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ABSTRACT

Middle-level administrative costs and personnel are increasing at a time when other areas are being forced to cut back. These middle-level positions are the deans and directors and assistants of support services in the areas of admissions, counseling, business, accounting and personnel offices, fund raising, safety, public information, alumni affairs, student personnel, registration and scheduling, and similar nonacademic support staff areas. The three functions of these staff are to act as liaison with external suppliers of resources; to implement procedures for internal allocation of resources and control of activities; and to work with student activities and curricular responsibilities. Specific examples of these functions are given. The staffing of these positions has moved from faculty with part-time assignments to the hiring of recent graduates without experience to a combination of the two. In the present period of retrenchment, due to tighter budgets, the need for more professionalism has become apparent. Influences on the future of college administration are discussed including affirmative action and the process of retrenchment itself. Some problems of middle-level personnel that are considered are the lack of mobility, the lack of opportunity for career growth, and the lack of continuing challenge. Some available solutions for these conditions are discussed. (JMF)

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MIDDLE-LEVEL COLLEGIATE
ADMINISTRATION
IN A PERIOD OF
RETRENCHMENT*

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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
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Recently, Jonathon Fife, Associate Director of the
Eric Clearinghouse on Higher Education, told me that he was
going to California to give a speech in which he would recommend
the establishment of a new collegiate officer, the Information

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Specialist. This would be someone whose responsibility would be to keep up to date on the literature of post-secondary education. And so, in an age-old way, a new administrative position was conceived: someone saw a need. Since the gestation period varies in these matters, it may be some time before we know the result.

But a similar process must have taken place at Cambridge and Oxford in the middle-ages when Registrars and Bursars were first appointed, and in the U. S. when the first alumni directors and deans of men were selected.¹ While the source of administrators has varied over time -- sometimes from the faculty and sometimes not -- the need for new administrative posts has not. Just think about the posts that have been created in the past ten years: ombudsmen, sex counselors, affirmative action officers, minority student program specialists, women's counselors, pension managers... The list goes on and on. Between 1929 and the mid-1960's, expenditures for administration increased 21 times; expenditures for instruction and departmental research grew only 12 times.² In the short span of time from the mid-60's to the early 1970's, current fund expenditures by colleges and universities for administration increased by more than 30%, while expenditures for instruction increased by only 10%.³ And this was during a period when enrollment nearly doubled.⁴

Administrative costs, especially for middle-level administration, are increasing quickly. even at a time when colleges and universities are cutting back in other areas.⁵

So, in a sense, we are already in a period of retrenchment. But let us look more closely at the problems and the issues.

First, some definitions. By middle-management, I mean the deans and directors (and assistants) of support services to whom first-line, most often non-exempt, supervisors report and who themselves report to an officer at the vice-presidential level. They are the men and women in admissions, counseling, business, accounting and personnel offices, fund raising, safety, public information, alumni affairs, student personnel, registration and scheduling, and similar non-academic support staff areas. While the number and organization of such services vary according to the size of the host campus, the essential duties remain.

Basically, these staff fulfill three functions. They serve as liaison with external suppliers of resources, be they financial or people; they implement procedures for internal allocation of resources and control of activities, especially in matters of campus coordination and compliance with external regulations and orders; and they work with student activities and curricular responsibilities in helping students become oriented to college requirements, standards, and opportunities.⁶ Examples of these services may be found in admissions and fund raising; affirmative action and pension departments; and student counseling. We will talk more later about these specific job categories.

Administrative positions have increased in number and become more complex as a result of both internal and external forces. As institutions grew in size and expanded their missions, new and greater supplies of money and students had to be found,

and more specialists were required to do jobs that formerly were done more leisurely. New levels of accountability have been imposed by local, state, and federal government agencies. In this area alone, the past decade and one-half has seen the introduction of new regulations and requirements into campus jurisdiction that have added substantial costs to operating budgets and new positions to personnel offices. Affirmative action, Equal pay, EEO-6 reports, collective bargaining, ERISA, FLSA, Health Maintenance, and OSHA are only a few items from a long list of statutes, programs, and regulations that have added to college costs.⁷ During this same period, student and faculty expectations for services have increased, and new forms of counseling, psychiatric services, academic support, training, and accommodations have become the norm.

The sources for new staff have changed with the times and the needs. At first, faculty members were given part-time assignments in the Registrar's or Bursar's Office, and those assigned tended to stay with the positions, especially after they became full-time, until retirement.⁸ During the early part of this century, however, when universities as centers of advanced training and graduate study were first beginning to flourish, many jobs that had been filled by faculty and other "amateurs" who learned them empirically became specialized, at least in part for reasons of prestige, and required advanced study.⁹ This progress toward professionalism was encouraged by associations that sponsored meetings of people in similar jobs, codes of ethics, and the sharing of information.

For the most part, however, middle-management positions did not require advanced training; this was reserved primarily for those in student services. Other areas required either training appropriate to the tasks, e.g., bookkeeping or engineering, or no specific training at all. Admissions officers, registrars, and others with public contact came from the ranks of secondary school teachers, the ministry, and business as well as from the faculty. In some cases, recent graduates were hired without experience.

The current scene is mixed for middle-management. It is an area of higher education that has been largely neglected by both researchers and senior administrators. As a consequence, little is known about middle-managers and few institutions have training and salary programs that are commensurate with the quality of people they want. And this may be intentional. Perhaps more than a few top administrators feel that good, young talent can always be found and that it is not necessary to worry about their condition.

Middle-management -- nay, management of any kind -- is an anomaly in a college or university because it represents such an unusual creature. It is not an ordinary organization, but an institution; and it has no ordinary hierarchy, but is collegiate in nature. So any part of it that smacks of bureaucracy is looked upon with suspicion by the faculty, who are the governing core of the institution. Tensions between faculty and administration are not aberrations, but are built into this kind of organization. The dilemma for the manager is that he has been hired to manage,

and probably has as his model of management an industrial example, but for reasons of nature, structure, and tradition, the top administration, which is largely recruited from the faculty, treats him as if he were in a staff role in support of faculty policy. Unfortunately, the U. S. does not have a strong tradition of service, such as the English civil service -- "in her Majesty's service" -- so our administrators do not look to this form of service as a model of behavior. Consequently, tensions increase.¹⁰

To say that this form of service is not valued is not to say that administrators are not loyal. Far from it. One of the chief sources of supply for administrative ranks is the group of active alumni, which, by the way, is not the case at English universities.¹¹ For a variety of reasons, most of their administrators earned undergraduate degrees at Oxford and Cambridge.

Middle managers exist in a proscribed world. Rarely do they get fired, and their chances for significant promotions are slim unless they move to different institutions. We will look more closely at their box in a later stage of this paper. But first, we should look at the notion of "retrenchment."

Higher education has been in a period of retrenchment for several years. Income has been reduced, budgets have been cut, programs have been discontinued. For the most part, however, retrenchment has meant only a reduction in funding and a concomitant reduction in programs or services. I believe that this is only the first stage. Later stages of retrenchment will bring a scaling down of size, a refining of mission, and more flexible, responsive institutional structures in administration,

governance, and curriculum. This last point may represent more hope than insight, but I think there is reason for optimism.

Middle-management has grown to meet new needs, many of which have been requirements for new information. The need for information -- both for internal decisions and for external reports -- has increased, and no end is in sight, especially now when even "so-called" private colleges are no longer truly private. Federal reports are required of every collegiate institution, and the states are next in line with their requirements. The greater the demand for accountability, whether to governments, banks, trustees, or campus caucuses, the greater the need for planning, which requires data and specialists to collect it, consider it, report it, and use it.

Under such conditions, most traditional areas of administration, and some new ones, such as space utilization experts, will continue to exert influence and play an important role. (Space coordination is a good example. With fewer buildings either planned or under construction, and growth by substitution the byword, there is more need than ever for the efficient use of existing space and the careful management of transition or staging space.) Nevertheless, there will probably be fewer administrators than now and those that remain will be more specialized. In this not-so-distant future, circumstances will be somewhat different than they are now, although certainly the outlines of that future are coming into view.

One important influence on the future shape of college administration is already with us: Affirmative Action. Up to now, affirmative action efforts have been mainly at the

faculty level, but with a shrinking professoriate following shrinking enrollments, it stands to reason that administrative positions will generate more applicants and receive greater scrutiny. This scrutiny, by the way, will not only check recruiting and selecting, but also training and opportunities for mobility. And these efforts will produce benefits for all administrators, not just minorities and women.

Another important influence on the future condition of college administration will be the process of retrenchment itself, which I think will make faculty quite critical of those areas of administration that are not demonstrably required or valuable. While faculty will protect their provinces against cuts, the process will bring them into sustained contact with administrators. The combined effects of contact and clearly defined roles can result in improved working relationships. Nevertheless, one area of administration will suffer in this process. Student academic support services have already been under critical review around the nation, and have been cut on many campuses because there appears to be an endless appetite for them, there are conflicts of opinion about who should pay for them, there is no way of telling when enough are offered, there are no objective methods to evaluate whether or not they are successful. and there is no compelling argument that these services must be provided by specialists. Peers and lay people seem to be just as successful.¹² Consequently, the functions of general counseling, academic advising, and campus orientation and socialization will probably be taken on by faculty and

"amateur", perhaps part-time staff from what I call "internal markets", i.e., faculty and graduate student spouses, and recent graduates. This of course is not to say that all student support services will be so transformed. Some, such as career counseling, interest and aptitude testing, and tutoring in study skills will remain. But they will be under the jurisdiction of an academic officer, perhaps a provost, and enjoy neither the status nor the salary levels of faculty or other staff.¹³

Those functions concerned with external sources of supply will in all probability continue to recruit generalists for entry-level positions, for which recent graduates have typically been the main sources of supply. However, access to these positions will almost surely be sought by young faculty who are leaving the academic tenure ladder. This change in the source of candidates is bound to have an effect on the positions, because these new aspirants will come with advanced degrees, rather than fresh baccalaureate degrees; they will have had experience in college teaching, often at the same institutions in which they will seek administrative posts; and they will bring more highly developed intellectual points of view, experience, and analytical power than recent Bachelor's degree holders. One hesitates to speculate on how this development will affect the jobs, but it may well be that it will bring with it a rise in prestige for middle management on campus as the faculty recognizes that the values, points of view, and training of the holders of these jobs are similar to its own.

Of course, such a trend might also diminish even further the respect of some faculty for administration because of the influx of "failed" academics, just as when in previous years and in particular kinds of institutions, "failed" preachers and businessmen added to the tarnish on the administrator's image.¹⁴

The third group of functions -- allocation and control of resources -- are the ones most likely to require staff with specialized training and/or experience. For these positions, wide searches, including forays into businesses and government agencies, will be typical. It is for these positions, too, that training programs and staff development seminars will be established to help foster the entrance of women and minorities. However, most entrants will probably already have degrees in management or administration.

Mobility will still be slow, given the box-like nature of middle-management, but new opportunities and rewards must be instituted. Industry is dealing with a similar problem in a variety of ways, including early retirements, lateral transfers, retraining programs, the liberal distribution of titles, more task force assignments, and departmental reorganizations.¹⁵ Similar attempts must be -- and probably will be -- made in colleges and universities.¹⁶

The lack of opportunity for career growth leads to wasted resources both through the departure to greener pastures of bright, ambitious young administrators, and through "early retirement" into the activities of local service clubs and businesses by those who first join the college staff with energy and enthusiasm, but who find after several years that

their sights must be lowered because the opportunities for advancement are limited.¹⁷ The first half of the problem is clear. Whenever a well-trained staff member leaves, a loss occurs. The second half is not as clearly understood. It is a loss to the institution and the individual when for reasons of loyalty or lack of opportunity someone stays in a job for too many years. How long is "too" many? When a person is no longer learning and challenged, and his energies become directed to other activities, he has been in his job too long. A malaise sets in and the energies of a formerly ambitious person become directed toward some other activity. In this situation, the institution stands to end up with a stifling administration void of ideas, a sense of humor, and an attitude of assistance.

Another problem exists for the person who is no longer challenged. After too many years as an assistant, he probably will be passed over for the director's job; new blood will be desired, and someone who has served for ten years as an assistant to the person being replaced will not be seen as the supplier. But this decision by the senior administration may be seen as a lack of respect for loyalty, and cause severe consternation among the devoted troops. For these reasons, colleges and universities must introduce programs of career development for their middle managers. Without growth for these individuals, the schools will lose almost every way they turn.

A variety of career paths should be open to knowledgeable and imaginative middle-level managers. Positions in academic administration, fiscal planning, and general administration,

among others, should be open to bright, eager career administrators who have proven their ability to learn and accomplish. However, mobility from one category to another is limited. Although there are examples of people who have progressed from entry level positions in admissions or financial aid to higher level positions such as vice president for public affairs, universities generally have not been progressive in planning and encouraging mobility for middle management staff. Consequently, the ambitious among this group must often leave the institution in order to advance in their careers. This is unfortunate because it puts the emphasis on one's administrative field when considering one's career, rather than on general administrative abilities -- i.e., on a field in which one seeks new challenges rather than on general abilities that can serve a variety of institutional needs in a manner that is personally satisfying to the middle manager.¹⁸

The larger the institution, the more likely it is that a middle management career path may lead one, for example, from alumni affairs to admissions to financial aid to institutional studies to the registrar's office in an upward progression of authority, responsibility, and salary. In smaller institutions, and in highly compartmentalized larger institutions, however, such mobility is limited because directors are generally recruited when young and often serve for twenty years or more. This means, of course, that if the university does not provide for lateral movement between positions, those in entry level

positions will not have the opportunity to advance themselves or meet new challenges without leaving the institution, and since they were hired, in part, on the basis of institutional interest and loyalty, this carries with it problems of deflated morale and frequent turnover. Also, if there are no opportunities for middle managers to gain experience in new areas, be trained in new skills, or earn advanced degrees while working, their futures are foreclosed in still other ways. If the institution does not permit staff to earn advanced degrees through a part-time studies program, staff morale may collapse as "outsiders" with Master's degrees and doctorates are brought in to fill intermediate and senior positions. As obvious as this problem may appear to be, and as easy as it would be to solve, it occurs with increasing frequency because of a desire by department heads to hire "professionals" who have what are thought to be "proper" credentials.¹⁹

The rising professionalism among college administrators carries several potential benefits. For the specialists, it may mean that salaries will be pegged either to the faculty or to the job market for their speciality, and not to others such as public school teachers salaries. The salaries of non-specialists will likely remain pegged to similar jobs in other colleges, and, therefore, lower than generalist middle-managers in business. Furthermore, increased professionalism has lead to increased respect and status (they

are no longer seen as amateur bureaucrats who couldn't get jobs elsewhere) and an easing of relations with faculty, as well as the development of external standards for their operations in admissions, registration, financial aid, etc. For this context, I use the term professional as someone who is "an expert 'with specialized knowledge and skill in a significant field of human endeavor', who accepts social responsibility for his actions by virtue of his competence, and who shares a corporate 'sense of organic unity and consciousness' with others of similar competence."²⁰

It might be of interest at this point to characterize several middle-management positions, so that responsibilities are clear. First we will consider positions in admissions.²¹

The Admissions Officer provides services to both his college and prospective matriculants by recruiting students and counseling them about opportunities for study. While all admissions offices are concerned with enrollment, public relations, and admissions policy, these are not the primary activities that define the tone of an office. The major activities are recruiting, selecting, counseling, and managing student records and data. All campuses are concerned with these core jobs, but most admissions offices choose only one or two as a dominant activity. The choice depends upon the type of institution and its stage of development. Private colleges and universities tend to spend more time in recruiting than public institutions do, and public institutions are more often than private ones engaged in the sophisticated

management of student records and data. Only a few large universities would claim this as a primary responsibility.

Student recruiting is a major activity primarily for lesser known private liberal arts colleges that have traditionally been faced with competition from both more prestigious private colleges and lower cost public institutions. Recruiting involves visits to secondary schools and alumni groups, placing advertising in newspapers and magazines, contracting for posters, catalogues and brochures, developing market plans for finding students whose academic profiles are similar to those of currently enrolled successful undergraduates, and the sundry other activities that are involved in identifying a pool of students and trying to persuade them of the virtues and opportunities at one's institution.

Other colleges have sufficient numbers of applicants, but want to be sure that they select from that group the most able students. Although admission procedures vary by institution, selection is typically done by the director of admissions, or possibly by the director and his staff. As schools ascend the academic status ladder, it is likely that the faculty will become involved in the selection of students. At one level, faculty serve on screening committees that review the difficult cases of children of alumni and friends. At another level, the faculty is involved in reading and voting on all candidates, not just the problem cases. As demands for access increase, the faculty and staff devote increased attention to the establishment of new criteria and procedures for student selection.

Still other institutions spend most of their admissions time counseling students about placement and curricular opportunities. These activities are shared as a primary task by both unselective open-door community colleges and the most selective private colleges and universities. The former operate this way as a matter of public service; the latter because they have an abundance of highly qualified applicants and want students to make their college choices for educational reasons. This concern for the "fit" between student and campus has been increasing, and has its roots in the ideal of universal access to post-secondary schooling. (This focus may change as even selective institutions engage in more competitive recruiting practices.)

The fourth category of admissions office is concerned primarily with the management of student records and data. As mentioned previously, this activity is considered most important by large public and some private universities, and by the central offices of public systems of higher education. However, the increasing use by private colleges of federal and state financial aid funds, especially equal opportunity grants and work-study money, and the concomitant reports required, result in all colleges being concerned with student data management. Typically, in large public institutions, the director or dean of admissions is also the university registrar and is engaged in significant levels of institutional research, especially that which involves enrollment projections, space and facilities usage, and the scheduling of rooms and examinations. The emphasis in these offices is on computer-generated reports for management planning and decision-making, and as a means of accountability to public sponsors.

At advanced levels, admissions officers, as Associate Director,

Director, or Dean of Admissions, provide expertise and leadership in their areas of responsibility, and probably coordinate the duties of two or three subordinates. The senior admissions official manages the day-to-day operations of an office, and plans staff activities in recruiting and selecting students. At this level, a Master's degree or an equivalent combination of education and expertise is often required. For the beginning level, a Bachelor's degree is the customary credential, although in growing numbers of cases, a Master's degree is desired. However, this probably represents an inflation in educational "credentialism", and not a real need of the positions.

The beginning college counselor or professional, i.e., non-faculty, academic advisor, provides advising or personal counseling services for students in a college or unit of the university. These positions usually involve a triple nature; the counselor must serve as advisor, advocate, and adjudicator for student concerns and requests. The potential conflict in this arrangement occurs most often for advising deans, as opposed to clinical or psychological counselors. Advisors work closely with students and receive general supervision from a more senior person in the office, who provides an advanced degree of expertise to handle more difficult problems, and probably supervises both clerical and professional staff. For this level of position, a Master's degree or a combination of advanced education and experience is necessary. And while the experience may be gained on the job, in many cases it is not possible to earn a Master's degree at the same time. This leads to problems discussed

elsewhere in this article.

A third position that will be described briefly is in development, i.e., fund raising. These people are most often involved in working with alumni and friends or potential donors to the institution; the objective is to get them informed, involved, and finally willing to invest in the people and programs of the institution. As with the other job areas just mentioned, the most likely types of candidates for entry level positions in development and other public affairs work are recent undergraduate alumni who have personality traits that make them desirable for public relations-type work, and who have developed an enthusiastic loyalty to the institution. Junior level officers in development typically work for someone else and perform either a line or a staff function. Intermediate and advanced level professionals often supervise others' work and have major responsibility for a special program such as annual giving or the campaign of a particular school or department.

Examples of specialist positions may be found in the Budget Department, the Legal Counsel's Office, the Dean of Students Office. For positions in these areas, specialized training is required in law, business, accounting, Student Personnel Administration, or a related field; and, by and large, practitioners exercise their special skills in the performance of their duties.²²

For precise definitions of job classifications, one may consult the product of a new field on campus -- the job classification specialist. Primarily in response to the provisions of "equal pay"

regulations, but also as part of effective salary administration, many colleges have engaged consultants who develop standard descriptions and salary scales for jobs at different levels in different areas on that campus. The salary results are custom-made for each campus (although virtually every campus has the same relationship between jobs) but the descriptions are substantially standard for every campus. (See appendix A for a description of the entry level admissions position and Appendix B for the director's description.)

There has been little inquiry into the background, interests, and condition of middle-managers on campus, but there has been some. Hauser and Lazarsfeld reported in 1966 on the admissions officer as an emerging profession.²³ Bess and Lodahl reported in 1969 on the educational background and work experience of middle-level non-academic administrators.²⁴ Also, in the mid-1960's, Mark Ingraham reported on the working conditions and compensation of this group.²⁵ But, except for salary surveys, little else has been done.

This is a fruitful area of inquiry. It is important, growing, and changing. It would be useful to know more about the attitudes, values, role models, aspirations, and influence on middle managers. For example, what conflicts do they face that affect their performance. Of course one cannot study middle-management in isolation. They are, in many ways, at the mercy of top management. If top administrators fail to delegate authority for decisions -- perhaps because one effect of increased politicalization and caucusing by constituents on

campus is to increase the consciousness of accountability and decrease the amount of responsibility delegated. If senior administrators are too tied up to think about the prospects and conditions of middle-management -- and there is evidence that they offer few incentives for growth -- they may not foster the new arrangements suggested. Task forces and flexibility may be over-shadowed by a desire for specialized skills, and declining budgets may limit training opportunities, but future shifts in size, mission, and student markets will demand these measures of flexibility, nevertheless.

Middle-level administrators can provide substantial services to faculty and students, but the increased demands on these administrators have put the dimensions of service and control into conflict. As long as these positions provide service and help the faculty and senior administration achieve the goals of the institution, its atmosphere will be healthy. They and the senior administrators will be heeding Woodrow Wilson, when as President of Princeton University he said, "My plea then is this, that we now deliberately set ourselves to make a home for the spirit of learning..." However, when senior administrators fail to delegate authority along with responsibility, are slow in making decisions, do not encourage and reward the improvement of services and practices, and do not understand the role of middle managers, the latter may fill this vacuum with their own, uncertain authority, and instead of providing willing service toward the accomplishment of goals, there will be control; not the control of authority that accompanies responsibility, but

the control that results from a concern that one does not have a mandate to do anything different and must protect the putative status quo, and a belief that one must protect his own area of authority. When this happens, bad relations result.

In closing, let me comment on what a middle-manager can do to help himself. First, be visible.²⁶ Participate in the educational life of the college. Be active in committee work and advising; eat with the faculty. Work with the departments and deans. Keep them informed about your work and ideas for theirs. Distribute reports widely; keep your faculty informed about developments in curricula, placement testing, and trends in enrollment.

Second, develop and demonstrate skills in forecasting, planning, and budgeting. Know the literature of higher education; know where to find studies that will help your work and that of your colleagues.

Third, analyze your institution's structure and propose paths for professional and intellectual development. In addition to courses and degrees, look into exchanges with departments on your own and other campuses. A great deal can be learned by doing your own job in a different setting, and by applying your skills to special, short-term projects. Also, identify possible patterns in the organization and suggest them to your senior administrators.

There is a tendency for middle-managers, and others in bureaucratic positions, to specialize intensively to make themselves

ever more proficient and indispensable. To consider a short-term job in a different context is a foreign thought. Actually, beyond a certain plateau, it is the administrator's imagination and talents for thinking, written and oral expression, and organization, not his knowledge of a particular field, that are important both for effectiveness and continued growth.

Fourth, demonstrate your professionalism; don't just ask for status. Faculty rank and special voting privileges for full-time, non-teaching administrative officers are "red herrings" that probably will do more to alienate the people you wish to influence than to enhance your status. Faculty status alone doesn't bring respect. Ideas and accomplishments do.²⁷

Collegiate administration is a challenging, enjoyable field, although there are serious problems in it as I have pointed out. It is a field with both direct rewards and intrinsic satisfactions. The primary enterprise as a middle-level manager is intellectual; it offers the opportunity to support academic and human development, and to "make a home for the spirit of learning." How much more basic and important, and exciting, even in a period of retrenchment, can a job be?²⁸

FOOTNOTES

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