2nd ed. Frankfurt 1967, 146 ff.; Wolfgang Runge, *Politik und Beamtentum im Parteienstaat: Die Demokratisierung der politischen Beamten in Preußen zwischen 1918 und 1933*, Stuttgart 1965.
30. For the political appointment of civil servants in Germany, see the strikingly high rejection rates in the data of Luhmann and Mayntz op. cit. (1973), 255 ff. Rejection predominates in the literature, too, because the influence of political parties on appointments is mostly regarded as a matter of "personal relations" (overlooking the extent to which this is also true with internal patronage). See, e.g., Peter Hubler, *Probleme der Rekrutierung und der Selektion von Bewerbern für den öffentlichen Dienst*, in: *Studienkommission für die Reform des öffentlichen Dienstrechts* vol. 10, Baden-Baden 1973, 155 f. with further references; Wolfgang Pippke, *Karrieredeterminanten in der öffentlichen Verwaltung: Hierarchiebedingte Arbeitsanforderungen und Beförderungspraxis im höheren Dienst*, Baden-Baden 1975, 138 f. One then frequently speaks of "extra-functional" selection or selection without regard to suitability, without being able to point to any empirical suitability comparison. For an external observer, these judgments reveal a piece of the historically determined organizational culture of the German public service.
31. See Chapter 3-6
32. See Anne Donnellon and Maureen Scully, Teams, Performance, and Rewards: Will the Post-Bureaucratic Organization Be a Post-Meritocratic Organizations?, in: Charles Heckscher and Anne Donnellon (eds.), *The Post- Bureaucratic Organization: New Perspectives on Organizational Change*, Thousands Oaks, CA 1994, 63-90.
33. Not only the positions attained at the given moment count but also and in particular positions with which a career begins, especially, of course, educational qualifications, as well as entry positions. "Indeed, mobility in the earliest stage of one's career bears an unequivocal relationship with one's later career," as James E. Rosenbaum, *Tournament Mobility: Career Patterns in a Corporation*, *Administrative Science Quarterly* 24 (1979), 220-241 (220), puts it. This means that young people, in particular, come under career pressure because what they miss out on at the beginning is difficult to catch up on later.
34. According to press reports in January 1994, the mass promotion of several thousand civil servants in North Rhine-Westphalia before a promotion freeze took effect was defended on the grounds that the civil servants concerned would otherwise have had to wait for over a year to be promoted! What was at issue was naturally not transfer to other posts but promotion to higher ranks with higher salaries.
35. There are clearly many parallels for this prevention of self-gratification - for instance, in the symbolically generalized communication media truth, love, money, and power. In all these cases, blocking self-gratification is the precondition for the development of more exacting social structures.
36. This distinction between operation and observation is not taken into account if, in keeping with the prevalent structuralistic orientation, one asks only about the

complex factors that influence careers. See, e.g., James N. Baron, Alison Davis-Blake, and William T. Bielby, The Structure of Opportunity: How Promotion Ladders Vary within and among Organizations, *Administrative Science Quarterly*

- 31 (1986), 248-273. Although an external observer is presupposed, namely the investigator, the distorting effects of self-observation of the system are not taken into account.
37. This can also be seen in title differences. See James N. Baron and William T. Bielby, The Proliferation of Job Titles in Organizations, *Administrative Science Quarterly* 31 (1986), 561-586.
38. See for the case of using fixed-term contracts to improve the career opportunities of permanent employees: William P. Barnett and Anne S. Miner, Standing on the Shoulders of Others: Career Interdependence in Job Mobility, *Administrative Science Quarterly* 37 (1992), 262-281. And, conversely, on the use of project work and fixed-term contracts as springboards for careers: Robert R. Faulkner and Andy B. Anderson, Short Term Projects and Emergent Careers: Evidence From Hollywood, *American Journal of Sociology* 92 (1987), 879-909.
39. See the empirical study of top careers in the American school system: James C. March and James G. March, Almost Random Careers: The Wisconsin School Superintendency, 1940-1972, *Administrative Science Quarterly* 22 (1977), 377-409. On page 379 we read: "... if one believes a social system is closely regulated, one should generally be more surprised by large deviations from a chance model than by small ones."

