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Research facing the challenge of Homo bureaucraticus

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*"There's no problem that hiring additional bureaucrats cannot solve."
(Soviet Prov.)*

The following fabliau shows how *Homo sapiens bureaucriticus* (Hb) gradually expanded its influence in the world of Research to establish its dominance.

When I was on a post-doctoral internship in the USA, ordering chemicals and small materials was very easy. After oral agreement from the laboratory manager and a simple phone call to the supplier, the product was delivered within two days with the invoice. This beautiful reactivity gave impetus to research, avoided storing products and thus immobilizing money on shelves. We only ordered what was necessary (since then, America has become very civilized by introducing many layers of paperwork). At Saclay, at the very beginning, the procedure was quite similar, except that it depended on a person dedicated to controls, the first pawn placed by Hb in the field. Responsiveness suffered, not from a lack of professional conscience on the part of the person concerned, but from a bottleneck effect. Since the idea of debottlenecking did not come to anyone, the remedy consisted in strengthening the Hb type staff by creating an Orders, Accounting, Litigation and Conquering Civilization division (C5 division). Hb was finally able to unleash his creative imagination. We were going to make economies of scale, award provisional contracts, select suppliers, impose tendering rules for contracts exceeding a certain amount, streamline procedures, multiply safeguards (i.e. signatures)... There was so much to do!

Hb, enthusiastic, does it.

Meanwhile, researchers, struggling to predict what will be needed in the coming months, devote a valuable portion of their time and imaginative capital to circumventing the bureaucratic hurdle that complicates and slows everything down, without perceiving its intrinsic beauty. Eternal battle lost in advance of those who want to do against those who want to regulate, regulate, monitor ... Some researchers start to store, like hamsters in their jowls, lots of chemicals for the winter; a parallel barter network is set up between the laboratories in the region; formal but not detailed orders are placed with suppliers to receive products from their catalog on a simple phone call until the committed amount is exhausted. And how to urgently order a rotor for a brand B centrifuge if it is necessary to extend the call for tenders to other centrifuge manufacturers whose rotors are obviously unsuitable? There, it is the suppliers who manage among themselves.

But, on paper, everything is in order.

Hb saw that it was good.

Will he rest?

Hb is still a little saddened not to have complete control of current expenses. How can we consider undertaking a project if we do not know how much we have in cash at any given time?

It is necessary to rationalize, homogenize, simplify, in a word computerize the system of orders, from the smallest to the most gigantic, so that all expenses go back in real time to a central computer and that the continuously decreasing amount of the available budget is displayed on the counter permanently, like a giant but inverted telethon.

Done.

It was painful and time-consuming, and very expensive, but it's done.

And God saw that it was good.

In the field, however, small details have changed. Suppliers and manufacturers have lost their name and become numbers; products, also renamed, are reduced to their catalogue reference. If we add the number and date of the order and the cost in euros, we see that we must fight with a succession of tight figures on a single line and that the slightest transcription error will inevitably seize the computer system and incidentally irritate suppliers who will not be paid. We will have to hire other HBs to cope. It's not really a problem.

Hb saw everything he had done, and it was good. But why, then, this feeling of dissatisfaction, of incompleteness?

The idea comes to him that control, to be perfect, must be exercised at the source, at the moment when researchers are looking for money for their projects. The idea seems crazy: what does he know about scientific research? How to judge, evaluate, choose, and control? He brushes aside the objection that touched him. It

couldn't be simpler! It will be the researchers who will do all the work. Of course, they will write their projects but, be careful, following its own rules and standards, with its Excel tables and indicating well in advance what they will find and what will be called "deliverables". And it will be other researchers who will judge, evaluate and choose the best projects. Ah! It will also be necessary to consider requiring a progress report every six months to maintain motivation; and organising an annual visit to the selected laboratories; and requesting, of course, a closure report; and a financial statement... What else do I forget, Hb thinks, because nothing stops him: he has just discovered that he can put everyone from non-Hb research to work, at his service, for his great project of "conquering civilization" ... Oh yes, and if I created a new Agency, no a High Council it would sound better, dedicated to the evaluation of researchers, teams, institutions, institutes, and let's think big! research Organizations and Universities?

And this is how the cultivar *Homo sapiens bureaucraticus* gradually invaded all the space allocated to Research and, in doing so, confiscated much of its meagre resources. Its proliferative and invasive capacity according to the Darwinian model is a challenge to classical genetics because nothing else distinguishes it from *Homo sapiens sapiens*.

1. Epilogue

"There is no problem that an excess of bureaucrats cannot create" (Soviet Proverb).

"One more bureaucrat is one less researcher to evaluate" (Hb's Golden Rule).

Is a salutary clash still possible between the enslaved researchers, overwhelmed by paperwork, and *H. bureaucraticus*, who is tense about the right he himself has created?

Is it still time to react? 1] [2

2. Conflicts of Interest

The author has no conflict of interests to declare.

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