

Notes on Administration of Research Facilities

The Administration Itself:

"The basic problem in the organization of a scientific group is to set up a system which will permit the individuals to apply to the fullest extent their knowledge and abilities in the direction of whatever is of the greatest importance to the laboratory. The only virtue in organization of any sort is to assist the scientist and the technical supervision to this end".

(Mees, The Organization of Industrial Scientific Research
p. 175) [*Italics by AFSA personnel*]

Either we (AFSA) agree with this statement or we do not -- if we agree, we recognize that the prime function of the administrators and service groups is to assist the technical people by performing the necessary housekeeping functions, provision of supplies, etc., and the maintenance of a favorable environment.

If we disagree with this premise, then we will use administrators not to insulate the technical people from the welter of top level paper work, but to add their own stream of orders, directives, memoranda, etc., to the existing torrent.

Example: What is the fundamental attitude of the procurement groups? Are they primarily interested in the delivery of the goods to the technical consumer as quickly as possible or is their ambition one of having the most impressive record keeping and filing system?

A scientist who orders an urgently needed piece of equipment, can be sympathetic toward the natural problems of delivery, shortages and priority. He will not be tolerant of artificial obstacles erected on the grounds of administrative nicety such as "lead time", the fact that certain classes of material must be ordered in certain months, etc.

This leads to the question of,

Efficiency

The question here is simply that of whose efficiency is to be nurtured. A tool room in a factory can be run with extreme efficiency if it issues only micrometers on Mondays, wrenches on Tuesday, etc., but what of the efficiency of the factory? AFSA has the same problem: we can run machine shops, drafting rooms, supply rooms and other service facilities with great internal efficiency if we are willing to inconvenience the people who are supposed to be served thereby, and again accept an Agency-wise drop in efficiency.

SUBJECT: Notes on Administration of Research Facilities

Scientists who are worth their salt professionally are disgusted by wastefulness and inefficiency, and unlike unskilled employees are not content to sit around and pleurably accept enforced idleness so long as their checks keep coming in.

Morale

One characteristic of a scientist is that he is not an 8 hour day producer. If his problem is of any interest whatever he probably thinks about it 16 hours a day. No scientist, if he is worth anything at all, is psychologically able to leave his problem at the office. This fact has long been recognized by industry and those people are not expected to punch time clocks. Even NRL is quite liberal in this matter -- what if a scientist does arrive 15 minutes late in the morning? Doesn't the company (or the Government) get richly repaid by the continual study and thinking done by the scientist on his own time and at his own expense?

A research administration which fails in the above respects acts like a selection system, particularly in the present era. After a period of time it can be assumed that the scientific and technical employees, with the exception of a few loyal and devoted men, will consist of those professionally unqualified for work in greener pastures.