ABSTRACT
          Anthropological field methods are viewed as a means
of reducing the unanticipated consequences of decision-making in
institutions of higher education. The conflict generated by the
unanticipated consequences of decisions can be reduced by a better
identification and a clearer understanding of the norms and values
existing in the various subcultures of the institution. Anthropology
is briefly described and compared to sociology and psychology, and
some examples of anthropological thinking are given. The possible
contribution of anthropological field methods to reducing the
conflicts facing institutional researchers is examined. These
conflicts include suboptimization, goal conflict, goal displacement,
and internal conflict. Each is based to a certain extent on the idea
that control of information is a kind of power, and that the power
institutional researchers have will influence the future of higher
education. (Author)

THE USE OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL FIELD METHODS
AS A MEANS FOR CONFLICT REDUCTION
IN INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION*

By
John P. Bean

Research Assistant
College of Education
University of Iowa
Iowa City, Iowa 52242
(319) 353-5540

2

Abstract

Anthropological field methods are viewed as a means of reducing the
unanticipated consequences of decision making in institutions of higher
education. The conflict generated by the unanticipated consequences of
decisions can be reduced by a better identification and a clearer under-
standing of the norms and values existing in the various subcultures of
the institution.

Anthropology is briefly described and compared to sociology and
psychology, and some examples of anthropological thinking are given. The
possible contribution of anthropological field methods to reducing the
conflicts facing institutional researchers are examined. These conflicts
include suboptimization, goal conflict, goal displacement, and internal
conflict. Each is based to a certain extent on the idea that control of
information is a kind of power, and that the power institutional researchers
have will influence the future of higher education.

THE USE OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL FIELD METHODS
AS A MEANS FOR CONFLICT REDUCTION
IN INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Institutional research can more effectively serve decision making in

higher education if it broadens its methodology to include anthropological

field methods. In the long run, use of this methodology would reduce conflicts

generated at all levels of the organization, increasing efficiency as well as

effectiveness. This reduction in conflict would result from a better identi-

fication and a clearer understanding of the norms and values existing in the

internal and external environment of the institution, the arena in which

decisions take place.

Anthropology

Anthropology emphasizes the study of man as a whole, his total way of

life. This fundamental proposition is similar to that of systems analysis,

i.e., no part of behavior can be fully or accurately understood in isolation,

but must be considered in the context of the whole of the social behavior of

the group under study. Generalizations about the nature of culture and of

man (woman) are arrived at only after a comparison of the behavior patterns

in a wide variety of cultures have been examined. Generalization is often

not as essential to anthropology as is understanding human behavior in the

context in which it occurs.

Data are typically generated by field methods. These include: participant-

observation as a means of observing incidents in their natural social context;

the enumeration of activities, events or objects to create a documentation of

frequency data; and the interviewing of informants to learn institutionalized

norms and the status of other individuals. (Zeldich, 1962) Informants can

also be used to learn of occurances which the anthropologist is forbidden

to witness, or of occurances which would be disrupted or altered by the

presence of an observer.

Finally, anthropology studies culture. The anthropologist's use of

the word "culture" is not to be confused with the common use of the word to

mean intellectually or artistically refined. The American Heritage Dictionary

defines culture in the anthropological sense to be "the totality of socially

transmitted behavior patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other

products of human work and thought characteristic of a community or popu-

lation." The anthropologist views culture as 1) a whole system, complete

unto itself, 2) a system of learned behavior which is transmitted from other

members of the culture, and 3) the characteristic behavior of a group.

Furthermore, behavior patterns are selected from a wide variety of possible

behavior in accordance with the dominant assumptions and values held by

the culture.

The goal of the cultural anthropologist is to selectively record human

behavior for the purpose of constructing explanations of that behavior in

cultural terms. (Wolcott, 1970) To the extent that the anthropologist is

successful, the information which he or she generates about social processes

can be used to predict the consequences of events which occur in the culture,

whether internally generated like a marriage, or externally generated, like

a drought, or contact with another culture. The anthropologist is an empa-

thetic observer, seeking to discover how the people being observed feel about

an event from their own point of view.

Anthropological Field Methods

The cultural anthropologist is well aware of the detractors of anthro-

pological field methods. These methods are decried as unscientific, subjective,

non-random and te...ing to produce non-generalizable data. Furthermore,

the methodology is inefficient, since a standard ethnology takes a minimum

of two years to produce, (one year for field work, and the second year for

analysis and the preparation of a report). Then what unique contribution

does anthropology have to offer that other social sciences, such as edu-

cational psychology or sociology, don't have?

Anthropologists insist on naturalistic observation. They contend that

removal of phenomena from their normal context may distort the phenomena.

Psychological research usually entails the use of controls in experimentation.

Since the normal social or physical context for behavior rarely can be

controlled for intervening variables, subjects are usually studied outside

of their normal surroundings. Secondly, much of psychological literature

is based on studies by questionnaires, which the anthropologist might use

as an adjunct to field work, but not as the sole source of data. The anthro-

pologist views verbal behavior (written or spoken) as only one aspect of

behavior, and it must be understood in the context of other indicators of

behavior. Third, psychologists usually try to understand individual behavior

by dividing behavior into ever smaller units, such as the response of a

specific individual to a specific stimuli. Anthropology deals more with the

totality of behaviors which both individuals and groups acquire than with

the precise process of how these behaviors are acquired.

Anthropology is more akin to sociology than to any other social science.

Frequently they overlap in interest in areas such as social organization and

behavior. However, anthropologists tend to study a particular culture or

subculture in depth, while sociologists examine the more generalized forms

of social systems. Sociologists also place more reliance on statistical data

and procedures. The anthropologist emphasizes inductive reasoning and reasoning by analogy while the sociologist (as well as the psychologist) construct deductive theories.

Anthropology is also significantly different from both psychology and sociology in the source of its hypotheses. The source of anthropological hypotheses is the systematized observation of the real world. (Ianni, 1976) This source is radically different from the preconceived notions of how the real world operates which is the usual source of hypotheses in psychology and sociology. Hypotheses, however generated, can be tested by a multi-method approach. (Hill, 1970) It is the generation of meaningful hypotheses to be tested that is usually a more difficult problem in research than the development of tests to indicate the degree of correctness of these hypotheses.

The insurmountable methodological problem for the anthropologist is that each anthropologist is his or her own research instrument. As a trained observer, however, the anthropologist compensates for this problem as much as possible by an awareness that the problem exists. Observer bias limits all experimentation, but the problem is compounded for the anthropologist since the instrumentation (the anthropologist) changes during the course of the experiment.

Anthropologists are often able to generate information through participant-observation that is more difficult or impossible to generate through either questionnaires or interviews. Information that the person who is the subject of a formal interview finds embarrassing is not likely to be brought out in the interview. Information that is incriminating is not likely to appear in responses to questionnaires. Dishonest or illegal practices, sexual relations, and the use of intoxicants fall into these categories. Participant-observation,

since it involves an extended study of one group of people, allows the observer

to gain the trust of the people being observed, and as this trust relationship

grows, anthropologists report that the kinds of information they are given

access to also grows. Such information can be useful in decision making, but

the distribution of such information might be constrained by the ethical code

of the anthropologist.

Other kinds of information may not be incriminating or embarrassing, but

members of organizations might prefer to keep this information from their

superiors so that their superiors believe they are behaving differently than

they actually are. Questionnaries which ask people how they spend their time

are likely to generate less accurate information than can be obtained by

participant-observation. Less than a 100% return of questionnaires, and

strategic responses to questions, are two problems the participant-observer

does not face.

General Applications of Anthropological Thinking

Anthropology is storytelling, and as one learns social roles and values

from the fables and myths one hears in childhood, so also can people learn

about their roles and values by comparing their ways of life with the ways

of life of people in other cultures. Such information allows one to reassess

one's own values in terms of a much broader context than the range of values

in one's own culture.

Here are several examples of anthropological thinking:

(1) People are ethno-centric, and they tend to believe that their

particular way of life is the best, and often, the only way of life possible.

These are elitist assumptions, and are responsible for the destruction of

entire cultures, such as the Mayans or the American Indians. The ultimate

test of a value is force, and in the course of culture contact, might equalled

right. Right did not necessarily equal "good" according to our cultural values.

By analogy, a situation similar to ethno-centrism can exist in an organi-

zation when professionals value autonomy and administrators value centrali-

zation of power. Regardless of which one is good in the abstract, the group

which controls the greater power is likely to optimize its own values regard-

less of the overall good of the institution.

(2) The golden rule goes as follows: "Do unto others as you would have

them do unto you." The golden rule for anthropologists goes: "Do unto others

as they would have you do unto them." It follows that a person must learn

to reward other members of the organization by what they see as rewards, not

by what management sees as rewards. The Human Relations school discovered

that principle years ago, but some managers still believe that increasing

someone's salary will make them work harder or cooperate more, which is not

necessarily the case.

(3) Myths are more than stories or childish beliefs, they also form a

kind of social reassurance, a device of education, learning, and culture

maintenance. (Hoebel, 1966) Higher education abounds with myth. There is

the myth that tenure gives a person academic freedom and economic security;

there is the myth of collegiality, which Baldridge (1971) seems to have

exploded; there are myths that teaching and research are incompatible functions;

myths of the absent minded professor; myths that administration is always in

conflict with the faculty; myths that research assistants write professor's

books; myths that research assistants are paid for doing nothing. These myths

are held by different subcultures within the university, and there is likely

to be some truth in all of them. For those people who believe in the myths,

they serve the same pattern maintenance function as myths for any other
culture.

(4) Laughter, which is a release of tension, can be used as an indicator
of what is causing anxiety in that group. A participant-observer can inventory
and enumerate the subjects a group of people choose to laugh at, and have one
indication of the things about which those people are concerned. Using this
information, a decision maker can predict that decisions related to these
matters will receive more careful scrutiny from that group than other decisions.

(5) All cultures have rituals which are: "the recurring performance of
a standardized set of acts in the belief that the acts are necessary to the
maintenance of the status quo or to the achievement of specified ends."
(Hoebel, 1966, p.478) Classroom lectures are the most common rituals at
institutions of higher education. The replacement of the lecture format with
a t.v. monitor or a computer assisted instruction module will affect the status
quo of the institution regardless of its impact on the cognitive domain of
students.

Anthropological Research As A Means Of Conflict Reduction

The key to understanding how field methods could reduce organizational
conflict in an institution of higher education is the focus of field methods
on values. The anthropologist believes that by the observation of behavior,
the real (as opposed to stated) values of the target group can be understood.

The primary link between field methods and organizational theory is
predicated on the notion that the real values of a group determines the real
goals those people pursue. In conjunction with the standard data on courses,
facilities, finances, the staff, and students, the use of information generated

by field methods will allow a decision maker to better predict the conse-
quences of his decisions. Planning means projecting all the consequences,
good and bad, that would arise from alternative courses of action. Perfect
planning is not possible, but by definition, only the best information can
lead to the best planning. The institutional researcher, in the role of
"provider of information" should seek the best information available in order
to best provide for the needs of decision makers. Anthropology's major
contribution to decision making is to introduce decision makers to potential
consequences not considered by other disciplines and methods.

The cost of any research has to be considered in terms of benefits derived.
The services of an anthropologist, which might be purchased for $15,000 a
year, are small compared to other forms of self-study. An accreditation
report for a single college in a university may have an opportunity cost
to the staff & faculty of the college in excess of $150,000. The printing
costs alone for one such self-study were nearly $10,000.

Even without considering comparative costs, the benefits of anthropological
research can be high. Much of the facilities planning in the 1960's which
resulted in the over-construction of dormitories was based on demographic
studies and enrollment projections. Had the values of the high school students
which made up this population been studied, that is, had the values of the
population which was supposed to inhabit these buildings been determined, then
apartments might have been built instead of dormitories, or the institution
might have opted to stay out of the housing business all together. At The
University of Iowa there has been an annual and costly debate between the
administration, and freshmen and sophomores, about the requirement that freshmen
and sophomores live in dormitories. This requirement is necessitated by the

need to pay off the bonded indebtedness which resulted from past planning

decisions based on too narrowly defined criteria.

Organizational Conflict

Naturally, field methods cannot be expected to reduce all institutional

conflicts. The following sets of propositions do not describe the state of

nature, but describe possibilities. Their purpose is to explore organizational

conflict as it might exist for the institutional researcher, and to show how

anthropological field methods might help to resolve such conflicts.

Proposition 1

a) Institutional researchers control a scarce resource, knowledge.

b) Control of a scarce resource gives the possessor of that resource

power. (Power is the ability to affect outcomes of events.)

c) Institutional researchers can use this power to enlarge their operations

beyond the needs of the organization to which they belong.

This is a description of suboptimization, the optimal growth of a subunit of an

organization which results in lowering the overall effectiveness of the organi-

zation in meeting its goals. Field methods cannot effect the extent to which

an office of institutional research suboptimizes in an _organizational_ context.

It can, however, help an office of institutional research avoid suboptimizing

in a _methodological_ sense, e.g., avoid excessive study by one methodology or

in one area which results in a less than optimal set of information for decision

makers to use.

Proposition 2

a) Institutional research originated in response to an increased demand

for organizational efficiency.

b) The goal of institutional research is to increase organizational efficiency, (i.e. the survival or growth of the institution, and a reduction in the cost of operations) and is not concerned with organizational effectiveness (i.e. pursuing truth, excellence, and the creation, assessment and distribution of knowledge).

Proposition 2 is a description of goal conflict, that is, the conflict in purposes between two subjects of an organization, i.e. between institutional researchers and faculty members. Field methods can be used to establish the extent to which the values of these two groups actually diverge. One spin-off from an ethnology (an anthropological description of a culture) of an institution should be value clarification, so that at least people can agree on what they disagree about, and the depth of such a disagreement. This knowledge may result in an overall reduction in conflict within an organization. However, if the conflict in values is deep, distribution of such knowledge may increase conflict in the organization.

Proposition 3

a) The goal of institutional researchers is to provide useful information to decision makers.

b) Institutional researchers spend all their time and energy analyzing data.

Proposition 3 describes goal displacement, the substitution of means for ends. In this instance it is no longer important for the institutional researcher to provide useful information to decision making. The elegance of statistical methods takes presidence over the usefulness of the final product. Anthropological field methods cannot reduce this kind of conflict. In fact, in a short run anthropologists might exemplify data gathering rather than information

13

supplying. It would probably take a minimum of six months before any

significant data would be made available to decision makers. But effective-

ness is measured in the long run rather than the short run. There is a

methodological corallary to proposition 3.

Proposition 3

b)(1) Institutional researchers use quantifirble data as the source of

the information they provide decision makers.

This corallary is based on the notion that what is quantifiable is important

to decision makers. There is no reasonable quarrel with this idea. However,

one should not assume that only quantifiable data is important in decision

making. Institutions of higher education can be considered meritocracies

which lack a widely accepted definition of merit. The decisions made about

the merit of a person or program or procedure are based on the values of the

decision makers and the pertinent information which they have. Since the

acceptance or rejection of a proposition is ultimately based on a subjective

evaluation of the "good" or "worth" of the proposition, it is illogical to

supply only "hard" or "quantifiable" data to the decision maker. Field methods

are well suited to providing an alternative, "soft" set of information for

decision making.

Proposition 4

a) Institutional research centralizes information.

b) Possessors of this information have power (see Proposition 1, b).

Proposition 4 is a continuation of the argument of Proposition 1, but at a

higher level in the organization. As stated earlier, power is the ability to

affect outcomes, to determine consequences. Authority is the right to set

14

goals and initiate activities. Centralization of power differs from centrali-
zation of authority, and by definition can have a more serious effect on
outcomes. If the information generated in institutional research is not
shared equally throughout the organization, the power of information is
centralized in the hands of those people who possess the information. If
decentralization of power is desirable because it allows for a "better"
pursuit of academic goals, then centralization of information, ergo, power,
is dysfunctional. This argument is again one of goal conflict. The addition
of anthropological information would increase the power of the possessor of
the information. This effect might be tempered by the enculturation of the
decision maker into non-elitist thinking, in which case the decision maker
would not be tempted to try to force his values on other members of the
organization (e.g., strive for efficiency at all costs).

Proposition 5

a) Institutional researchers should supply decision makers the "best"
information for decision making.

Proposition 5 represents internal conflict for the institutional researcher,
because he or she must decide how and where to allocate the scarce resources
of time, energy and money in the search for optimal decision making information.
Table I lists several (though by no means all) possibilities for research, and
each topic implies the need for a different methodology for discovering and
processing data. Methodology has a profound impact on the kinds of information
institutional researchers can provide decision makers. To accept a method-
ological status quo has ethical implications (Sjoberg, 1975), to reject it
implies risk. The only escape from such conflict is through ignorance or faith.

15

TABLE I

Topics for the Contents of Institutional Research Studies

Topic	Rationale from Proponents of Each Topic
"The Big Five" (Course, facilities, financial, staff and student data)	This constitutes the nuts and bolts for institutional decision makers. Knowing this information is the key to efficiency.
Decision making theory	It is most important to know how decisions are made at various levels of the institution in order to predict information requirements for decision making.
The history of decision making at the institution	Past behavior is generally the best indicator of future behavior.
Collective bargaining	A decision maker must be prepared to deal with conflicts before they arise.
What constitutes failure in an institutional subunit?	Efficiency and effectiveness are both enhanced when "dead wood" is removed.
Philosophy	Decision making will become consistent and ethical only when administrators understand their philosophical biases and ethical responsibilities.
Values	Understanding the values of the various subcultures of an institution is the best way to predict the consequences of an administrative decision.
The external environment	This is the key survival interface in an organization.
Budgeting	Shifts in budgetary emphasis indicate the real values and the real power bases in the institution which constitute the internal environment for decision making.

16

Summary

To the extent that institutional research is a profession (Lyons, 1976, p. 3), it must have a clientele. The clientele for institutional researchers are the decision makers of the institution to which the office of institutional research is attached. As a profession, institutional research must also perform a service, and the primary service institutional research performs is the generation of information for use within the institution. As professionals, institutional researchers are ethically obligated to provide the best possible service to their clients.

The arguments contained in this paper lead to the conclusion that institutional research can be improved by broadening the search for information about the institution, and that anthropological field methods provide one means for accomplishing this task. Specifically, information derived from anthropological methodology can give institutional decision makers a clearer understanding of the values of the people affected by a particular decision. Used in conjunction with other information, this knowledge of values can lead to decisions which can reduce conflict in an institution while increasing institutional efficiency and effectiveness.

References Cited

Baldridge, J. Victor.   Introduction: models of university governance--
      bureaucratic, collegial, and political.   In J. Victor Baldridge
      (Ed.), Academic governance.   Berkeley: McCutchan, 1971, 1-19.

Hill, Stephen C.   "Swimming with sharks:"   techniques of a multimethod
      approach to concept validation.   Human organization, 1970, 29,
      323-337.

Ianni, Francis A.J.   Field research and educational administration.
      University council for educational administration review, 1976,
      27, 10-13.

Hoebel, E. Adamson.   Anthropology: the study of man.   Third edition.
      New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966.

Lyons, John M.   Memorandum to a newcomer to the field of institutional
      research.   Association for Institutional Research, 1976.

Sjoberg, Gideon.   Politics, ethics and evaluation research.   In Marcia
      Guttentag and Elmer L. Struening (Eds.), Handbook of evaluation
      research, volume two.   Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1975.

Wolcott, Harry F.   An ethnographic approach to the study of school
      administrators.   Human organization, 1970, 29, 115-122.

Zelditch, Morris, Jr.   Some methodological problems of field studies.
      American journal of sociology, 1972, 67, 566-576.