

# REGULATIVE ORDERS AND INSTITUTIONS

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Technology and bureaucracy have been twin forces directing and shaping the regulative orders of institutions in the 20th century. Machine, and later scientific technology have subsumed traditional norms of manufacture and production to the rule of the "technological imperative." Bureaucracy has subsumed the definition and exercise of authority to the official rules of a procedural regime rationally directed to cost efficiency.

To say ours is a technological society, as many have, is to acknowledge the dominance of technology and technical procedures in our conception and definition of how activities ought to be organized and carried out. To say ours is a bureaucratic or management society, as others have, is to acknowledge the dominance of rational cost accounting and official procedures as the bases for defining, directing and regulating activities within organizations. But to acknowledge the dominance of the principles of technology and bureaucracy in the regulation of contemporary institutions is not to agree with or laud the two regulative orders. Groups ranging from unions to environmentalists have criticized and challenged both. Their extension into institutions not immediately directed to production or profit making has increased the criticism. There is growing recognition that neither works well any longer even in its own context.

The strength of technical and bureaucratic regulative orders is in their precision and their measurable rationality. Social norms tend to be elastic and permeable, with indeterminate boundaries, vague meanings, and variable applications. Having origins lost in tradition, norms often seem arbitrary or outdated. As well, the strength and efficacy of norms depends to an important degree on their immediacy within more or less constant social interactions and relationships. In contrast, formally defined rules have much clearer boundaries and meanings and can have extended application. Their operation depends less upon personal interactions and relations than upon formal procedures and an organization designed to enforce them. The added advantage of technically or bureaucratically defined rules lies in the purposeful efficiency of the regulative order. They are demonstrably technically effective and cost efficient.

These rationally based systems made possible the development of the large-scale corporations characteristic of modern economic enterprise, but not without costs. The weakness of technical and bureaucratic regulative orders is that they revolve about and are defined in terms of "things" rather than people. Not only are they formal, they are impersonally formal. They are directed towards control of productive processes and of costs. The needs and desires of humans are

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ysatisfied *out of* the institutions, not by or within them. Karl Marx was right in recognizing that the machine based technology of the factories would be alienating, personally and socially, to those employed within them. A similar point can be made about Weber's bureaucrats acting in terms of a "formalistic impersonality." The "persons" of the workers and others within technically and bureaucratically regulated institutions are subsumed to the rational procedures of quality control and cost efficiency.

Throughout the 20th century there has been a tension between the efficiency of technically and bureaucratically regulated institutions and the needs and values of the persons working in or affected by them. When the limitations and problems of technical and bureaucratic institutions are considered, surprisingly little attention has been paid to a third alternative. Although rarely considered on the same plane or in the same context as the twin forces of technology and bureaucracy, a regulatory order based on the professional model has also been significant for the development and shape of 20th century institutions.

Like the manufacturing and corporate sectors, professions went through their own "revolution" in the 19th and early 20th centuries, a revolution that resulted in a new premise of the "qualified practitioner" and a new promise of the "ethical practitioner." They have been the hallmark of professions since. The regulative order of professions revolves about a combination of the *discipline* of the professional function, rooted in a body of knowledge, and the *ethical concern* for the needs of the client. This was originally thrust towards and expressed by the individual and autonomous (free) practitioner to his or her clients, and became "institutionalized" in the practitioner-client relationship. The success of the "professional project," however, resulted in an increased demand for professional services. This in turn led to a rise in the number and variety of service organizations, such as schools, hospitals, welfare agencies, etc., that developed about regulative orders more or less centred in professionally defined services.

The regulative order of professionally based institutions has been more normatively than rationally rooted. It is an order shaped by professional definitions and values about the functions to be performed and the qualifications necessary to perform them. It is an order directed to expressing those functions in the interest of the clients. The strength of the professional order is that human qualities and human needs are at its centre: it operates at the human level in terms of human interests.

The weakness of the professional order is that it can lack the systematic organization of more rationally directed institutions. The professional model developed and was initially expressed in the relationship between free practitioners and individual clients and has not easily been translated into more general organizational forms. There have been few guides to help arrange and order

relations between and among the different professions and occupations now involved in service institutions. As a consequence many professionally based institutions developed in an *ad hoc* manner as those within them coped with the problems, pressures and demands that arose. The difficulty has been that the normative coherence and thrust of client-oriented service sometimes has been lost in the jockeying for status and control among professional groups.

A regulatory base rooted in the nature of the professional functions and in the characteristics and needs of the clients, combined with a less than systematic development, has meant that there has been a greater variation among service institutions than might be the case with technically and bureaucratically based institutions. Local conditions and more traditionally based values and needs have helped define and colour service institutions in ways that are much less evident or important in the rationally regulated technical and bureaucratic institutions. In other words, it is likely that professionally rooted institutions are importantly local institutions that can defy attempts to organize them more globally.

Just as technical and bureaucratic institutions evidence a tension between their technical and cost efficiency and the human values and needs of persons working within or affected by them, so too within professional institutions there has been a growing tension – in this case between meeting the needs of the clients on the one hand, and being accountable for the effectiveness and the cost of the services being delivered on the other. Among those facing these problems are governments which have become more and more involved in regulating (rather than simply legitimizing) institutions in all sectors of society.

Not surprisingly, given their prior involvement in the economic sector and the fact that public monies increasingly pay for service institutions, the government approach to the regulation of the professionally based institutions has been guided predominantly by principles of technically rooted “quality control” and bureaucratically defined “cost accounting.” Where previously many service institutions were given grants in one form or another or were funded at a given rate as governments supported their services, such monies are increasingly subject to budgetary control and cost accounting. The result has been the rapid bureaucratization of the formerly professionally regulated institutions. Rather than lessening the tensions between the ideals of professionally defined service and the desire for a more rational technical and budgetary accounting, the new government-directed regulatory orders within service organizations have increased those tensions.

It is interesting that the escalation of bureaucratic and technical regulation of service institutions is occurring at a time when the opposite is happening in those corporations which have been the most bureaucratically organized and technically rooted. The Quality Movement is expanding rapidly within the economic sector,

and while it has as many expressions as it has proponents, there are some general identifiable features. Central among these is the idea that customer satisfaction should replace product control and profit-making as the central goal towards which the enterprise is directed. In the process, a technically defined quality control of production is to be replaced by qualified workers directing their knowledge and skills towards manufacturing products and delivering services that best meet the needs of customers. Profit is to be defined less as a matter of capital cost accounting than as a resource to be used to better meet the needs of the customer. This is very much like the professionally based regulative order, rooted in the principle of the qualified practitioner, disciplined in the knowledge of the professional function and ethically directing that knowledge and skill in the interest of the client.

If there is any lesson to be learned from examining regulative orders that have shaped institutions in the 20th century, it is that the rational orders of the technical and bureaucratic imperatives do not meet or satisfy the interests and needs of the people within them or of the people served or affected by them. As a student once wrote in an introductory sociology examination: "Bureaucracy may be the most efficient form of organization, but efficiency is not our greatest need." On the other hand there has been a problem transforming the more human regulatory order of professions, initially institutionalized within the practitioner-client relationship, into a more encompassing and systematic organizational form.

A potential solution may be found in the features and thrust of the Quality Movement. Its organizational conception of the qualified worker defined within the context of a work team might well help service organizations cut through professional ideology relating to the autonomy of the individual practitioner. It might help define a more systematic coordination among a team of professionals, without lessening the importance and role of the qualified practitioner. As well, an organizational definition of function or service, one that is not dominated by or limited to the function of a single profession, may foster more general and systematic definitions of service functions, lessening the local uniqueness of each organization while still centred in the idea of functions directed towards the interests of clients.

The regulation of both economic and service institutions in the future may thus be based on an interesting combination of principles inherited from the 19th century revolutions in the technical, bureaucratic and professional orders, but transformed and rearranged in a new institutional order which itself may be revolutionary.