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ABSTRACT

The roles of academic senates in university organization are discussed. Three symbolic purposes that academic senates may fill are considered first: they may symbolize institutional membership in the higher education system, collective and individual faculty commitment to professional values, and joint faculty-administration acceptance of existing authority relationships. Serving on the academic senate can confer status that protects the institution from two disruptive elements, informal leaders and organizational deviants. Since academic senates typically take a long time to make decisions, complicated problems that administrators prefer not to tackle can be directed to the senate, where the problem goes into an organizational "deep freeze." Since most items that someone wants discussed by the senate are never acted upon, the use of the senate as an attention cue is a good way to allocate attention. The senate, by inhibiting the propensity to change that increasingly characterizes the administration, serves as a major element in the homeostatic process of organizational conservation. Other roles of the senate include: a personnel screening device, a ritual and pastime, and scapegoat. These functions of the senate are considered in the context of the model of organized anarchy. (SW)

THE LATENT ORGANIZATIONAL FUNCTIONS OF THE ACADEMIC SENATE: WHY SENATES DON'T WORK BUT WON'T GO AWAY

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THE LATENT ORGANIZATIONAL FUNCTIONS OF THE ACADEMIC SENATE: WHY SENATES DON'T WORK BUT WON'T GO AWAY

Academic senates (Note 1) are generally considered to be the normative organizational structure through which faculty exercise their role in college and university governance at the institutional level (American Association for Higher Education, 1967). Although no complete census is available, analyses of data in past studies (Kemerer and Baldridge, 1975; Hodgkinson, 1974) suggest that senates may exist in one or another form on between 60 per cent to 80 per cent of all campuses.

With the advent of faculty collective bargaining in the late 1960s, concern was expressed that senates, unable to compete with the more adversarial and aggressive union, might disappear on many campuses (McConnell and Mortimer, 1971). Not only has this prediction proven to be false (Baldridge, Kemerer and Associates, 1981; Begin, 1979), but in fact there is evidence that the proportion of institutions with senates has increased over the past decades (Baldridge, Curtis, Ecker, and Riley, 1978).

This growth is somewhat perplexing in view of the stream of criticisms that increasingly has been directed against the senate structure. It has been called weak, ineffective, an empty forum, vestigial, unrepresentative,

and inept (Baldridge, 1982; Carnegie Foundation, 1983; Keller, 1983; Mason, 1972; Millett, 1978; McConnell and Mortimer, 1971). Its detractors have referred to it as "slowly collapsing and becoming dormant" (Keller, 1983, p. 61) and "purely ceremonial" (Ben-David, 1972). In a 1969 national study, 60 per cent of faculty respondents rated the performance of their campus senate or faculty council as only "fair" or "poor" (Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, 1973). A more recent consideration of faculty governance has stated that "traditional structures do not appear to be working very well. Faculty participation has declined, and we discovered a curious mismatch between the agenda of faculty councils and the crisis now confronted by many institutions" (Carnegie Foundation, 1983, p. 12.)

These negative evaluations of faculty governance structures are not new. A trenchant observer in 1918 (Veblen, 1957, p.186) noted the administrative use of faculty "committees-for-the- sifting-of-the-sawdust" to give the appearance, but not the reality, of participation, and called them "a nice problem in self-deception, chiefly notable for an endless proliferation" (p.206).

There is not complete agreement that the senate has no real instrumental value. Blau's (1973) finding of a negative correlation between senate participation and

educational centralization at over 100 colleges and universities, for example, led him to state that "an institutionalized faculty government is not mere window dressing but an effective mechanism for restricting centralized control over educational programs, in accordance with the professional demands of the faculty. Formal institutionalization of faculty authority fortifies it" (p.164). Another supporter of the senate (Floyd, 1985) after reviewing the literature reported that the senate "continues to be a useful mechanism for campus-wide faculty participation" (p.26) at certain types of research universities and elite liberal arts colleges in some governance areas, although it is less useful in others. But despite the support of a small number of observers, the clear weight of evidence and authoritative opinion suggests that, except perhaps in a small number of institutions with particular characteristics, the academic senate doesn't work. Indeed, it has been suggested that it has never worked (Baldridge, 1982). Yet it survives, and in many respects thrives.

After citing a litany of major criticisms of the senate and proposing reasons for its deficiencies, Lieberman (1969) added "what is needed is not so much a critique of their inherent weaknesses, but an explanation of their persistence in spite thereof" (p.65). Similarly,

Hobbs (1975), in looking at the functions of university committees, suggested that rather than focusing attention on recommending ways in which these committees might be made more effective, greater attention should be given to examining their roles in university organization. The purpose of this paper is to conduct just such an examination.

Manifest and Latent Functions

The manifest functions of an organizational structure, policy, or practice can be thought of as those for which behavior leads to some specified and related achievement. Institutional processes that usually lead to expected and desired outcomes should be expected to persist. Often, however, organizations engage in behavior that persists over time even though the manifest function is clearly not achieved. Indeed, such behavior may persist even when there is significant evidence that the ostensible function cannot be achieved. There is a tendency to label such organizational behavior as irrational or superstitious, and to identify an institution's inability to alter such apparently ineffectual behavior as due to "inertia" or "lack of leadership."

The theory of functionalism (Merton, 1957) suggests an alternative explanation. Some practices that do not appear to be fulfilling their formally intended functions may persist because they are fulfilling unintended and unrecognized latent functions that are important to the organization. As Merton describes it, functional analysis examines social practices to determine both the planned and intended (manifest) outcomes and the unplanned and unintended (latent) outcomes. This is particularly useful for the study of otherwise puzzling organizational behavior because it "clarifies the analysis of seemingly irrational social patterns, ... directs attention to theoretically fruitful fields of inquiry, ... and precludes the substitution of naive moral judgments for sociological analysis" (p.64-65, 70). In particular, it points towards the close examination of persistent yet apparently ineffective institutional processes or structures to explore the possibility that they are meeting less obvious, but still important, organizational needs. "We should ordinarily (not invariably) expect persistent social patterns and social structures to perform positive functions which are at the time not adequately fulfilled by other existing patterns and structures.... (Merton, 1957, p.72). The senate may do more than many of its critics believe, and "only when we

attend to all the functions and their social contexts can we fully appreciate what it is that the senate does" (Tierney, 1983, p.174).

This paper shall examine two major questions. First, and briefly, what are the manifest functions of the academic senate that its critics claim appear not to be fulfilled, and what organizational models do they imply? Second, and at greater depth, what may be the latent functions of the academic senate that may explain its growth and persistence despite its failure to meet its avowed purposes, and how do these functions relate to organizational models?

The Manifest Functions of the Academic Senate

In general, those who criticize the senate have not clearly articulated the criteria they have employed, and their analyses tend to be narrative and anecdotal with no explicit conceptual orientation. Their comments and conclusions, however, suggest that they evaluate the senate implicitly using the three traditional models of the university as a bureaucracy, as a collegium, and as a political system.

Probably the most prevalent implicit model is that of the university as bureaucracy. In his study of the

effectiveness of senates (which is one of the few studies to specify desired outcomes), Millett (1978) established eight criteria that "would provide some reasonable conclusions about the contributions and the effectiveness of campus-wide governance to the process of institutional decision making" (p.xiv). These included the extent to which senates clarified institutional purpose, specified program objectives, reallocated income resources, developed new income sources, as well as the extent to which they were involved in issues such as the management of operations, degree requirements, academic behavior, and program evaluation. The identification of the senate's role in decision making, and the emphasis upon goal-setting, resource allocation, and evaluation all suggest an implicit view of the senate as an integral part of a hierarchical, rational organization. This bureaucratic orientation is also seen in one of the two "modal" university committee types identified by Hobbs (1975). This type, among other characteristics, meets often, has a decision-making function, records minutes, prepares written reports for administrative officers, and has a clear sense of task. Other analysts have also used language that either explicitly or metaphorically identifies the senate in bureaucratic terms. Senates are needed to deal with "the full range of academic and

administrative matters (Carnegie Foundation, 1983, p.13), their purpose "approximates that of the college's management" (Keller, 1983, p.126), and they assist "the discovery and employment of techniques to deal with deficit spending, with increasing enrollments, with healing the wounds resulting from student dissent, with curriculum expansion, with faculty salary increases in a tight budget, with parking, and so forth" (Stone, 1977, p. 40).

A second model implicitly views the senate as part of a political system. In this model, the senate is seen as a forum for the articulation of interests, and the setting in which decisions on institutional policies and goals are reached through compromise, negotiation, and the forming of coalitions. Senates serve as "a place for campus politicians to exercise their trade" (Deegan and Mortimer, 1970, p.46), which in its worst sense may identify them as "poorly attended oratorical bodies" (Keller, 1983, p.127), and in the best sense means that they can "provide a forum for the resolution of a wide range of issues involving the mission and operation of the institution" (American Association for Higher Education, 1967, p. 57). Given the significant differences that typify the interest groups that make up its constituencies, the senate enables participants to deal

with inevitable conflict as they "engage one another civilly in dispute" (Hobbs, 1975, p.242).

The model of the university as collegium is less explicitly identified in analyses of the senate than the other two models, but it appears to be recognized through constant references in the literature to the concept of collegiality. The senate in this view would be a forum for achieving Millett's (1962) goal of a dynamic of consensus.

Depending upon the organizational assumptions used, an observer might consider the senate to be effective in governance either a) to the extent that it efficiently considered institutional problems and, through rational processes, developed rules, regulations, and procedures that resolved them, or b) to the extent that, perceived as fully representative of its constituencies, it formulated and clarified goals and policies, or c) to the extent that, through interaction in the senate forum, shared values developed leading to consensus. But senates do not respond quickly to problems and recommend efficient solutions, they are increasingly advisory rather than legislative, faculty members appear politically naive and apathetic, senates are oligarchical and not representative, and as institutions get more complex faculty interaction is more likely to expose latent

conflict than it is to increase feelings of community (Mortimer and McConnell, 1978).

Alternative organizational models suggest a range of activities, processes, and outcomes as the manifest functions of the senate. Since these functions do not appear to be performed adequately, the senate has been judged to be ineffective. In many ways the senate appears to be a solution looking for problems. Millett (1978), for example, provides a list of eight specific problems and questions raised by student activism in the 1960s (such as the role of higher education in defense research, or the role of higher education in providing community service to the disadvantaged) to which appropriately comprised senates were presumably an answer. He found that "there is very little evidence that organs of campus-wide governance, after they were established, were particularly effective in resolving these issues" (p.200). Since its manifest functions are not being fulfilled, the persistence of the senate suggests that it is filling important latent functions. What might some of these be?

The Latent Functions of the Academic Senate

The Senate as Symbol. In addition to whatever effects they may have upon outcomes, organizational

structures and processes also often have symbolic importance to participants (Feldman and March, 1981). Academic senates may fill a number of important symbolic purposes. We will consider three: the senate may symbolize institutional membership in the higher education system, collective and individual faculty commitment to professional values, and joint faculty-administration acceptance of existing authority relationships.

Faculty participation in governance is generally accepted as an essential characteristic of "mainstream" colleges and universities. Since 1950 there has been a significant increase in the types and kinds of institutions that many consider only marginally identified with higher education. These include, for example, community colleges with strong administrative hierarchies, unselective state colleges with traditions rooted in teacher education and the paternalistic practices of school systems, and small and unselective independent institutions with authoritarian presidents. By establishing an academic senate structure that was more typical of the system to which they aspired, than it was of the one from which they developed, an institution could suggest the existence of faculty authority even when it did not exist. This structural symbol of a faculty voice could support a claim to being a "real" college.

ideas can publicly defend academic freedom, and those without scholarly interests can argue for reduced teaching loads to encourage research. In this way even those who cannot do so through the publication of scholarship or research can publicly display their academic bona fides.

A major criticism directed against the senate is that exists at the pleasure of the administration and board of trustees (Lieberman, 1969; Baldridge, Curtis, Ecker and Riley, 1978). Because of this, its authority has been described as "tenuous" (Mortimer and McConnell, 1978, p.26). However, the fact is that although trustees have rejected senate recommendations they have not abolished senates. Indeed, administrations support senates and in fact believe them to be even more "effective" than do faculty members (Hodgkinson, 1974). Why should both the faculty and the administration continue to support the senate structure? It is obvious that faculty would wish to maintain senates because they are a symbol of administrative acceptance of the idea of faculty participation in governance. Administrators may support senates because voluntary faculty participation in such bodies is a tacit acknowledgement by the faculty that they recognize and accept the ultimate legal authority of the administrative and board. The senate is thus a symbol of cooperation between faculty and administration. As in

The development of a senate can also symbolize a general faculty commitment to substantive values as well. The most visible and public matters of faculty concern at some institutions have been related to faculty collective bargaining which have tended to focus upon employee issues that in many ways were similar to those of other workers. Particularly in the public sector, but sometime in the private sector as well, faculty emphasis upon salary, working conditions, and other mundane matters has eroded in the minds of the public their claim to professional status. Creating a senate may be a response to that erosion, symbolizing a commitment to professional values and faculty concern for more purely academic matters. This helps to legitimate the institution's desire to be treated differently than other organizations, and the faculty's claim to be treated differently than other groups of workers. Through a senate, the faculty can symbolically endorse such desirable attributes or outcomes as increased quality, standards, and integrity even though (or perhaps because) they cannot define either the problems or their solutions in operational terms. The senate may thus serve as a forum through which, individually and collectively, faculty may symbolically embrace values in lieu of actual behavior. Within the senate, academics who have never had controversial new

other organizational settings, parties may cooperate in perpetuating an already-established structure even when the objective utility of the structure is agreed by the parties to be of little value (Deutsch, 1973). The continued existence of the senate therefore is not only a visible manifestation of the ability of the parties to cooperate, but also reflects an intent to further increase cooperative activities.

The symbolic value of the senate is so strong that even those like Millett (1978) who after study have concluded that the senate is ineffective when evaluated against specific criteria, continue to support it. Even if it doesn't work in terms of its ostensible aims, it may be preferable that an institution have a non-functioning senate than that it have no senate at all.

The Senate as Status Provider. Cohen and March (1979) hypothesized that "most people in a college are most of the time less concerned with the content of a decision than they are with eliciting an acknowledgment of their importance within the community.... Faculty members are more insistent on their right to participate in faculty deliberations than they are on exercising that right" (pp. 201-2). In an analogous vein, the existence of a senate certifies the status of faculty members by acknowledging their right to participate in governance,

while at the same time not obligating them to do so. The vigorous support of faculty for a strong and active voice in campus governance, coupled with their reluctance to give the time that such participation would require (Dykes, 1968; Corson, 1960) should therefore not be surprising.

The senate also offers a route of social mobility for older and less prestigious faculty locals whose concern for status based on traditional norms is frustrated by a lack of scholarly achievement (Ladd and Lipset, 1973). Participation in committee affairs, and opportunities it brings to work with higher status administrators, provides a local means for enhancing their own importance.

In addition to certifying the status of participants in general, providing an opportunity for individuals to serve as senator is a means of conferring status that protects the institution from two quite different, but potentially disruptive, elements; informal leaders, and organizational deviants.

Universities are normative organizations that rely upon the manipulation of symbols to control the behavior of their members (Etzioni, 1964). Unlike organizations characterized by control through coercive or utilitarian power, normative organizations tend to have more "formal

leaders" (those who influence others both through their personal power and through the organizational positions they hold), and fewer informal leaders (personal power only) or officials (positional power only). Formal leadership provides a relatively effective means of exercising power in a decentralized and loosely-coupled system. By the same token, the development of informal leaders can be dysfunctional by facilitating the development of semi-autonomous sub-groups that can diminish the formal leader's influence.

Formal leaders cannot prevent the development of informal leaders, but in normative organizations "to the degree that informal leaders arise ... the tendency is to recruit them and gain their loyalty and cooperation by giving them part-time organizational positions. ...The tendency is for the informal leaders to lose this status within the given organization and for control to remain largely in the hands of the formal leaders" (Etzioni, 1964, p.64). Membership in a prestigious body such as a senate with presumed quasi-administrative responsibilities can be used towards the same end "of providing alternative channels of social mobility for those otherwise excluded from the more conventional avenues for 'social advancement' " (Merton, 1957, p. 76). Senate membership provides legitimate organizational roles in which informal

leaders can participate and have their status confirmed, while at the same time preventing them from disrupting ongoing organizational structures and processes.

There is a second group of campus participants whose activities, if not channelled through a legitimate structure such as a senate, might prove disruptive to the organization. They are the institutional deviants, often highly vocal persons with a single-minded devotion to one or another cause. Senates offer these deviant faculty a legitimized opportunity to vent their grievances and solicit potential support. Election of such persons may sometimes lead administrators to discount the senate as "nonrepresentative," and may be seen by them as yet another example of senate weakness. On the other hand, the need for even deviants to allocate attention means that time spent acting in the relatively stable environment of the senate is time they do not have available for participating in relatively more vulnerable settings, such as the department. The senate may thus serve as a system for absorbing the energies of potentially disruptive faculty members. Since the senate, like the administration, is subject to overload, it can attend to only a small number of items at any one time. The difficulty of convincing senate colleagues of the justice of their position is more likely to reduce

aspirations of deviants than would be constant rebuffs by administrators or departmental colleagues; if a faculty member cannot convince his or her colleagues, how can the administration possible be convinced?

The Senate as Garbage Can and Deep Freeze. Sometimes a college or university can use rational processes to make choices and solve problems when it is called upon to make a decision. However, this become difficult when unexpectedly other people become involved in the decision process, new problems are introduced, and new solutions are proposed. These relatively independent streams of participants, problems, and solutions may somehow become attached to each other, often by chance, just as if they were all dumped into a large container, leading to what has been referred to as "garbage can decision making" (Cohen, March, and Olsen, 1972). Choices become more difficult as they become increasingly connected with "garbage" (that is, with problems, potential solutions, or new participants that, at least to the decision maker, appear irrelevant). Choices become easier if they can be made either before these irrelevant matters become attached to them (decision making by oversight), or after these irrelevant matters can be made to leave the choice (decision making by flight). Because of the essential ambiguity of the college and university processes, any

choice point can become a garbage can. One of the latent functions of the senate may be to function as a structural garbage can, and the inability of the senate to make speedy decisions may increase its effectiveness in this role by putting some problems into an organizational "deep freeze.".

An administrator who wishes to make a decision, but finds it difficult to do so because irrelevant problems have become associated with it, can refer those irrelevant problems to the senate. The decision can then be made by flight while the attention of participants is directed elsewhere.

The deliberate speed of the senate makes it possible for many problems that are referred to it resolve themselves over time with no need for any specific action. This kind of outcome is shown by the disparaging statement of one faculty member that "the committees [of the senate] report, but usually it has taken so long to 'study the issue' that the matter is long since past" (Baldridge, Curtis, Ecker and Riley, 1978, p.80).

Other issues, particularly those that deal with goals and values and thus might be divisive if an attempt was made to resolve them, may be referred to the senate with the justifiable expectation that they will absorb a

significant amount of energy and then will not be heard of again.

The Senate as Attention Cue. The number of problems available in a university searching for decision opportunities and forums in which they can be resolved, although perhaps finite in number, is at any specific time far greater than can be acted upon. Administrative attention is in comparatively short supply, and, as discussed in Chapter 9, as administrators "look for work" they must decide to which of many different potential attention cues they should pay attention. This is a non-trivial issue, because the ability of problems, solutions, decision makers, and choice opportunities to become coupled through temporal rather than through logical relationships makes it exceptionally difficult for an administrator to know on an a priori basis what is most important. In the absence of a calculus or an algorithm that permits administrators to predict how important any specific problem may prove to be, they must rely on heuristics (such as "oil the squeaky wheel") to indicate when an item may have reached a level of concern sufficient to require administrative attention. There are many sources of such cues; a telephone call from a state legislator, or an editorial in the local paper or student press, are examples. So too is discussion and action

(potential or actual) by the senate. As Mason (1972) and others have commented, senate agendas "tend to be exceedingly crowded ...[and] even if a senator has succeeded in placing a policy-question in the agenda 'it will not be reached until the meeting has gone on so long that the member's one overwhelming desire is to go home' " (p.75). As a result, not every item that is proposed for the senate agenda actually gets on it, and not every item that gets on it is attended to. The presence of a specific item on an agenda that becomes the subject of extended discussion and possible action therefore signifies that it is of unusual importance, and worth an investment of administrative time. By the same token, a matter proposed to the senate but not considered by it can be used as a justification for administrative indifference. The senate thus operates in the university in a manner similar to that of a public agency before a budget subcommittee. When there are no more than the usual level of complaints, no action need be taken. But when "an agency shouts more loudly than usual...subcommittee members have a pretty good idea that something is wrong" (Wildavsky, 1974, p.154).

Since most items which someone wants discussed by the senate are never acted upon, the use of the senate as an attention cue is an efficient way of allocating

attention. It relieves the administration of responsibility for dealing with every problem, establishes a rationale for a system of priorities, provides a justification for inattention to some items, and maintains the symbolic relationship of administration responsiveness to faculty concerns.

The Senate as Personnel Screening Device. Universities constantly have to fill administrative positions, and it is often less disruptive institutionally as well as desirable financially to do so with faculty members. However, not every faculty member is acceptable, and at least two characteristics not often found in combination are desirable; a person should both have the confidence of faculty colleagues, and should also be sympathetic to the administrative point of view. The senate provides a forum in which such persons can be more easily identified and evaluated.

Election to the senate itself provides strong (although not absolutely reliable) evidence of acceptability to faculty colleagues, and working with administrators in preparing reports or other committee assignments allows senators to demonstrate through the equivalent of on-the-job participation their commitment to administrative values.

Anecdotal evidence indicates that administrators are often selected from among faculty "committeemen" (Ladd and Lipset, 1973, p.83), and case study material (Deegan and Mortimer, 1970; McConnell, 1971) has shown how the intimate involvement of faculty committee members with administrative officers in policy formulation has meant that "many senate committee members have moved easily and naturally into regular administrative positions" (McConnell, 1971, p.103). Of course, persons selected for administrative positions because they perform well in the kinds of ideological and non-instrumental debates of the senate may turn out not to be the most effective institutional leaders (Cohen and March, 1974).

The Senate as Organizational Conservator. More attention has traditionally been given to the presumed negative consequences of the university's acknowledged resistance to change than to the potentially positive aspects of maintaining the ongoing system. From a functional perspective, ongoing organizational processes and structures exist in an equilibrium that is a response to, and a resultant of, a number of forces operating upon and within the institution. As with any open system, the university is homeostatic in nature and tends to react to the instability caused by change by responding in a manner that returns it to its former state. The senate, by

inhibiting the propensity to change that increasingly characterizes the administration, serves as a major element in this homeostatic process of organizational conservation.

Administrators in general, and presidents in particular, usually do not wish to change the university in dramatic ways, and in fact the processes through which they are selected and socialized tend to make their roles conservative (Cohen and March, 1974). Yet they occupy boundary positions in the organization, and find themselves exposed, as faculty members are not, to the demands of the external environment as well as those of the organization. In that external environment there are a number of factors that implicitly or explicitly pressure university administrators to become more intrusive in organizational life (see for example, Keller, 1983) . Regulations by state and other agencies, calls for accountability by external study groups, and fiscal exigencies related to demographic patterns are commonly cited as causes, and the senate has been seen as "an effective mechanism for restricting centralized control over academic programs" (Blau, 1973, p.164) as well as a constraint upon an ambitious administration (Dykes, 1968).

In addition to external pressures, there are as well other powerful, if less obvious, reasons for increased

administrative activism which are related to the increased availability of institutional information. The movement towards the "management" of higher education has, among other things, led to complex systems for the collection and analysis by administrators of previously inaccessible institutional data. These data illuminate anomalies, inequities, and non-standard practices that must then be justified or abolished, and therefore that provoke administrative intervention. But as Trow (1975) has pointed out, it is precisely the obscurity caused by bad data collection that may permit the diversity and innovation upon which institutional quality is based. The senate's ability to resist administrative initiatives can therefore be seen, at least in some cases, as protecting the institution from making changes based upon measurable but ultimately unimportant factors, and thus preserving those enduring organizational and institutional qualities that are beyond routine measurement.

In addition to the increased quantity of data, there are also changes in the processes through which data reaches administrators in executive positions, as well as the speed with which it moves through the organization. In the past, data might have eventually come to administrative attention after having first been passed through and manipulated by a series of committees, and

long after corrective administrative measures could be applied. Today, these same data may be transmitted directly to the president from a state coordinating board, often with a time lag measured in weeks rather than years. The effect on a university can be similar to that in other social systems characterized by "symptoms of communication failures based on a superabundance of information, inadequately assimilated, rather than its scarcity" (Douglas Cater, cited in Magarrell, 1980, p.1). Today administrators may face an endless and often real-time stream of data calling for corrective action before there is time to plan, consult, or fully consider.

The existence of a senate reduces administrative aspirations for change and increases the caution with which the administration acts. This not only protects much of value within the organization, but also prevents the unwitting disruption of ongoing but latent systems through which the university keeps the behavior of organizational participants within acceptable bounds. The senate thus is the structure through which, in Clark Kerr's (1963) terms, the faculty serve as the institution's "balance wheel," resisting some things that should be resisted, insisting on more thorough discussion of some things that should be more thoroughly discussed, delaying some developments where delay gives time to

adjust more gracefully to the inevitable. All this yields a greater sense of order and stability (p.100)

The Senate as Ritual and as Pastime. Senates usually meet on a regular schedule, follow a standard agenda format, involve the same core of participants, and engage in their activities under stipulated rules of order. In an organization typified by ambiguity, it is often comforting to engage in scheduled and structured activities in which the behaviors of others can be generally predicted. The senate thus serves as a ritual, a "formality of procedure or action that either is not directed towards a pragmatic end, or, if so directed, will fail to achieve the intended aim" (Burnett, 1969, cited in Masland, 1983, p.164). The identification of the senate as "theatrical and debate-oriented" (Keller, 1983, p.127) or as a "... a forum where pompous professors exchange dreary speeches" (Deegan and Mortimer, 1970, p.46) underscores its ritualistic qualities.

The rituals of senates serve a number of important organizational functions. Among other things, it helps stabilize and order the organization, it provides assurances that mutually expected interactions will occur, and it reduces anxiety (Masland, 1983). Senates also provide organizational participants with opportunities for engaging in acceptable behavior when faced with ambiguous

or uncertain stimuli. When one doesn't know what else to do, participating in senate debate can appear to be a contribution towards solutions and can enable faculty members to "pretend that they are doing something significant" (Baldridge, Curtis, Ecker, and Riley, 1978, p.80).

Ritual provides participants with a sense of membership and integration both into an organization and into a profession. For others, however, the senate may be enjoyed purely as a pastime. It is a place where one can meet friends, engage in political intrigues, gossip about the administration, and complain about parking - all common forms of faculty recreation. It is also a place where speeches can be made, power can be displayed, nits can be picked, and the intricacies of Robert's Rules of Order can be explored at infinite depth. Those faculty who do enjoy such things have a vested interest in perpetuating the senate, for without it a forum for their involvement would be lost.

The Senate as Scapegoat. The best laid plans of institutions often go awry. To some extent, this may be due to cognitive limits to rationality that suggest that only a small proportion of potentially important variables may be attended to at any given time. Equally as important may be the organizational characteristics of

colleges and universities as decentralized and loosely-coupled systems (Weick, 1976). In such systems it is often difficult to predict events, and intentions, actions, and outcomes may be only modestly related. Even the power of the president, usually considered the single most influential person in the institution, is severely circumscribed.

When plans are not enacted, or goals not achieved, organizational constituents search for reasons. In order to meet psychological needs, these reasons must of course blame others and not oneself; and in order to meet political needs, these reasons must be specific rather than conceptual. A president is unlikely to blame an institutional failure on weak presidential performance, and a Board of Trustees is not likely to accept a president's argument that a certain task cannot be performed because it is beyond the capabilities of a loosely coupled system. On the other hand, Boards can understand a president's assertion that a specific act was made difficult or impossible because of opposition by the senate, and may even entertain a claim that it would be impossible to implement a program because of the likelihood of future senate opposition. In the same way, faculty members at the department or school level can argue against considering a new policy on the grounds that

the senate would not approve it, and can blame the senate when a program supported by the senate breaks down when implemented at lower organizational levels.

Cause and effect relationships are extremely difficult to assess in the equivocal environment of the college or university. The actions (or lack thereof) of a structure such as the senate, which has high visibility and an ambiguous charge, can plausibly be blamed for deficiencies of all kinds in institutional operation. An academic department can use the senate as a scapegoat for its own unwillingness to make the difficult choices necessary to strengthen its departmental curriculum, as easily as a politically incompetent president can accuse it of scuttling a major policy initiative. In these and in similar cases, the senate helps the participants "make sense" of an exceptionally complex system while at the same time preserving their self-images of acumen and professional competence.

Academic Senates in Organized Anarchies

This chapter began by discussing the perceived shortcomings of senates when traditional organizational models are used to assess their effectiveness. It then suggested a number of important latent functions that

senates may play. Let us now consider these latent functions in the context of a newer organizational model - that of the organized anarchy.

Organized anarchies are institutions characterized by problematic goals, unclear technology and fluid participation (Cohen and March, 1974). "The American college or university is a prototypical organized anarchy. It does not know what it is doing. Its goals are either vague or in dispute. Its technology is familiar but not understood. Its major participants wander in and out of the organization. These factors do not make the university a bad organization, or a disorganized one; but they do make it a problem to describe, understand, and lead" (p.3).

An organized anarchy is a loosely-coupled system in which individuals and subunits within the organization make essentially autonomous decisions. Institutional outcomes are a resultant of these only modestly interdependent activities, and are often neither planned nor predictable. It is difficult in such an environment to make inferences about cause and effect, to determine how successful one is or even to be certain in advance that certain environmental changes or evolving issues will turn out to be important or trivial. In this situation of great ambiguity, people spend more time in sense-making

than in decision-making (Weick, 1979) and in engaging in activities that verify their status. The decoupling of choices and outcomes makes symbolic behavior particularly important, and particular choices, problems, solutions, and participants often become associated with one another because of their temporal, rather than their logical relationships.

Organized anarchies need structures and processes that symbolically reinforce their espoused values, that provide opportunities for individuals to assert and confirm their status, and that allow people to understand to which of many competing claims on their attention they should respond. They require a means through which irrelevant problems and participants can be encouraged to seek alternative ways of expressing themselves so that decision makers can do their jobs. They should also be able to "keep people busy, occasionally entertain them, give them a variety of experiences, keep them off the streets, provide pretexts for storytelling, and allow socializing" (Weick, 1979, p.264).

Given these requirements, the issue of the "success" of the academic senate can be seen from a completely different perspective. Questions concerning its rationality, efficiency, ability to resolve important issues, representativeness, and community-building

effectiveness, which may be important under other models, are of less consequence here. If one conceives of a college or university as an organized anarchy, academic senates may be effective indeed. This may be the reason they have survived and prospered even though they have not fulfilled the manifest purposes that their charters claim. If senates did not exist, we would have to invent them.

It's time to say something nice about senates. The concept of the organized anarchy appears to capture a significant aspect of the role of the senate on many campuses, but certainly not of all senates on all campuses at all times. There are many examples of senates that have taken responsibility for resolving a specific problem, and have done so in a timely and efficient manner. There are senates in which important institutional policy has been determined, and through whose processes of interaction faculty have developed shared values and increased feelings of community. Given the comments of observers of the senate, however, these appear to be exceptional, rather than common, occurrences.

Those who observe the workings of senates and find them deficient should be particularly careful in making recommendations for change, since these changes might affect not only performance of manifest functions but their important latent functions as well. This is

particularly true when making recommendations based upon normative and ultimately moral concepts such as "shared authority" or "representativeness." Merton warned (1957, p.71) that "since moral evaluations in a society tend to be largely in terms of the manifest consequences of a practice or code, we should be prepared to find that analysis in terms of latent functions at times run counter to prevailing moral evaluations. For it does not follow that the latent functions will operate in the same fashion as the manifest consequences which are ordinarily the basis of these judgments."

Giving more adequate consideration to latent functions may make more useful any recommendations that might change the senate, or propose eliminating it completely and substituting some other organizational structure. As a general principle, "any attempt to eliminate an existing social structure without providing adequate alternative structures for fulfilling the functions previously fulfilled by the abolished organization is doomed to failure [and] is to indulge in social ritual rather than social engineering" (Merton, 1957, p.81). Functional analysis also enables us to more clearly evaluate warnings, such as that senates are "ineffective because faculty [are] not active participants. If faculty do not become involved in ...

senate ... affairs, the ominous predictions about the demise of faculty governance may come true" (Baldridge and Kemerer, 1977, p.345-6). To the extent that the organized anarchy model is an appropriate one, the future of the senate in governance is unlikely to be related to increased faculty involvement.

(Note 1). The term "academic senate" is used in this chapter to identify a formal, representative governance structure at the institutional level that may include only faculty (a 'pure' senate), or one that , in addition to a faculty majority, may also include representatives of other campus constituencies such as administrators, academic staff members, and/or students (a 'mixed' senate), as defined by the Report of the AAHE Task Force on Faculty Representation and Academic Negotiations (American Association for Higher Education, 1967, p.34).

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