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How Big Is Too Big?

As the national volume of research increases, and, indeed, as we experience a mounting rate of increase, a number of research organizations are growing, or may already have grown, to such dimensions that one is bound to inquire: How big is too big?

There is of course no tidy or universal answer. But there may nevertheless be some criteria which should be in the minds of those who face this question.

An organization is clearly too big if an excess of enthusiasm, energy, and hope has resulted in an expansion whose financing is so shaky that it impairs morale, or whose physical facilities are so crowded that research efficiency has suffered.

An organization should not grow further if it can do so only by using the perhaps illusory attraction of its size, resources, and prestige to rob other organizations of personnel which might, in terms of the total national effort, better stay where they are. In addition, the financial support necessary for the further expansion of a large institution may, under some circumstances, be obtained only at the expense of funds which should in fact go to other institutions.

Any enlargement of an organization is achieved only at a cost—of money, of facilities, and of personnel, all of which might otherwise be utilized elsewhere in other tasks. On the other hand, an organizational enlargement is presumably always designed to produce new benefits. Only when these benefits clearly promise to outweigh the total cost, as judged unselfishly and broadly, is the expansion justified. No one can draw up a precise profit-and-loss statement for such a transaction, but he can at least attempt to weigh all the factors.

As growth occurs it is inevitable that there will be increasing complications of organization, increasing difficulties of internal communication, and increasing inefficiency in the direct and detailed contact between the upper levels of leadership and the active research at the laboratory bench. An organization has already outgrown its optimum size if these unfortunate results of growth have combined to bring it about that the whole is no longer more than the mere sum of the parts.

There are doubtless further important criteria for judging overgrowth of an organization. It is thus to be hoped that others will add to the discussion of this topic.—WARREN WEAVER, *Rockefeller Foundation, New York*.