Bureaucratic Organization

and Educational Change

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IS A bureaucratic structure an efficient organization for bringing about desirable changes in educational programs? Does bureaucracy stimulate or inhibit innovations in education? Are there organizational structures other than bureaucracies that can ensure sequential coordination of student experiences? How can educators design an organization that will bring about the achievement of educational goals?

Today's educational leaders are eagerly searching for the answers to these questions as they attempt to improve their school systems in an era of phenomenal change. Societal forces are exerting much influence on the goals, character, and direction of American education, thus creating pressures on school administrators and supervisors to make educational changes.

In an effort to handle these pressures, numerous educational leaders have concluded that a bureaucratic structure is not designed to accommodate the rapid changes needed. These leaders believe that a bureaucratically organized school system lacks certain desirable characteristics which are evi-

dent in a dynamic system, such as the willingness to expand, to probe the unknown, and even to change its very structure. In a bureaucratic school system, the frontiers of today too rarely become the familiar territory of tomorrow.

Dimensions of Bureaucracy

Bureaucracy has been defined in many ways. Bureaucracy is a pattern of ordering and specifying relationships among personnel in an organization. These relationships are based on rationality, with authority being vested in a position rather than in an individual. Ideally, all relationships and activities are directed toward the achievement of organizational goals. Bennis (3) wrote that bureaucracy has the following dimensions:

1. A division of labor based on functional specialization

2. A well-defined hierarchy of authority

3. A system of rules covering the rights and duties of employees

4. Systematic procedures for dealing with work situations

5. Impersonal approach to interpersonal

relations and the promotion of rational behavior according to organizational goals

6. Promotion and selection based on technical competence.

In the typical bureaucratic organization, importance is placed upon achieving unity of command. Control of programs through attention to gradation of authority is emphasized. The gradations of authority are usually reflected in the differentiation in salaries from top to bottom.

School systems develop specific rules of procedures which are legitimatized by the force of specialized knowledge and weight of hierarchical authority built into the system. These rules are designed to encourage rational behavior—that behavior expected in achieving the goals often predetermined within the hierarchy. Irrational behavior in the form of student or faculty cliques (informal organizations) is neither expected nor condoned in theory. The division of labor along lines of specialization, combined with hierarchical descriptions of authority, produces formidable organizational machinery in school systems.

In addition to the dimensions listed above, four necessary dimensions unique to educational organizations follow:

1. *Sequential coordination of student experiences.* Since students progress through twelve or more grades in different schools and at different levels, school systems have traditionally attempted to ensure a sequential coordination through bureaucratization of content and methodology.

2. *Teacher autonomy.* In attempting to minimize the inherent conflict between hierarchical authority and professional specialization, school systems have attempted to grant autonomy to the teacher as a professional to make discretionary judgments about procedures to be used during the time a student group is in his charge. Studies have shown, however, that bureaucratization tends to result in the lessening of autonomy for teachers as school districts grow in size.

3. *Dual responsibilities.* Unlike some other organizations, the public schools have a responsibility to a student clientele and a responsibility to a public constituency. In most professional and business organizations, responsibility is centered upon one clientele.

4. *Guaranteed existence.* Legislation at the local, state, and federal levels guarantees the continued existence of public school systems. As a result, innovation may be less likely to be introduced because the need to change has not been a requirement for organizational survival. The students have to attend and the schools have to serve.

Most students of organizations believe that the dimensions of bureaucracy described above have to be either modified or eliminated if the organizations of the future are to become innovative organizations. One or more of the following criticisms of bureaucracy appear in many recent articles and books written about organizations:

1. The inability to legitimize differences in ideas among personnel depresses creativity.

2. The probability exists that new ideas generated from within will be subjected to vetoes by members of the official hierarchy, especially if these ideas are in conflict with perceived rational teaching behavior.

3. Bureaucracy does not adequately allow for personal growth and the development of mature and healthy personalities.

4. The bureaucratic organization does not have an adequate structure and process for the review of decisions.

5. The bureaucratic structure cannot accommodate the diversity of external inputs needed for a *democratic* school system.

6. The extrinsic reward system stimulates conformity rather than innovation.

7. The prior commitments of organizational resources to subunits within the organization make it difficult to develop innovative solutions for new problems.

8. Bureaucracy does not take into account the "informal organization."

9. The lines of communication are oftentimes closed because of hierarchical divisions.

Needless to say, the bureaucratic organization does not go undefended against criticism. For instance, some writers contend that the faults found in bureaucracy lie in the mismanagement of the organization rather than in the description of qualities inherent in the structure. Instead of being undemocratic, bureaucracy is presented by its advocates as a form of democracy in that it enables schoolmen to organize for goal fulfillment and meet the educational needs of a school district.

According to its advocates, leadership in a bureaucracy is position oriented, thus the irrational behavior of minority cliques is effectively controlled. These authorities also contend that critics of the bureaucratic system have failed to provide the concrete dimensions for a replacement organization. They ask, for example, what alternatives to the division of labor along specialization lines exist. These au-

thorities contend that the bureaucratic structure assures orderly, efficient educational change.

Toward Innovative Organization

The writers believe that the questions posed in the opening paragraph cannot be answered with unqualified "Yeses" or "Nos." We would contend that bureaucracy is not all bad and that some features in an altered form may be retained. Such features as (a) the commitment to the achievement of organizational goals and (b) the system of rules covering the rights and duties of employees have merit and legitimately belong in educational organizations. Nevertheless, we feel that the time has come for educational leaders to make alterations in their bureaucratic structures or to create new systems if their organizations are to become innovative. In initiating organizational changes, educators should give consideration to the propositions reviewed in the following paragraphs.

The organization should have an effective system for planning programs which provide educational opportunities for all students. Educational change is thwarted by a lack of planning. As a consequence of ineffective planning, much organizational energy is wasted in attempts to serve disparate, poorly defined goals. Planning in the traditional bureaucratic organization is an elite process, often resulting in harmful conflict and in apathy toward the suggested goals. The traditional organization is often more concerned with production than with what should be produced. Therefore, identification with educational needs is often lost in organizational management; children have

served organizational needs more than their educational needs have been served. We believe that organizational arrangements should be made for effective planning of educational programs and that this planning should be made upon educational needs rather than upon artificial organizational needs.

Organizational machinery should be established to encourage effective communication for continuing development and clarification of a system of educational ideas which has relevance for practice. The educational ideas provide for system unification. Measurement and evaluation of organizational decisions are based upon the educational ideology. An essential factor of any school system operation is the necessity of ensuring sequential coordination of student experiences. Measurement and evaluation of decisions in terms of the relevant system of ideas will help provide the base for the sequential coordination of student experiences. Furthermore, this will help assure the attainment of organizational goals. The authors emphasize, however, that communication concerning "What we are about" is a continuous process. Consequently, the ideas to which the system is committed are undergoing continuous development, clarification, and change.

Pluralism and collegial relations in decision making concerning educational processes should characterize the modern educational organization. Numerous authorities have pointed to the need to establish systematic arrangements for teacher participation in organizational decision making. The bureaucratic organization is inherently in conflict with this objective. As a conse-

quence, teachers are forcing negotiation agreements. In the collegial type organization, specific arrangements are made for cooperative participation in policy making. School systems should achieve maximum utilization of group processes. An analysis of current leadership research indicates that administrators and supervisors are more effective when they help groups to define and achieve their tasks, goals, and purposes.

Administrative activities should be dispersed and decentralized down to the level of the innovative area whenever possible. If school systems are to have the active participation of the professional staff in the change process, the staff must be permitted to introduce innovations at their levels. This right reduces the threat of vetoes now present in bureaucratic organizations. The traditional bureaucratic organization was designed to reduce conflict and focus administrative activity around predetermined goals. We would suggest that the modern organization should be flexible enough to legitimatize conflict which is not destructive. Constructive conflict generates a variety of alternative solutions. Thus, school systems can select from a variety of solutions instead of being forced to accept one solution. This encourages the development of a pluralistic social system.

School systems should establish an environment in which the "search for truth" can flourish from the individual classroom to the meeting room of the Board of Education. School personnel should be encouraged to search for better ways of doing things. Such a search will mean a critical analysis of present practices. An open organizational sys-

tem will encourage an attitude of inquiry. The "search for truth" also implies the right to experiment and its concomitant result—the right to fail. Experimentation should be legitimatized.

School systems organized for educational change should develop a harmonious balance between the achievement of personal goals and institutional goals. Several writers have observed that the traditional monocratic organization tends to emphasize organizational goals that are in conflict with the personal need dispositions of school personnel. The organization should be sensitive to—and responsive to—the need dispositions of personnel.

The organization should provide for the effective participation of school leaders in the external social systems. The school system does not exist in a political and social vacuum. It is a subsystem of the community power system and of the state and national systems. Desirable changes in education often fail because the educational organization did not provide for effective action in politics. Professional personnel at all levels must be knowledgeable about the "politics of education" and at appropriate times function as political activists. Openness to change in school organizations is conditioned by the degree of openness and closedness in the political power systems within which school systems operate.

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