



Journal of Educational Administration

BUREAUCRACY AND ALIENATION: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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To cite this document:

WAYNE K. HOY RICHARD BLAZOVSKY WAYNE NEWLAND,
(1983), "BUREAUCRACY AND ALIENATION: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS", Journal
of Educational Administration, Vol. 21 Iss 2 pp. 109 - 120

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BUREAUCRACY AND ALIENATION: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

WAYNE K. HOY, RICHARD BLAZOVSKY AND
WAYNE NEWLAND

Data collected from 41 high schools are used to test a set of hypotheses concerning dimensions of organization and alienation. The results from school organizations are then compared with those of Aiken and Hage for social welfare agencies. Although the relationships between bureaucratic structure and alienation are remarkably similar for secondary schools and social welfare agencies, there are striking differences in their organizational structures. Schools are dramatically more formalized and centralized than welfare agencies; and teachers are significantly more alienated than welfare workers. It is theorized that a bifurcation of professional and administrative domains in schools provides a distinctive organizational structure that reduces the impact of structure on alienation of teachers.

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between bureaucracy and alienation has had an impressive history in the literature of organizational analysis. Bureaucracy, starkly conceived, often seems to vindicate Weber's assertion, "The fully developed bureaucratic mechanism compares with other organizations exactly as does the machine with the non-mechanical modes of production."¹ Placing this social "machine in the garden" drew anguished cries from such observers as Marx and Durkheim, who saw the emergence of a technological and bureaucratic society as antithetical to the nature of man. It is hardly surprising, then, that the bureaucracy-alienation dilemma still provides a rich backdrop for organizational analysis.

Alienation can refer to feelings of anomie, loss of self, despair, loneliness, powerlessness, disengagement, indifference, anxiety, isolation, meaninglessness, disaffection, dissatisfaction, and depersonalization.² Despite the considerable attention focused on the concept, social scientists have not been consistent in their use of the term. Unfortunately, as Aiken and Hage cogently observe, one major limitation of many discussions of alienation is that the concept has been defined, measured, and discussed

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as if it represented some free floating human condition unrelated to the specific social circumstances.³

In the present study, we use the term alienation to refer to dissatisfactions with relations in work. Our concern is with relating dimensions of organization with aspects of alienation. More specifically, the purpose of this study is twofold: (1) to examine the relationship between two aspects of bureaucratic structure – centralization and formalization – and two types of alienation – alienation from work and alienation from expressive relations, and (2) to compare the empirical results of this analysis for educational organizations with those of Aiken and Hage for social welfare organizations.⁴

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

Alienation from work reflects a feeling of disappointment concerning one's position of employment in the organization. It refers to the extent to which one is dissatisfied with such things as authority, relative position compared to other workers, opportunities for professional growth and development, the recognition and acceptance granted by superiors, and the degree to which the job is consistent with career expectations. Alienation from work is conceived in terms of dissatisfactions associated with the occupation of a position in a hierarchical structure.

Alienation from expressive relations reflects dissatisfaction in social relations with one's work associates. It refers to the extent to which an individual is dissatisfied with supervisors and colleagues. Aiken and Hage have compared these two types of alienation with two of those discussed by Marx, that is, alienation from the process of production and alienation from fellow workers.⁵ Dissatisfaction from work relations, then, is conceptualized as two types of alienation: alienation from work and alienation from expressive relations.

Centralization is “. . . the locus of authority to make decisions affecting the organization.”⁶ It describes the involvement exercised by members in decision making. There are, according to Aiken and Hage, two important aspects of centralization.⁷ First, organizations vary in the extent to which specific tasks are assigned to subordinates and subordinates are given freedom to accomplish those tasks unimpeded by superiors; this is called *hierarchy of authority*. Formal organizations in which the tasks are routinely assigned and little action can be taken without the approval of a superior are characterized by a rigid hierarchy of authority. A second significant characteristic of the distribution of power is the extent to which employees participate in setting goals and policies for the organization – *participation in decision-making*. Hierarchy of authority and participation in decision-making provide the conceptual basis for operationalizing centralization.

Aiken and Hage provide evidence to support the proposition that both alienation from the job and alienation from fellow workers is greater in

highly centralized social welfare organizations than in decentralized ones.⁸ Other studies suggest the same generalization for a variety of institutional settings. Blauner and Faunce discovered that workers in highly centralized automobile factories expressed strong feelings of powerlessness and dissatisfaction.⁹ Similarly, Pearlin found that alienation among nurses was related to rigid and impersonal authority structures.¹⁰ For professionals in an aerospace organization, Miller demonstrated that strong organizational control was likewise directly related to work alienation, and Blau and Scott provided evidence that tight control in social welfare agencies produced worker dissatisfaction.¹¹

The picture is somewhat more mixed in the school context. Barakat and Isherwood and Hoy found positive relationships between degree of hierarchical control in schools and sense of powerlessness of teachers.¹² However, Moeller and Charters unexpectedly discovered a significant association between the bureaucratization of school districts and teacher sense of power.¹³ Nonetheless, it seems likely that the potential for alienation from work and from colleagues will be greater in centralized schools than decentralized ones; in fact, Allutto and Belasco present some preliminary data to suggest that school centralization and teacher decisional deprivation produce teacher dissatisfaction.¹⁴ Furthermore, two common characteristics of professional orientation are a demand for autonomy in job performance and a strong voice in decisions and policies. If teachers are denied access to such power, it seems probable that they will become dissatisfied with their work relations.

This discussion leads to the formulation of two guiding hypotheses:

- H.1 The degree of teacher alienation from work will vary directly with the degree of centralization of a school organization.
- H.2 The degree of teacher alienation from expressive relations will vary directly with the degree of centralization of a school organization.

Formalization refers to the extent to which the work has been standardized and the amount of leeway that is permitted from such standards.¹⁵ Formalization is one way of reducing uncertainty in bureaucratic organizations. Standardized procedures and official rules provide precise directions and appropriate responses to recurring situations and furnish firm and clear guidelines for decision making.¹⁶ Formalization reflects not only the extent to which workers must consult rules and procedures as they fulfill their organizational roles, *job codification*, but also the degree to which employees are observed and checked upon for rule violations, *rule observation*. Hence, formalization implies both a large number of rules as well as their rigid enforcement; job codification and rule observation provide the conceptual basis for operationalizing formalization.

Aiken and Hage showed that formalization, in terms of both job codification and rule observation, was related to alienation in the work relations of social welfare employees.¹⁷ Similarly, Crozier's analysis of French bureaucracies revealed that strict reliance on rules and regulations was directly linked to worker dissatisfaction.¹⁸ Isherwood and Hoy's study

of teacher powerlessness in high schools also suggests a possible relationship between formalization and alienation.¹⁹ Finally, Gouldner argues that when management attempts to impose and enforce rules, the resultant punishment-centered bureaucracy is likely to create tension, resistance, and hostility among employees.²⁰

Professionalization and formalization are alternative strategies for dealing with organizational uncertainty. Professionals have both technical competence in their field as well as an internalized set of professional norms to guide their decision making. Neither an extensive set of organizational rules nor their strict enforcement is necessary; in fact, they seem likely to create conflict and produce dissatisfaction. Although the occupation of teaching is probably not fully professionalized, it seems reasonable to suggest that public school teachers are becoming increasingly more professional.²¹ Therefore, two additional hypotheses are proposed:

- H.3 The degree of teacher alienation from work will vary directly with the degree of formalization in a school organization.
- H.4 The degree of teacher alienation from expressive relations will vary directly with the degree of formalization in a school organization.

DESIGN AND METHOD

Sample

The hypotheses of this study were tested using data collected from the professional staffs of 41 New Jersey secondary schools.²² In selecting the schools, an attempt was made to include systems from a variety of communities. The schools ranged in size from those with several hundred students to those with more than 2,000 students. The sample was fairly typical of New Jersey secondary schools in terms of size, equalized valuation per pupil, and percentage of minority students; however, if any type of school was underrepresented, it was probably the large urban core high school.

Data were collected from faculty in regularly scheduled faculty meetings. More than 2,500 educators returned usable research instruments. Information obtained from individuals was aggregated to reflect the properties of the 41 schools. The school organization was the unit of analysis, *not* the individual. School properties were related to each other. In order to maintain methodological independence between the independent and dependent variables, each school faculty was randomly divided into two groups. One half of the staff responded to an instrument designed to measure the independent variables of bureaucratic structure; the other half responded to measures of alienation. Mean scores for each school were then computed, and the organizational scores for each variable were used in the analyses.

Dependent Variables

The two alienation variables discussed in this paper were measured with indices developed by Aiken and Hage.²³ The index used to measure work alienation consisted of the following six items:

1. How satisfied are you that you have been given enough authority by administrators to do your job well?
2. How satisfied are you with your present job when you compare it to similar positions in the state?
3. How satisfied are you with the progress you are making towards the goals which you set for yourself in your present position?
4. On the whole, how satisfied are you that your superior accepts you as a professional expert to the degree to which you are entitled by reason of position, training and experience?
5. On the whole how satisfied are you with your present job when you consider the expectations you had when you took the job?
6. How satisfied are you with your present job in light of career expectations?²⁴

Individuals answered the questions in terms of their degree of satisfaction along a four point scale from 1 (very satisfied) to 4 (very dissatisfied). Individual scores were combined into a mean score for each organization. The coefficient of reliability for the work alienation index was supported with an alpha of .82.

A similar index for alienation from expressive relations was computed based on the responses to the following two items:

1. How satisfied are you with your supervisor?
2. How satisfied are you with your fellow workers?

Aiken and Hage reported a strong correlation ($r = .75$) between these indices of alienation; likewise, in the present research the measures of alienation were strongly correlated ($r = .65$).²⁵

Independent Variables

Aspects of bureaucratic structure were determined through use of a set of scales developed by Aiken and Hage.²⁶ The two aspects of centralization were measured by an index of hierarchy of authority and an index of participation in decision making. The index of hierarchy of authority was computed by averaging the replies of respondents to each of the following five statements:

1. There can be little action taken here until a supervisor approved a decision.
2. A person who wants to make his own decisions would be quickly discouraged here.
3. Even small matters have to be referred to someone higher up for a final answer.
4. I have to ask my boss before I do almost anything.
5. Any decision I make has to have my boss's approval.

Responses vary from 1 (definitely false) to 4 (definitely true). Individual scores were then averaged for an organization score. A coefficient alpha of .82 was computed for this index.

Aiken and Hage have a four-item index for participation in decision making. The index had a coefficient alpha of .72 in the present study and was based on the following items:

1. How frequently do you usually participate in the decision to hire new staff?
2. How frequently do you usually participate in decisions on the promotion of any of the professional staff?
3. How frequently do you usually participate in decisions on the adoption of new policies?
4. How frequently do you usually participate in decisions on the adoption of new programs?

Participants responded to each item in terms of "never," "seldom," "sometimes," "often," or "always." A total score for each individual was tallied and then an organizational score was computed.

The index of hierarchy of authority indicates how much subordinates rely on superiors in making decisions about individually assigned tasks. The index of participation in decision making measures participation in decisions involving personnel and policy. There is a strong inverse relation between these two measures as is reflected in Table 1.

Two aspects of formalization were also measured. The index of job codification has an alpha of .72 and consisted of the following five items:

1. I feel that I am my own boss in most matters.
2. A person can make his own decisions without checking with anybody else.
3. How things are done here is left up to the person doing the work.
4. People here are allowed to do almost as they please.
5. Most people here make their own rules on the job.

This measure was scored from 1 (definitely true) to 4 (definitely false), and then the scale was averaged and converted to an organizational score.

The index of rule observation was composed of the following two items:

1. The employees are constantly being checked on for rule violations.
2. People here feel as though they are constantly being watched to see that they obey all the rules.

The alpha for this index was .86, and it was scored in the same way as the index measuring hierarchy of authority.

The index of job codification reflects the extent to which subordinates must consult rules in fulfilling their professional obligations. On the other hand, the index of rule observation describes the degree to which subordinates are observed and checked for rule violations. Unlike the results of the Aiken and Hage study, the two measures are highly correlated ($r = .81$).²⁷

FINDINGS

Bureaucratic Structure and Alienation

Service organizations have been defined as social units whose basic function is to serve clients.²⁸ Welfare of clients is presumed to be the chief concern of both schools and welfare organizations. To best serve its clients, service organizations are staffed with professionals or semiprofessionals. As professionals, both teachers and welfare workers are presumed to have technical competence in their field as well as an internalized set of professional norms that guide their behavior. Therefore, it was theorized that excessive bureaucratic control in terms of authority relations, decision making, organizational rules, and enforcement of rules would produce conflict and induce dissatisfaction among the professional staff of these service organizations.

The tests of the major hypotheses of the study support the theory. Hierarchy of authority is strongly correlated with alienation from work ($r = .73$) and participation in decisions is inversely related to alienation from work ($r = -.53$). Centralization, as measured by hierarchical control over assigned tasks and the degree of participation in decision-making, does seem to impinge upon work alienation; teachers resent a high degree of control over assigned tasks and lack of participation in schoolwide decisions. Similarly, both indices of centralization are significantly correlated with alienation from expressive relations ($r = .47$ and $-.39$ for hierarchy and participation respectively). School organizations that rely on hierarchical work arrangements and limit the participation of teachers in decision making are likely to be characterized not only by higher work alienation but also by disenchantment of teachers with expressive relations, particularly with superiors.

Formalization also has an impact on alienation. There is a positive relationship between job codification and both alienation from work ($r = .46$) and alienation from expressive relations ($r = .18$); however, the latter relationship is not a significant one. This means that although there is greater dissatisfaction with work in schools having a preponderance of rules that define and specify the job, such rigidity does not seem to have the same detrimental influence on expressive relations in the school.

The relationship between rule observation and alienation from work is strong ($r = .63$); but the relationship between rule observation and alienation from expressive relations, although also significant, is not nearly as strong ($r = .31$). The results suggest that school organizations in which rules are rigidly enforced are likely to be characterized by higher levels of both alienation from work and from expressive relations, but the negative impact of strict rule enforcement seems greater for dissatisfaction in work than in social relations. Table 1 provides a summary and comparison of the relationships analyzed in the two types of organizations.

Table 1. Product-moment correlations between measures of alienation and measures of centralization and formalization for high schools and welfare agencies¹

Measures of Centralization and Formalization	Measures of Alienation	
	Alienation From Work	Alienation From Expressive Relations
Centralization		
Hierarchy of Authority	.73* (.49)	.47* (.45)
Participation in Decisions	-.53* (-.59)	-.39* (-.17)
Formalization		
Job Codification	.46* (.51)	.18 (.23)
Rule Observation	.63* (.55)	.31* (.65)

¹Correlations for Aiken and Hage's study of welfare agencies (N = 16) are given in parentheses.

*p < .05

Schools and Social Welfare Agencies

Since schools and welfare agencies are staffed predominantly with professionals engaged in performing non-uniform tasks, one might be tempted to assume that the bureaucratic structures of these two types of service organizations would be quite similar. This is not the case. The organizational structure of the high schools is significantly more centralized than that of the welfare agencies. Schools are characterized by much more hierarchy of authority and substantially less participation in decisions than the welfare agencies. The welfare agencies are skewed in the direction of decentralized of authority while high schools are highly centralized; in fact, there is no overlap in the range of the hierarchy scores (welfare agencies, 1.50-2.10 and schools, 2.88-3.82). The least centralized school has a greater degree of hierarchical structure than the most centralized welfare organization (see Table 2).

The degree of job codification in both agencies and schools is moderate with a significant tendency for the agencies to have slightly more rules and regulations. However, schools are dramatically more formalized in terms of the degree to which rules are observed and enforced. The most formalized welfare agency has less rule observation than the least formalized school; there is no overlap in the range of rule observation scores (welfare agencies, 1.11-1.90 and high schools, 2.77-3.79). The data for all the structural comparisons are presented in Table 2.

Not only are there substantial differences in the bureaucratic structure between high schools and welfare agencies, there are major differences within the organizational structures of the two types of service organizations. An analysis of the intercorrelations among the independent variables shown in Table 3 reveals that the dimensions of bureaucratic structure are much more closely interrelated in high schools than in welfare agencies. In fact, all aspects of structure are significantly correlated in high schools. Hierarchy of authority, in particular, is strongly related to *all*

Table 2. A comparison of bureaucratic structure and alienation scores for high schools and welfare agencies

	High Schools (n = 41)			Welfare Agencies (n = 16)			t	p
	Range	Mean	S.D.	Range	Mean	S.D.		
Hierarchy of Authority	2.88-3.82*	3.41	.21	1.50-2.10	1.76	.17	30.78	<.01
Participation in Decisions	1.34-2.33**	1.87	.21	1.68-3.69	2.85	.64	6.00	<.01
Job Codification	2.12-2.67*	2.43	.16	2.22-2.70	2.54	.12	2.82	<.01
Rule Observation	2.71-3.79*	3.28	.29	1.11-1.90	1.48	.24	24.00	<.01
Alienation from Work	1.57-2.46*	1.98	.20	1.09-2.11	1.69	.23	4.46	<.01
Alienations from Expressive Relations	1.67-2.39	1.99	.18	1.22-2.01	1.61	.21	6.46	<.01

*The possible scores range from a low of 1.00 to a high of 4.00

**The possible scores range from a low of 1.00 to a high of 5.00

aspects of school bureaucracy; the correlations of hierarchy with rule observation ($r = .91$), job codification ($r = .74$), and participation in decision making ($r = -.53$) are so strong as to suggest that centralization and formalization in schools can be measured by the single unidimensional concept of hierarchy of authority. Apparently, when teachers describe the structure of schools, centralization and formalization are seen merely as related aspects of the hierarchic authority structure of schools.

The profile of the structure of high schools is in marked contrast to that of the social welfare agencies. The same aspects of bureaucratic structure are relatively independent of each other in the social welfare agencies. For example, welfare agencies can have strong hierarchy of authority without relying on rules and regulations, and if they have high job codification, the

Table 3. Product-moment correlations between measures of centralization and formalization for high schools and welfare agencies¹

Measures of Centralization and Formalization	Centralization		Formalization	
	Hierarchy of Authority	Participation in Decisions	Job Codification	Rule Observation
Centralization				
Hierarchy of Authority	-	-.53* (-.55)	.74* (.14)	.91* (.43)
Participation in Decisions	-	-	-.32* (-.12)	-.43* (-.26)
Formalization				
Job Codification	-	-	-	.81* (-.03)
Rule Observation	-	-	-	-

¹Correlations for Aiken and Hage's study of welfare agencies (N = 16) are given in parentheses.

* $p < .05$

rules and regulations may not be closely observed; that is, hierarchy of authority is not significantly correlated with job codification ($r = .14$) and job codification is not correlated with rule observation ($r = -.03$). Not so for high schools, strong hierarchy of authority is associated with job codification ($r = .74$), and job codification is associated with rule observation ($r = .81$). The pervasive authority structure of schools is arresting.

The picture of the schools depicted here seems quite different than that rendered by Bidwell, March and Olsen, Weick, and Meyer and Rowan, all of whom claim that schools are loosely coupled systems in so far as technical work is concerned; that is, instructional work is basically removed from the control of the organizational structure.²⁹ Perhaps when teachers say that they must ask permission and get approval before they "do almost anything" they are excluding the instructional activity. Such a proposition remains an untested possibility, but this study shows these high schools are tightly coupled, at least with respect to administrative matters.

Finally, a comparison between the degree of alienation in each organizational context is instructive. Not surprisingly, in light of their more rigid bureaucratic structure, high schools have significantly more dissatisfied professionals than welfare agencies in terms of both alienation from work ($\bar{X} = 1.98, 1.69$ respectively, $t = 4.46, p < .01$) and alienation from expressive relations ($\bar{X} = 1.99, 1.61$ respectively, $t = 6.46, p < .01$). In spite of the hierarchical structure of high schools, however, teachers are not overwhelmingly dissatisfied. The average alienation scores for schools suggest only mild alienation even in the most bureaucratic structures (see Table 2).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Similar to the Aiken and Hage data on the social welfare agencies, highly centralized and highly formalized school organizations are characterized by greater work alienation. A lack of opportunity to participate in decisions, hierarchical control over assigned tasks, an abundance of rules, and rigid enforcement of rules are all strongly related to work alienation. Likewise, with one exception, these aspects of formalization and centralization are related to alienation from expressive relations; however, rules and regulations in-and-of-themselves apparently do not produce alienation from expressive relations. Perhaps rules interfere with social relations among colleagues only when they are rigidly observed and enforced.

Although the relationships between bureaucratic structure and alienation are remarkably similar for schools and social welfare agencies, there are some striking differences in their organizational structures. The high schools are dramatically more formalized and centralized than the social welfare agencies. Not one welfare agency was characterized by as much hierarchical control or rule enforcement as the *least* centralized or *least* formalized high school. Furthermore, while the dimensions of formalization and centralization for the agencies were relatively independent of each other, this was not the case for schools. Aspects of

centralization and formalization are viewed by teachers as part of an overarching hierarchical structure. Hierarchical control is the dominant motif of the structure of these high schools; all aspects of structure are strongly related to a pervasive authority structure. High school teachers maintain that they must ask permission and get approval before they do almost anything; even small matters have to be referred to a superior for a final answer.

In spite of the rigid hierarchical structure of high schools, teachers are not as alienated from work and from expressive relations as much as one might expect. Perhaps, as we have suggested, strict hierarchical control of the activities is limited only to administrative matters, and teachers have substantial professional discretion in matters relating directly to teaching and learning in the classroom. Indeed, it may be that a bifurcation of professional and administrative domains in schools provides schools with a distinctive organizational structure, one that enables teachers to cope with what otherwise might be an intolerably oppressive structure.

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22. This study was part of a larger study on the organizational structure of schools conducted at Rutgers University.
23. Aiken and Hage, "Organizational Alienation".
24. The first item in this index was modified slightly for use in this study. The word "administrators" was substituted for "board of directors" in question one; the rest of the items are identical.
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