

Organization Man

William Whyte's classic, read in multiple parts

An in-depth review summary of the classic by William Whyte, with my 21st century commentary

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The Organization Man by William Whyte: Introduction

By: Venkat on November 18, 2008

[William Whyte's](#) 1956 classic, [The Organization Man](#) is far too embedded culturally to be 'reviewed' today, even as a classic. The book can only be read within its context, and reconstructed for 2008. It is also much too dense and nuanced to dispose off in a single post, like I do most books. So I am going to start my first-ever multi-part series devoted to a single book; the book that began the study of worker archetypes, 52 years ago. If you want to follow along, make sure you buy the [2002 reissue edition](#), with a great foreword by **Fortune Magazine** executive editor, Joseph Nocera. Since I have to do a bit of setup, in this first part, I'll only get as far as Chapter 1. In future parts, I'll try to do 3-4 chapters at once.

Let's start by reviewing the cultural impact of the original. The best-known artifact of course, is Apple's famous 1984 commercial ([YouTube video here](#)), which owes as much to Whyte as to Orwell for its arresting imagery.



Organization man: anonymous, colorless, enervated, subsumed by crowd, indoctrinated

classic antithesis image, female, colorful, creative-destructive sexual energy, stand-out-from-crowd individualism



The Origins and Cultural Impact of 'Organization Man'

Whyte's critical portrait of post World War II corporate America, and the suburban lifestyle it created, is next only to Max Weber's [The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism](#) in influencing how we think about work. In many ways, it is in fact an updated version of Weber's arguments, against what Whyte saw as a culture that had drifted much too far from the individualist, competitive and Darwinian ethos to which Weber attributed the growth of the West.

Any book which creates an iconic cultural image will necessarily itself be reduced to caricature. In Whyte's case, his nuanced (if unsympathetic portrait) of his subject ended up reduced to a strawman collectivist figure, as in the 1984 Apple commercial. Some have assumed, without reading the book, that it is a case against organizations and for nonconformity. This was explicitly **not** Whyte's intent. As he says:

This book is not a plea for nonconformity. Such pleas have an occasional therapeutic value, but as an abstraction, nonconformity is an empty goal, and rebellion against prevailing opinion merely because it is prevailing should no more be praised than acquiescence to it. Indeed, it is often a mask for cowardice, and few are more pathetic than those who flaunt outer differences to expiate their inner surrender. ...there will be no strictures in this book against "Mass Man" ... nor will there be any strictures against ranch wagons, or television sets, or gray flannel suits... the man who drives a Buick Special and lives in a ranch-type house just like hundreds of other ranch-type houses can assert himself as effectively and courageously against his particular society as the

bohemian against his particular society...the fault is not in organization, in short; it is in our worship of it. It is in our vain quest for a utopian equilibrium...it is in the soft-minded denial that there is a conflict between the individual and society.

We'll consider Whyte's ideas in their original sophisticated forms, but you will need to make a conscious effort to think deeper than the default simplistic imagery associated with the phrase 'Organization Man'. The book rings very true and very current, which makes sense, since if we are right about [cloudworker economics](#), we are seeing a partial return to a form of work that is a century old. A form of work whose loss Whyte was bemoaning, since he wrote about its antithetical form, the corporation, in its heyday. But before we dive into the first 3 chapters, here are some examples of how The Organization Man managed to frame the discourses around work for 50 years:

The 1984 Apple commercial I already mentioned

The image of suburbia in [The Stepford Wives](#)

Malvina Reynolds famous 1962 song [Little Boxes on the Hillside](#), which was also used as the theme song for the Showtime suburbia drama, [Weeds](#).

And of course, all the literature about work since TOM. [Peter Capelli's Talent On Demand](#) is a good example of TOM-informed analysis, as is all of Dan Pink's work.

The notion of **empty suit** to describe a useless, faceless warm body

The surreal Coen brothers' movie, [The Hudsucker Proxy](#)

The list goes on (do post other examples you know of in the comments).

Whyte himself tired of Organization Man related work after about eight years and spent the rest of his life as an urbanologist, exploring the culture of cities. Some day I may blog about that.

But let's dive into the text itself.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Whyte begins the book with an open declaration that while he professes a pessimism in relation, his own views are strongly unopposed towards the culture he is about to discuss. The book begins with a compact definition: Whyte is writing up 100 about a sophisticated white.

As usual when I read that contemporary body of thought which usually requires the presence of society against the individual. Its major proposition are that: a belief in the group as the source of morality, a belief in "heterogeneity" as the ultimate need of the individual, and a belief in the application of science to achieve that heterogeneity.

The specific which Whyte has selected was a direct result of his own individual conditions. As with that sophisticated thing and then a practical and dependent on (liberalism) every individual (with subtle but "sensible" of the organizational man). He saw the white as possible across the Western world, and could point to America but that Westerners can hardly that has been equally possible across the West. My that was a classic Organization Man at Yale Street between 1980-1985. Whyte was in an industry he studied, not just corporate middle managers. To the white he attributed the socialization of middle manager and the professionalization of business.

The organization man provided culture of the 20s was at the other end of the spectrum, relative to the self-reliant individual. Culture 20s (under advised) clearly, even that, Whyte anticipated the culture that he might be attributing a statement. The chapter originally argues that the broad might not be very long term, and that dependent on a counter trend might be employed. In this, I believe Whyte was more right than we are. I think in the perfect future seems to see in the general that the Organization Man also, don't in the early 1980s, that companies today actually price individual and individual average stability. But in corporate America, the price level actually changed as much. There is no reason to the value of a middle manager.

and the rest of them own thing, but the organization man is still there and well, and in the majority, most of the support is to be longer playing them.

The other pieces of Chapter 1 are worth highlighting. First, the commentary on the unique aspects of the American experience. Like Francis Fukuyama's *Trust* more recently, Whyte points out a fundamental way about American self-perception that was first observed by de Toqueville.

One hundred years ago (over 100) de Toqueville was writing that through our general genius - and feeling - by a cooperative action, we build more than the others of personal independence and freedom. We hold on, and on like as the American, when they organization man long since a fact, offered the old that an F nothing had really changed at all.

The observation that Americans do not like to spend their collective effort on a new. What is perhaps unique to people in the world that has large American corporations, their traditions of capitalism, right interests for the individual of capitalism. Corporate culture usually right to the generalization of China and Cuba. And we are not taking their culture from. The one taking about fundamentally common and other of the managerial class. Something people usually refer to by reference of "American dream culture" that never thought of the word is modern. [Lecture 1: The American Dream](#) is one of my earlier posts, and that is somewhat similar. Whyte shows the socialization of middle manager and the professionalization of business.

Conclusion? The article is, and when he includes his studies about in Western history, it is in a sense of a Protestant this, specifically, design - the development of property, the emerging effect of security, the values of risk, of hard work and independence. He is not being hypothetical, only suggesting the history wants to believe the future he knows he exists.

Let me conclude this opening post with an axiom from the opening paragraph, one of the most difficult that I have read. The part is well I heard particularly tough.

They are not workers, nor are they the white collar people. In the usual sense of the word. These people only work for The Organization. The one I can think of belonging to is a well. They are the ones of our middle class who will have, typically as well as physically, to take the name of organization man, and to they will be the kind and best of our great self-perpetuating institutions... the system that makes that body something as "career man" - psychologically necessary, they are of the staff as well as much as the firm, and most are destined to be joined in a middle area that will make a stability requirement.

This is a very subtle form of the common culture that has become an organization and so something that is more than a traditional culture. The two parts of the essential idea that the organization man, ultimately, is a group, making that culture. This is [Lecture 1: The American Dream](#), reworked in the same.

And that's the thing. That's how we'll look at a few more chapters, covering Whyte's analysis of the role of the Protestant Ethic, the role of "Scientific" and the values of heterogeneity and "Tightness".

The Ideology of the Organization Man

By: Venkat on November 23, 2008

Recap: Last time I introduced [William Whyte's](#) 1956 classic, [The Organization Man](#) within a modern context, and we got as far as Chapter 1. We saw that Whyte set

himself the project of describing, carefully if unsympathetically, the collectivist, anti-individualist 'social ethic' that provided the foundations for modern corporations. In this post, I will cover Chapters 2-5 (Part 1 of the 7-part, 29-chapter book).

Here's a short version of the argument in Part 1, titled the **Ideology of the Organization Man**. Intellectual culture and practical concerns conspired, between 1940-1960, to create a pseudo-scientific socialist culture within the capitalist corporation. What began as an instrument to co-opt unionism ultimately swallowed middle management, and the organization man was born. Where the previous century, 1840-1940 had been dominated by colorful figures from the top and bottom -- robber barons and fiery unionists -- post WW II American culture was defined and dominated by the middle layers. Whyte argues that this layer managed to suck the soul out of leadership and grassroots passion alike. Like the labor union culture, and unlike the robber-baron culture, it was group-oriented. Unlike the labor unions though, it was not primarily about unity against oppression or about worker rights. It was primarily about a corporate deification of the values of community: **belongingness** and **togetherness**. A belief in cooperation and consensus for their own sake.

Let's do the longer version, and as we do so, keep this **deja vu** question in mind: are 'social' media falling victim to the same collectivist dangers today?

Chapter 2: The Decline of the Protestant Ethic

Whyte is out to describe the life and times of the Organization Man, not discover its root causes, so the effort he devotes to this is at best a quick broad-strokes study. He concludes that the social ethic arose as a reactionary response to the [protestant ethic](#) of Max Weber. The protestant ethic, as understood here, was the mature form: the highly competitive, Darwinian, radical individualism of the robber baron era of capitalist building.

Whyte attributes its decline to two forces: the accumulated entropy of its internal contradictions, and the rise of opposed intellectual and pragmatic cultures that provided an alternative (ultimately worse, in Whyte's analysis). On the 'internal contradictions' front, the ethic became a victim of its own success. It helped organize an unruly and lawless America into a mass suburban culture driven by the logic of large consumer markets. Protestant-ethic values fueled the growth of the America as an industrial-scale producer. The ideals, such as thrift and self-denial, that drove corporate growth, were not exactly helpful in catalyzing a culture of mass consumption. Whyte quotes a contemporary market researcher:

Helping in this task is what a good part of "motivation research" is all about. Ernest Dichter, says, "we are now confronted with the problem of permitting the average American to feel moral even when he...is spending, even when he is not saving, even when he is taking two vacations a year and buying a second or third car. One of the basic problems of this prosperity, then, is to give people the sanction and justification to enjoy it and to demonstrate that the hedonistic approach to his life is a moral, not an immoral one.

The Organization Man culture was exactly this consumption-legitimizing culture, and though ostensibly built on its own set of collectivist rather than material values, its **effect** on the economy was to legitimize consumption, through Organization Man narratives such as The Good (Suburban) Life, which we'll meet later. Curiously enough, it managed to

simultaneously stigmatize entrepreneurship for pure profit and wealth as greed. It was moral to want two cars, but not to want a million dollars.

The second force was an intellectual counter-reaction to the individualism encouraged by the Protestant Ethic. In a way, this too, was an effect of success: by domesticating Wild West America, the Protestant Ethic created a culture that needed more structure.

Philosophers such as [William James](#) (1842-1910), [John Dewey](#) (1859-1952) and [Thorstein Veblen](#) (1857-1929) critiqued the protestant ethic, and erected the counter-arguments that could legitimize the new, more organized, suburban American culture.

Note though that it is not the careful opinions of these philosophers that Whyte thinks matters, but the crude and bastardized forms in which they diffused through the culture.

In all this, there is curiously little discussion of the specific historical/contingent causes that might have been contributors (two World Wars and one Great Depression). Overall though, I suspect Whyte's analysis would be strengthened, rather than weakened, by adding history.

This chapter had me wondering: was Whyte merely a nostalgic classicist, pining for a romanticized Golden Age of capitalism? Reading further, you realize that wasn't the case. Whyte genuinely felt that the individualist values of the protestant ethic were sounder than those of the collectivist social ethic that replaced it. Full disclosure: so do I.

Chapter 3: Scientism

Philosophers and a diffuse sense of collectivism alone would not have created the Organization Man. The force that made the collectivist social ethic real was what Whyte calls Scientism. The culture of Scientism drew in part from grand social engineering models, such as the [General Systems Theory](#) of Ludwig Von Bertalanffy, the [System Dynamics](#) of Forrester, and the [Cybernetics](#) of Wiener (I peripherally referred to the history of social engineering in [this piece](#)).

(A personal comment is in order here. As a guy with a PhD in systems and control theory myself, I've had a love-hate relationship with this body of literature. Nowadays, I have finally settled into being a skeptic.)

Among the sillier effects of wooly-headed borrowing from science that Whyte notes is the then-current tendency to turn the mathematical notion of equilibrium into a cultural axiom, and derive from it a justification for collectivism in terms of 'social equilibrium.' Here's Whyte's summary critique of Scientism:

The scientific basis can be stated very simply. It is now coming to be widely believed that science has proved the group superior to the individual. Science has not, but that is another matter. Mistaken or not, the popularized version of the science of the group is a social force in its own right...

...Part of the trouble lies in our new-found ability to measure more precisely, the idea that the successes of natural science were in large measure to the objectiveness of the phenomena studied eludes social engineers. Median income level of a hundred selected families in an urban industrial universe correlates .76 with population density-not .78 or .61 but 76, and that's a fact. The next step beckons: having measured this it seems that there is nothing that can't be measured. We are purged of bias and somehow by the sheer accumulation of such bias-free findings, we will pave the basis of a theoretical formula that describes all. Just like

physics....

This should sound familiar: Whyte is describing a version of Orwell's 1984 (Whyte and Orwell were born only 15 years apart). After describing (with barely-concealed disgust) the sorts of 'scientifically legitimized' collectivist organizational roles that were beginning to emerge in the 50s ("peace planner," "group therapist," "integrative leader," "social diagnostician"), Whyte comments explicitly on the ideas of his literary contemporary.

As in other such suggested projects the scientific elite is not supposed to give orders. There runs through all of them a clear notion that questions of policy can be made somewhat nonpartisan the application of science...[In] the 1984 of Big Brother one would at least know the enemy was-a bunch of bad men who wanted power because they liked power. But in the other kind of 1984 one would be disarmed for not knowing who the enemy was, and when the day of reckoning came the people on the other side of the table wouldn't be Big Brother's bad henchmen; they would be a mild-looking group of therapists who, like the Grand Inquisitor, would be doing what they did to help you.

This critique of Scientism would sound dated, except that it isn't. Change a few terms and you get modern statements of Scientism, to which Whyte's remarks would equally apply. Consider this bit from [The End of Theory](#), by Chris Anderson of Wired,

Speaking at the O'Reilly Emerging Technology Conference this past March, Peter Norvig, Google's research director, offered an update to George Box's maxim: "All models are wrong, and increasingly you can succeed without them."

This is a world where massive amounts of data and applied mathematics replace every other tool that might be brought to bear. Out with every theory of human behavior, from linguistics to sociology. Forget taxonomy, ontology, and psychology. Who knows why people do what they do? The point is they do it, and we can track and measure it with unprecedented fidelity. With enough data, the numbers speak for themselves.

Norvig (and by citation, Anderson) are, quite simply, wrong. I love the original George Box quote (all models are wrong, some models are useful). Norvig dangerously reduces the idea of scientific model to "first principles, theoretical model." The "massive amounts of data and applied mathematics" just substitutes the the hidden assumptions of statistical, multiple-regression modeling and data-mining for the more explicit ones of first-principles modeling.

I don't have room here to go into this in detail, but the takeaway is this: this is one piece of Whyte's analysis that is **still** current. Consider, for instance, the recent book, [The Dream Manager](#) (a Nanny Corporation parable about a company that institutes a "dream manager" position to help employees reach their dreams). Does that come from a very different place than the idea of a "peace planner?" If System Dynamics led to a deification of equilibrium, today, bastardized versions of complexity theory similarly deify an obscure notion of **disequilibrium**. [All of behavioral economics](#) and [wisdom-of-crowds](#) thinking can, without adequate care, end up with the same problems.

The moral and doctrinal values that accompanied Scientism were **belongingness** and **togetherness**, each of which gets its own chapter.

Chapter 4: Belongingness

The social ethic of the Organization Man relied on ideas from something called the Social Relations school, founded by sociologist [Elton Mayo](#) at Harvard in the fifties, a school of thought that was concerned with the rootlessness of the industrial worker, and the problem of reconciling the [assumed] worker's need for belongingness with "the conflicting allegiances of the complex world he now finds himself in." Somewhere in this intellectual program, an unquestioned idea crept in, that a single subsuming affiliation (to the Nanny Corporation), was the solution.

The argument is developed along three fronts. First, there is Mayo's own work, on the social systems **within** industrial environments, in particular through an extremely smart set of experiments at Western Electric in Illinois. Mayo and his colleagues were out to improve productivity in the classic Taylorist fashion, and found an unusual phenomenon: **every** experiment they could think up, ranging from improved lighting to changing schedules, resulted in improvements in both the test and control groups. They finally concluded that it was the fact that they were **selected** for the study, which made the test subjects feel like they belonged, that resulted in the morale improvements.

Similar conclusions were drawn on two other fronts, Lloyd Warner, studying the New England town of Newburyport, attributed the dynamics of the community in relation to the local company (a shoe factory), to the need for belongingness. Elsewhere, Frank Tannenbaum drew similar inferences from his study of labor unions.

From these studies, an entire ideology was constructed, that redefined management around the idea of belongingness to the corporation, not just at work, but at home, and in the community. While the insights may have come from studies of industrial workers, unions and their communities, ultimately, the **effect** of the management ideology was on middle management, as they turned the presumed lessons of the over-extrapolated science on themselves. The most devastating effect this had was on leadership.

At times it almost seems that human relations is a revolutionary tool the organization man is to use against the bosses. Listen to an unreconstructed boss give a speech castigating unreconstructed bosses for not being more enlightened about human relations, and you get the feeling the speech is a subtle form of revenge on the part of the harried underling who wrote it.

Whyte's critique of both the underlying science and the widespread impact on management theology, is extremely sharp, he lampoons the vague and over-complicated sociological analysis (which relied, in part, on the idea of cultural memory of Middle Age fiefdoms, assumed as older models of effective belongingness):

Someday someone is going to create a stir by proposing a radical tool for the study of people. It will be called the Face-Value Technique. It be based on the premise that people often do what they do for the reasons they think they do. The use of this technique would lead to many pitfalls, for it is undeniably true people do not always act logically or say what they mean. But wonder if it would produce findings any more unscientific than opposite course [of complicated socio-historical analysis].

Whyte's main point is that an abstract, practically metaphysical, value like **belongingness** cannot be demonstrated through experiment. It can only be assumed as a value extant in

the culture (if one is doing a contingent, situational analysis), or taken as an axiom if one is constructing a theology. In the case of the Human Relations school, Whyte notes that much of the work assumed that belongingness per se, was a good thing, in the sense of a twentieth century version of allegiance to a Middle Ages fiefdom. The chapter concludes with a beautiful quote from Clark Kerr (a renowned Berkeley chancellor):

Clark Kerr Chancellor of the University of California, at Berkeley, has put it well: the danger is not that loyalties are divided today but that they be undivided tomorrow. . I would urge each Individual to avoid total involvement in any organization; to seek to whatever extent within his power to limit each group to the minimum control necessary for performance of essential functions; to struggle against the effort to absorb; to lend his energies to many organizations and to give himself completely to none...

Chapter 5: Togetherness

If the value of **belongingness** dictated the Organization Man's overall attitude of engagement with the corporation and the suburban community, **togetherness** defined his approach to work itself, in the context of his own work-group. Togetherness as a value is at the root of much-lampooned Organization Man pathologies, such as groupthink and the elevation of consensus-seeking over truth-seeking. I never realized the caricatures used to be **so** true to reality. Consider this discussion of actual group dynamics training:

[The] search for better group techniques is something of a crusade against authoritarianism, a crusade for more freedom, for more recognition of the man in the middle...Anti-authoritarianism is becoming anti-leadership. In group doctrine the strong personality is viewed with overwhelming suspicion. The cooperative are those who take a stance directly over keel; the man with ideas-in translation, prejudices-leans to side or, worse yet, heads for the rudder. Plainly, he is a threat. Skim through current group handbooks, conference leaders tool kits, and the like and you find what sounds very much like a call to arms by the mediocre against their enemies...

... [for instance] the Bureau of Naval Personnel handbook... among the bad people we meet is the Aggressor. The conference leader's remedy: Place Donald Duck at your left (the blind spot). Fail to hear his objections, or if you do, misunderstand them...[the] object is to get him to feel that he belongs...if he still persists in running wild, let the group do what they are probably by now quite hot to i.e., cut the lug down. They generally do it by asking Little Brother Terrible to clarify his position, to clarify his clarification...These defensive gambits against the leader are only a stopgap measure. What some group advocates have in mind is, quite literally, to eliminate the leader altogether.

Zeroing in on the effect on innovative thinking in particular, Whyte notes:

The most misguided attempt at false collectivization is the current attempt to see the group as a creative vehicle. Can it be? People very rarely think in groups; they talk together, they exchange information, they adjudicate, they make compromises. But they do think; they do not create...[The] fixture of organization life [,] the meeting self-consciously dedicated to creating ideas...is a fraud. Much of such high-pressure creation-cooking with gas, creating out loud, spitballing, and so forth-is all very provocative, but if it is stimulating, it is stimulating much like alcohol. After the glow of such a session has worn off, the residue of ideas usually turns out to be a refreshed common denominator everybody is relieved to agree upon-and if

there is a new idea, you usually find that it came from a capital of ideas already thought out-by an individual-and perhaps held in escrow until moment for its introduction. Somehow, individual initiative must enter into the group...[We] must remember that if every member simply wants do what the group wants to do, then the group is not going to do anything.

This particular pathology is probably on its way to being corrected, by the more sophisticated arguments in books like **The Wisdom of the Crowds**, that warn against group brainstorming. Let's close with Whyte's passionate cry in support of individualism:

[The democratic culture of organization life] makes it all the harder for the individual to Justify to **himself** a departure from its norm. It would be a mistake to confuse individualism with antagonism, but the burdens of free thought are already steep enough that we should not saddle ourselves with a guilty conscience as well. The hunch that wasn't followed up. The controversial point that didn't get debated. The idea that was suppressed. Were these acts of group co-operation or individual surrender?

I haven't seen a better characterization of assumed consensus anywhere. But let me emphasize once more, Whyte isn't against legitimate study of group dynamics, free from agendas that **assume** the group is superior rather than proving it (which can at best be situational models of proof).

The value of togetherness still rules today, in the guise of diversity ethics.

Next time, we'll look at Part II, **The Training of the Organization Man**

The Training of the Organization Man

By: Venkat on February 17, 2009

Recap: In the first two parts of this series, I introduced [William Whyte's](#) 1956 classic, [The Organization Man](#) within a modern context, and covered the governing ideology that led to the rise of this worker archetype. Last time we learned how the collectivist corporate values -- togetherness and belongingness -- bolstered by a culture of 'scientism,' created the main pathologies of Organization Man culture, such as blind conformity, unjustified belief in 'team' creativity, an anti-leadership culture, and extreme risk aversion.

In this post, I'll cover Part II, **The Training of Organization Man** (Chapters 6-10). The theme in this section is Whyte's big worry: that through a pathological pair of complementary dysfunctions in universities and businesses, perfect-storm conditions were emerging (remember, this is the 50s) that would lead to a takeover of the business world by Organization Men.Â Were Whyte's fears justified? Did the Organization Man truly die with Apple's 1984 ad, or has he merely taken on a new and more subtle guise? Let's find out.

The Cold War in Business America

It was the 1950s, the world of the Truman doctrine and fears of Nuclear Armageddon. In the 5 chapters that make up Part II, Whyte's rhetoric has the ominous quality of the times. The

overarching fear is clear -- that the soulless, collectivist and conformist Organization Man would take over and destroy the capitalist vitality and creative-destruction that Whyte so admired. He is clearly chronicling what he saw as a hidden Cold War for the soul of corporate America. Ideologically, there is no question: I am unreservedly on Whyte's side. Knowing what we all do about the history of American business between 1956 and 2009 however, I was torn between two interpretations of the last half-century. On the face of it, the book's tone seems alarmist. It certainly seems like Apple metaphorically killed the Organization Man with its 1984 ad, and that we've been seeing the slow dawn of a glorious era of maverick nonconformism since then (emerging at the rate that organization men are retiring). On the other hand, you also get the eerie sense that Whyte was right to be scared. That perhaps the Organization Man culture has won so comprehensively, and co-opted the Boomer rebellion so completely, that we cannot even see it. Which is it? I'll give you the Cliff Notes version of Part II before I share my conclusion.

Much of Part II reads like a polemic against higher education. In Whyte's view, the post-war education system was guilty of abandoning its unique mission of education-as-soul-liberation, and cravenly reducing itself to the status of a production line for the interchangeable, but specialized parts demanded by corporate America. Unlike his contemporary, C. P. Snow, who argued in his famous 1959 lecture, [The Two Cultures](#), that the great divide in higher education was between the humanities and the sciences, Whyte saw a deeper divide between fundamental and applied knowledge. Much of Part II is devoted to agonizing over how the focus on applied knowledge, primarily in the form of vocational, engineering and business undergraduate programs, was hollowing out **both** the humanities and the basic sciences. Whyte makes a convincing argument that this culture produced a generation of technicians (a particularly eloquent bit compares the impoverished experience of learning "business English" to the mind-expanding beauty of the real thing). Remember that the flip side of this view was the more traditional rosy-eyed view of the GI Bill and the Space Race. So Whyte was clearly a contrarian in his own time.

Equally, Whyte argues, corporate America abandoned the Darwinian training models that had proved so successful during the early part of the century. It turned its training function into a production line for staff bureaucrats. This function displaced the trial-by-fire process of turning out hard-headed line managers (if you are unfamiliar with the line/staff distinction, [try this primer](#)).

Chapter 6: A Generation of Bureaucrats

Chapter 6 covers the attitudes towards work on the part of graduating seniors in the 1949. This, remember, was the generation that grew up through World War II and witnessed the struggles of the Great Depression in childhood (much like what school kids today are experiencing, a world of post 9/11 worldwide terror and a depression). This was a generation both risk-averse and in a mood to enjoy, appreciate and be grateful for the victories hard-won by their parents, and ever aware that World War III could kill them next week. The Beat poets were very much a sideshow. Here is a sample of the sort of attitude Whyte found, which seems very contemporary today, in 2009.

When I talked to students in 1949, on almost every campus I heard one recurring theme: adventure was all very well, but it was smarter to make a compromise in order to get a depression-proof sanctuary, "I don't think A T & T is very exciting," one senior put it, "but that's the company I'd like to join. If a depression comes there will always be an A T & T."

When seniors check such ostensibly line occupations as sales, they still exhibit the staff bias. For they don't actually want to sell. What they mean by sales is the kind of work in which they will be technical specialists helping the customers or, better yet, masterminding the work of those who do the helping. They want to be sales engineers, distribution specialists, merchandising experts -- the men who back up the men in the field...A distinction is in order. While the fundamental bias is for staff work, it is not necessarily for a staff job. If the choice is offered them, a considerable number of students will vote for "general managerial" work, and many who choose personnel or public relations do so with the idea that it is the best pathway to the top jobs.

The big point here is that young workers were shying away not only from small businesses and entrepreneurship, but also from real line-of-fire work and real risks of failure in big companies. They were buying into the myth of a balanced, well-rounded life. In the booming growth era they were graduating into, companies, themselves befuddled by the settling fog of the social ethic, were offering them this life. And universities of course, were preparing them for it. There is a surreal quality to the inter-institutional social transaction being described. This is captured in a scary pair of statistics that demonstrate the slow draining of entrepreneurial spirit that seems to have been going on:

Here is how a total of 127 men answered the two chief questions:Â on the question of whether research scientists should be predominantly the team player type, 56 per cent of the men headed for a big corporation said yes, versus 46 per cent of the small-business men. On the question of whether the key executive should be basically an "administrator" or a "bold leader," 54 per cent of the big-corporation voted for the administrators versus only 45 per cent of the small-business men.

This was the raw material being turned out by universities. Chapter 6 begs the question, what did the universities-as-people-factories themselves look like in this era? Chapter 7 provides the answer.

Chapter 7: The Practical Curriculum

In Chapter 7, we see evidence of the raw material in a number of places: not between the sciences and the humanities, but between the fundamental and the applied. Between the production of pure technicians and the production of critical thinkers with required skills. One set of evidence comes from the curriculum. Besides "business English," an anachronism, nearly every offering of the time included *Personality Development, Moral Hygiene and Psychology Applied to Life and Work*. If the content of the era were being tapped into the global, apparently modern, large that Betty Friedan called *The Feminine Mystique*, the term of the era, needed to make themselves, were equally being used in the global and

various kinds of other work. It probably originated in that appears for evidence of the chapter in the *Daily Post* (London, January 14, 1960) about the distinctive effect of the Wharton business school on the University of Pennsylvania.

"... [and] that most important distinctive influence of Pennsylvania of the atmosphere required for the maintenance of the faculties of the Wharton School of Finance and Commerce. Justly famous for the excellent business training which it offers, and for which it grants an academic degree, the Wharton School by the sheer force of its reputation and underlying support has given to undergraduate social and administrative life an atmosphere which, while it is neither unorthodox, is really unorthodox."

Even if it followed the specialty for inclusion of the business school, employees can find the training. He said that what business school teach him because he was too busy teaching what business could teach him, and teach for better. To return to my personal, I think. Look ahead to 1960. There will be a great part of the educational plan will be products themselves of the most interesting and influential training in society.

Similarly, for the sake of the university, or engineering in particular, along that line is what that the argument is about. To the extent that I believe he received my intellectual ability, I had been through engineering school through non-engineering terms. The problem we get is at the university of the time fighting to change history in a social institution, and clearly having difficulty in getting into the social institution. In a large sense, it is self-protection (or years later) faculty. They conclude, as he says they do, to know exactly what problems, the more specifically they say. That the future about something that you see in the presence of a complementary pathing in the business

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I think one of the things that I've seen in history for the 90s, the Chief Minister of that I thought of as a business school leader a sense that seemed to be an echo of the social skills of the 1950s. Another, he called for an abandonment of social skills and faculties of "leaders" and argued for higher education to produce more than what engineers, faculty, that seems to be happening. But looking at it's back at the other institutional subject the competition.

Chapter 8

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