
OCCUPATIONAL GROUPS IN THE URBAN LABOR FORCE

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Abstract

Enormous shifts have occurred in the occupational composition of the labor force since the turn of the century. Perhaps the more striking change in the labor is the remarkable decline in the number of people who works on farms or in farm-related activities. The proportion of farmers and farm managers has dropped from twenty percent in 1900 to about two percent in 1970, while the proportion of farm laborers and foremen has declined from eighteen percent to two percent in the same period. In all, farm workers constituted only four percent of the labor force in 1970 and have declined to about one percent in 2020. This further documents the degree to which the developed nations have moved from being agrarian societies to being urban societies in which the vast bulk of the labor force is employed in nonagricultural work. Below, major occupational trends in the urban or nonfarm segments of the labor force are discussed.

KEYWORDS: Labor Force; bureaucracies; Blue-Collar Workers; Semiskilled; Unskilled Laborers; Occupational Specialties.

White Collar Workers:

Clerical workers and those in related occupations amounted to only 3 percent of the labor force in 1900. Since then; the increase in numbers and proportions of clerical workers has exceeded that of all others. By 2000, this category has increased ten folds to about 22 percent of the labor force. The number of those working in these occupations will continue to widen its lead over its competing occupational category (Ritzer, 2007). The largest single group within the clerical work force is composed of secretaries and stenographers together with typists and receptionists; they now number well above ten million mark. Included also are electronic computer personnel and other office machine operators. Bookkeepers, bank tellers, telephone operators, and shipping and receiving clerks account for most of the rest of the workers in this category. A major reason for the massive growth in clerical work is the proliferation of large scale bureaucracies in industry and government. Such large scale organizations require innumerable clerical workers to handle the paperwork that is their lifeblood. In addition to increasing the numbers of people employed in this category, bureaucratization has also radically altered the nature of white-collar work. Whereas white-collar clerical work formerly brought with a higher status than blue-collar work, the growing "factory life" structure of many bureaucracies has reduced



the status of much white-collar clerical work by making it virtually indistinguishable from blue-collar factory work (Ritzer, 2007). Another factor in the growth of many of the occupations in this category is technological change. The development of the copying machine, dictating machine, and the computer has a spectacular impact on the nature of white-collar clerical work. Professional and technical workers have increased from 14 percent in 1970 to 39 percent in 2000. This tremendous increase was exceeded only by that of clerical workers. Taken together (and a significant proportion does work together), professional and clerical personnel now account for about one out of every three employed workers. The increasing need for professional and highly trained technical expertise has led to the expansion of professional and technical careers such as teaching at all levels; engineers and draftsmen; the health fields, including doctors, nurses, nurses' aides, dentists and dental technicians, pharmacists, veterinarians, dieticians, nutritionists, medical and X-ray technicians; and the scientists' group, including physicists, mathematicians, chemists, biologists, geologists, metallurgists, and gastronomists. In the so-called helping professions, therapists, counselors, social workers, personnel workers, psychologists, and librarians are members of growing areas while in business and government, accountants, city planners, economists, and programmers are on the list of expanded occupations, as are architects, lawyers and clergy. Because the professional and technical fields are so varied, no single factor can fully explain the growth of the many different kinds of occupations in this category. Likewise, the use of the concept "profession" to describe some of the occupations in this category is somewhat misleading for sociologists may have something quite different in mind when assessing the question of whether or not a given occupation has earned professional status than the far more arbitrary criteria used in the government for classifying labor force statistics into occupational categories. Professionalization is a process in urban societies that has significance in its own right, independent of the problems of labor force classification schemes. Nevertheless, several factors leading to growth of professional and technical occupations can be tentatively identified. One factor is the increasing of knowledge, techniques, and machinery, which has led to a burgeoning demand for highly trained people to handle these areas (Montagna, 2017). Almost by definition, the professional occupation most affected by technological changes are those of scientists, as virtually all technological changes are now derived from basic and applied scientific research. In turn, each new scientific discovery that leads to technological change raises a host of new scientific questions (effects on health, safety, the environment, and climate) that require still more scientific research. As both a cause and a result of technological change, the number of doctorate in science went up (Price, 2005). In a similar way, growth in engineering and related technological fields has proceeded at a rapid rate. The increased wealth and sophistication of the consumers has led to an increased demand for the services of professional occupations, such as psychoanalysts, psychologists, marriage counselor, accountants, lawyer, architect, and interior decorator, and many mass media publications advise their readers as to the desirability of employing these and other professions to help solve these problems. The helping professions themselves attempt to generate increased demands for their services by informing the public of their value



(Zuckerman and Merton,2003). In these and many other ways the urban public is increasingly dependent on a growing core of professional workers. In turn, the professions have become among the most attractive career alternatives to a growing number of young people who have the necessary prerequisites; mainly, the appropriate amount and type of higher education. Thus, the increase in the number of professional workers is directly related to the increased portions of the population seeking the sort of credential provided by attending institutions of higher learning, such as colleges and universities. The category labeled proprietors or managers is composed of two quite distinct group insofar as employment trends are concerned. About 75 percent of this group is made up of salaried managers and officials of business enterprise and their members have been increasing substantially as they have become the prime workers in the corporate economy .New types of managerial occupations have been created by technological changes. A good example is the manager of computer services, an important kind of new position in industry, government, and medical service facilities such as hospitals and clinics (Wilensky.1998). In a similar way, a substantial number of traditional management positions have been modified by social and technological change. The manager of the accounting department in many organizations has been forced to learn the theory and functioning of electronic computers. The manager of the personnel department has been forced to deal with a wide range of new demands imposed by workers or the government with regards to pension plans, health insurance plans, and other fringe benefits, workmen compensation laws and affirmative action programs. In fact, many new occupational subspecialties within the ranks of personnel work have been created to deal with demands such as these. The remaining proprietors and managers category is composed of the independent proprietors category is composed of the independent proprietors of small businesses - gas stations. grocery stores. and retail specialty stores of all kinds. The final category in the white-collar segment of the labor force is sales workers. More than 50 percent of all sales workers are employed in retail outlets of one kind or another. Also included. however. are real estate agents, insurance agents, and manufacturers' representatives. To a certain extent, the shift in retailing toward large branches of chain stores with their growing emphasis on self-service and check-out counters has somewhat depersonalized sales transactions and limited the potential growth in the number of retail of retail sales person in favor of cashiers, security guards and store detective, stock handlers, price markers, inventory clerks, and other personnel who are included in other more rapidly growing segments of the labor force.

Blue Collar Workers:

Blue-collar work is classified by the skill levels associated with the jobs in this category. At the top of the skill ladder among blue-collar workers are the craftsmen .This group is a varied one includes tool and die makers, auto mechanics, supervisors. The skilled worker category generally implies a period of prescribed training or apprenticeship anywhere from several months to several months to several years as a prerequisite to entry. Skilled craftsmen are the elite of the blue-collar world, whose income often exceeds that of many



white-collar workers. In terms of income or prestige, in fact, social scientists often have difficulty in deciding whether to classify these workers as members of the lower or working classes or as having achieved middle-class status. At any rate, a substantial portion of skilled blue-collar workers now reside in substantial portion of skilled blue-workers now reside in suburban communities that are generally characterized as middle class. The semiskilled operative group makes up the largest segment of the blue-collar labor force. It is typified by the operator of a production machine on the assembly line of a factory. Such specialties are semiskilled in the sense that it may take several days or several weeks of supervision to train a worker to use and maintain such a machine properly. Another important semiskilled operative group comprises the workers who make their living as drivers or delivery persons, including long-distance truck drivers, taxi and bus drivers, and those who deliver food packages. The mechanization of industry and the growth of automobile and truck as principal means of transportation and the movement of goods grew rapidly in the first half of the twentieth century (Wilensky and Lebeaux, 1998). This was largely at the expense of unskilled, which was often upgraded to the semiskilled level as the machine began to displace unskilled manual labor. Since 1960, the proportion of semi-skilled workers in the labor force has declined. This is due in part to the increased efficiency of production because of innovations in science, engineering, and management, which have raised the productivity of the industrial worker. At least part of the reason for increased productivity also has been the mechanization of control of the production process, commonly referred to as automation. There is a great deal of controversy regarding the eventual effects of automation. Those who view the effects of automation as positive in creating more jobs as well as more wealth tend to see these as long-term rather than short-run gains. On the other hand, those who view automation with alarm, are equally concerned with its more immediate consequences: those that will affect the current labor force. Since the impact of rapid technological change is already taking its toll among significant numbers of workers whose skills have been rendered obsolete or whose jobs have been seriously altered or eliminated, automation and related technological changes tend to generate feelings of insecurity among both semiskilled and unskilled workers. At the turn of the nineteenth century, unskilled laborers constituted the largest segment of the blue collar labor force (13 percent). Unskilled manual jobs were the ticket of entry into the urban economy for millions of migrants from domestic and foreign rural regions. Literacy was not imperative for obtaining unskilled jobs and they could be learned in minutes, hours, or days. In fact, most unskilled workers at the turn of the century were functionally illiterate; they had no formal education beyond the fourth grade level (Hall, 1995). Opportunities to obtain employment as an unskilled blue-collar worker have been steadily shrinking over the course of this century compared to other segments of the labor force. Unskilled workers now constitute only about 4 percent of the total. Among this segment of the labor force, functional illiteracy and unemployment have remained constitutively the highest in recent decades. The largest unemployed pool of unskilled workers in the society now tends to be concentrated in large cities, where it is now most difficult to gain accessibility to other segments of the labor force because they have



become more geographically decentralized, and where educational resources are inadequate for the task of training more literate and skilled workers to meet changing job demands and opportunities. This is widely perceived as one of the most important urban social problems. Current newcomers to urban living can no longer rely on unskilled manual labor as a way to obtain secure positions in the urban labor market.

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