ABSTRACT

        Numerous dysfunctions result from bureaucratic school
organization, including an overemphasis on specialized tasks, routine
operating rules, and formal procedures for managing teaching and
learning. Such schools are characterized by numerous regulations;
formal communications; centralized decision making; and sharp
distinctions among administrators, teachers, and students. In a
bureaucracy, rules are used to reduce the visibility of power
relations, the need for close supervision, and the level of
interpersonal tension and conflict. Instead, by defining minimally
acceptable behavior, rules often inspire less than optimal employee
performance, leading to increased personal supervision, more visible
power relations, and increased interpersonal conflict. While
bureaucratic behavior might produce stability, it also creates a
dependent relationship between administration and staff and
eliminates flexibility and creativity. Communication problems are
exacerbated and resource allocations used as controlling mechanisms.
School administrators and teachers must expend substantial effort to
make a bureaucracy work. Effective principals are sometimes forced to
develop strategies to circumvent the bureaucracy, to become
insubordinates in their students' best interests. Recent research
shows that top-down systems are no longer viable. The complexity and
professional discretion involved in running schools and teaching
require an approach that maximizes staff ability and fosters creative
problem-solving. (16 references) (MLH)

The Dysfunctions of Bureaucratic Structure

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The concept of a school system suggests there should be some unifying quality among the schools that are a part of that system. Bureaucratic structures have traditionally met the school system's need for this unifying quality. According to Firestone and Wilson (1985). bureaucratic linkages -- such as roles. rules. procedures, and authority relations- - serve to coordinate the activity of people who work in schools. However. such· diverse groups as the National Governors' Association. the Holmes Group, and the National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration agree that the current organizational structure of the schools does not promote excellence in teaching or learning.

A number of dysfunctional consequences result from bureaucratic organization. Schools organized on the bureaucratic model tend to overemphasize specialization of tasks, routine operating rules, and formal procedures in organizing for teaching and learning. They are characterized by a proliferation of regulations, formal communications, centralized decision making, and sharp distinctions between administrators and teachers and between teachers and students (Sergiovanni, 1987).

Dysfunctional Consequences of Rules

Rules are used in a bureaucracy to reduce the visibility of power relations, reduce the need for close supervision, and reduce the level of interpersonal tension and conflict. However, rules also tend to define minimum acceptable behavior. Defining minimum behavior often leads to less than optimal performance on the part of employees, and this, in turn, leads to an increase in personal supervision, the very condition that the rules were intended to eliminate (Abbott & Caracheo, 1988).

The increase in closeness of supervision leads to an increase in the visibility of power relations, which leads, in turn, to an increase in the level of interpersonal tension and conflict. In addition, adherence to rules also leads to rigidity on the part of administrators and employees. Too often, in those cases where it is necessary to choose between exercising judgment and adhering to rules, the rules tend to win.

Rules take on an aura of compulsion; they become sacrosanct -- they are to be followed, not questioned. What were intended to be means become ends, and unquestioning compliance with rules rather than their judicious enforcement becomes the norm. Too often rules are substitutes for personal judgment. They tend to discourage creative efforts in responding to problems, to justify minimal performance, and to produce apathy (Anderson, 1969).

Authoritarian Methods Fostered

Bureaucracies provide a haven for the type of *mindscape* described by Sergiovanni (1987) as *Clockworks I*. A mindscape is composed of images, theories, and sets of beliefs that shape a person's reaction to problems, define what is important and unimportant, and provide them with a rationale for guiding actions and decisions.

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Clockworks I administrators view schools as a tightly structured entity with a pattern of operation that resembles the mechanical workings of a clock. Quality control is a management problem that they can solve by coming up with the right controls -- scheduling, prescribing, programming, monitoring, inspecting, testing, and checking. Teaching is conceived as a job, and the teacher as a worker. Clockworks I focuses on *power over* -- that is, controlling people and events so that things turn out the way the administrator wants (Sergiovanni, 1987).

Bureaucratic administrators arrange schedules and control behavior; maintain tight personal control over money and supplies; and dictate curriculum, goals, and means. While this type of behavior may result in a certain amount of stability, it creates a dependent relationship between the administrator and staff and p.actically eliminates flexibility and creativity. Staff are immobilized and afraid to move without orders (Barth, 1987).

Communication Problems Exacerbated

Bureaucratic structure has a tendency to obstruct communication. This allows problems to compound and "solutions" to develop that are not always the most effective. Information does not flow freely and easily throughout the system. In most cases, there are no mechanisms in place to report problems to superiors (Duttweiler, 1987). People who consistently ca!! superiors attention to problems are accused of being "malcontents," of being "disloyal," or of "rocking the boat." The result of this is that important information is frequently withheld.

Often, when problems *are* reported, the underlying causes are not addressed. The information that is passed upward is screened by successive layers in the hierarchy in order to protect the vested interests of those relaying it. Therefore, information needed to make appropriate decisions is often missing. Problems go

undetected until they assume major proportions because subordinates are discouraged from identifying the sources.

Hierarchical authority allows administrators to restrict the possible solutions and approaches to those they feel competent in using. This often results in decisions of a lowered quality, in faulty problem solving, and a normative structure that values the status quo (Bradford & Cohen, 1984).

In addition, traditional bureaucratic managers who maintain control over all decisions and activities decrease the responsibility felt by subordinates for the success or failure of any effort. Staff abilities are ignored or under-utilized-- resulting in lowered staff motivation.

Resource Allocation Used to Control

Gamoran and Dreeben (1986) have described how resource allocation serves a coordinating and controlling function in school systems. They point out that by controlling the allocation of resources needed for teaching, administrators -- by intention or not -- shape the conditions under which teachers work. The control and distribution of resources substitute for rules, orders, and supervision that are weak in loosely coupled systems. Control over resources is a source of power in organizations. Through control of resources that support classroom instruction, administrators have the capacity to define the conditions under which teachers work, to facilitate or limit teachers' ability to make the strategies of teaching work.

Centralized budgeting seldom provides incentives for efficiency. It frequently fails to foster diversity through which more efficient and effective approaches to teaching and learning may be identified. What is worse, it invariably excludes key actors such as school administrators, teachers, parents, and students who have perhaps the most powerful motivation to

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see that resources are used to best advantage (Caldwell & Spinks, 1988).

There is a discrepancy between the practices that teachers use and those they might use if they were faced with different constraints of time, resources, organization, and student attributes (Elmore, 1987). As Pfeifer's (1986) interviews with teachers have uncovered, teachers are frustrated with the meager material resources with which they are expected to accomplish their work.

In Pfeifer's study (1986), teachers provided descriptions of the effects of poorly designed and implemented school policies which suggest that many policies instituted to improve instruction serve, instead, as a major source of frustration for classroom teachers.

"Creative Insubordination"

A great deal of time and effort is spent by school administrators and teachers in "the mundane work of making a bureaucracy work" (Pfeifer, 1986). Frymier (1987) studied 183 professional educators from nine urban schools. He concluded that-- by circumstances and by law -- the educators were forced to deal with factors over which they had almost no control. Events and mandates required them to engage in activities that would not help their students perform well in school.

Recent accounts of schools that have dramatically increased in effectiveness include tales of principals' circumventing district office rules and regulations. Effective principals are sometimes forced to develop strategies to circumvent the bureaucracy. In the attempt to protect the integrity, working rhythm, and morale of their schools and teachers, these principals deliberately ignore, misunderstand, or actually disobey orders from superiors (Jones-Wilson, 1984). These strategies have been labeled "creative insubordination"-- the wisdom of knowing where and how to disobey (Morris, Crowson, Hurwitz, & Porter-Gehrie, 1982).

The use of such strategies raises questions about policies and procedures that compel effective principals to be insubordinate in order to work in the best interests of their students. Schools should not have to depend on the heroism of school leaders who are willing to circumvent district policies in order to be effective (Oakes, 1987).

Cleveland (1987) suggests that systems which operate by "recommendations up, orders down" are no longer viable. Reliance on hierarchical control supplants reliance on existing capacity, ingenuity, and judgement on the part of the professional with reliance on rules, surveillance, and enforcement procedures. The complexity and professional discretion involved in running schools and in teaching require an approach that maximizes the ability of staff -- an approach that fosters the problem-solving capacity of professionals (Elmore, 1987).

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