

Organizational Behavior in Education
Leadership and School Reform
Robert G. Owens Thomas C. Valesky
Tenth Edition

Pearson New International Edition

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explicitly or implicitly) as applied to public school systems and schools. Neal Gross, using sociological methods of inquiry, sought to illuminate the reasons school board members and school superintendents in New England made the decisions that they did.²⁸ Daniel Griffiths initiated landmark work on decision making in educational administration that added considerably to our understanding of the importance of the decision-making behavior of administrators.²⁹ One of many studies based on Griffiths's work, for example, suggests that if the administrator confines him- or herself to establishing clear processes and procedures for making decisions (rather than actually making the final decisions), the administrator's behavior will be more acceptable to subordinates.

A team of researchers who were especially interested in understanding the processes of curriculum change in schools conducted a study to explore the question, To what extent do administrators and teachers in a given school system tend to agree or disagree in their perceptions of decision-making roles and responsibilities? Among the many findings arising from this complex and comprehensive study, one of the most outstanding—according to Griffiths—was that consideration for subordinates is more valuable behavior for the superintendent to exhibit than behavior intended to initiate structure in the group.

University graduate programs of study for educational administrators soon reflected the influence of social and behavioral science views of organizational behavior. In many cases, courses featuring some of the newer behavioral views—such as leadership, motivation, decision making, organizational climate, conflict management, and organizational change—took their place alongside courses on budgeting; financing; law; and school plant, site, and facilities. It soon became standard practice for writers of textbooks on the school principalship, general administration, and personnel administration to attempt to establish the relevance of organizational behavior research and concepts to the specific areas that the book addressed. Many professors, in their research and consulting activities, used these new ideas in their analysis of practical problems in actual schools, as well as in the design of inservice training activities.

Conclusion

Much of the current debate about school reform and educational leadership—whether in academic literature, in the popular press, or in discussions between practitioners—manifests different, frequently incompatible ideas about the nature of schools as organizations and the behavior of people who work in them. This debate has its roots in the larger debate about whether organizations are best understood as hierarchical, bureaucratic systems or as collegial, collaborative systems. That debate emerged in the first half of the 20th century with the publication of the *Western Electric Studies* and has been continually stimulated by the growth and spread of research in group dynamics and human resources development. Though the human resources view has steadily grown in influence

in the realms of business and the military as well as in education, many individuals in executive and leadership positions still cling to classical notions of hierarchical power relationships. It is important for the student of education to be aware of this, and it is especially important to examine the issues and make a clear personal commitment on where to stand on those issues as a guide to professional practice in educational leadership.

The struggle to develop understanding of human resources approaches to organizational behavior has led to the development of a number of theoretical views that can be helpful in clarifying issues confronting the educational leader. Chapter 4 examines a number of the newer views.

Reflective Activities

1. Examine the concepts from this chapter related to scientific management, bureaucratic organizational theory, and classical organizational theory. Which concepts, if any, do you believe are viable for today's schools? Describe why you believe these can still be effective.
2. Organizations have elements of scientific management, bureaucratic organizational theory, classical organizational theory, and/or human relations concepts that predominate. Using the concepts presented in this chapter, describe the management model of the organization (for example, school) where you are employed. In your opinion, is the existing model of management in your school or work environment the most effective for the organization? If so, explain why. What specific outcomes do you believe are attributable to this model of management? If it is not a desirable organizational model, what would you suggest as an alternative?
3. Complete a sociogram of the teachers and administrators in your grade level, department, and/or school, whichever is most helpful to you in analyzing informal relationship structures. Analyze the results in terms of how many informal groups exist and the size of these groups. Are they influential? Are they loners? Are they connected to the formal decision-making structure of the school?
4. *Working on Your Game Plan.* Chapter 3 described two different approaches to understanding organizations and behavior. One is from the classical perspective (organizations are characteristically hierarchical and bureaucratic), and the other is from the human relations perspective (organizations are characteristically collegial and collaborative). In our present era of school reform, both of these perspectives are alive and well and competing for your attention and your allegiance as a leader. Write a paragraph for your game plan about exercising leadership in schools. Express your thoughts and present commitment on two issues:
 - What ideas from these two perspectives on organization and human behavior do you find most useful in analyzing the problems of being a leader in schools? How would you translate those ideas into things that you do (or how you would do them) as a leader on the job?
 - What connection do you perceive between the ideas that you discussed and present-day human problems in the schools (such as motivation, student achievement, or morale)?

Suggested Reading

Callahan, Raymond E. *Education and the Cult of Efficiency*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962.

Recounts the events of an early period in the 20th century when U.S. business and industrial leaders sought to improve public schooling by forcing school boards across the country to adopt their organizational values and goals. If you think that what goes around comes around, you will find a powerful message for today in this fascinating account.

Etzioni, Amitai. *Modern Organizations*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1964.

A remarkably lucid, easy-to-read explanation of the fundamentals of modern organizational thought. Truly a classic in the literature of organization and behavior.

Morgan, Gareth. *Images of Organization*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1986.

This well-written book describes seven different ways of thinking about organizations, using metaphors for organizations such as machines, political systems, cultures, and so on. The author describes the advantages and disadvantages of using each metaphor.

Rothwell, William J., and Roland L. Sullivan. *Practicing Organizational Development: A Guide for Consultants (2nd ed)*. Hoboken, NJ: Pfeiffer: A Wiley Imprint, 2005.

This book, first published in 1995, includes chapters from many of the authors highlighted in our textbook, such as Margaret Wheatley, Edgar Schein, and Robert Tannenbaum. It includes both theory, hands-on activities, and cases that can be used to help schools undergoing organizational development processes.

4

Organizational Theory

CRITICAL INCIDENT A Tale of Two Principals



Mavis

Mavis is thought of by the staff as a very capable and intelligent leader. Mavis has worked with the staff to set up an organization in which a variety of committees that focus on schoolwide goals has significant decision-making authority. There are committees for technology, social, curriculum, discipline, staff development, organization/scheduling, reform, and several other ad hoc committees as needed. Staff members are asked to indicate which three committees they would like to serve on, and then the leadership committee chooses members to ensure that there are individuals who always seem to be task-oriented and others who are always very collaborative and supportive of others. Mavis and the leadership team selects the chairs for committees who they believe are the most knowledgeable about the committee charges and who are well organized. The chairs also serve on a school steering committee to ensure that all committees work in tandem toward schoolwide goals. Team leaders and the principal's leadership committee also serve on the steering committee.

Charley

Charley is thought of by the staff as highly organized and decisive. He has been at this school for 15 years as principal. The school organization is composed of grade-level teams. Charley believes that too many committees wastes staff time that can best be spent in planning for instruction. Each grade-level team meets with Charley once a month. Charley sets the agenda for these meetings and after getting ideas from the group, he makes the final decisions. Charley believes that by being in charge of the teams, he can ensure that the entire school is on track to meet schoolwide goals.

1. Analyze each of the organizational structures set up by these two principals. Which one is most likely to lead to effective decisions that will meet schoolwide goals? Why?
2. For which principal would you rather work? Why?

In Chapter 1, we emphasized two major overarching theoretical ways that leaders think about schools as organizations: One is traditional bureaucratic theory and the other is more recent human resources theory. We also described McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y, which clarifies the very different assumptions that leaders hold about people at work in organizations that cause them to choose to follow one or the other of these two very different approaches. In this chapter, we briefly describe and discuss six widely used theoretical frameworks *that build on and extend the three fundamental organizational theories outlined in Chapter 1.*

Describing theoretical models of organizational life is a great deal like the electronic version of chalk-talk diagrams that a television commentator uses during a football game. They can lay out and describe the concepts that underlie the game, but they must be understood in the context of the uncertainty and unpredictability that are always present in human endeavor. Models are useful for giving you a mental road map of how organizations work, something that you can use in the practical business of sorting out organizational issues and how to be an effective leader in dealing with them. Thus, theories and models are helpful in clarifying important issues involving organizational behavior. But they are not *literal* depictions of an organizational mechanism, as they are sometimes mistakenly taken to be.

For example, some people have rhapsodized about systems theories of organizations using the metaphor of old-fashioned clockworks, in which pendulums swing with unerring predictability, gears whirl, springs unwind, and other parts all move synchronously in near-perfect predictable relationships to produce the desired result, namely, to tell the correct time. Organizations, especially educational organizations, are human endeavors, and—to the despair of those seeking simplicity, precision, system, order, and certainty—cannot be reduced to mechanistic systems. Understanding that we are dealing with *human social systems* is basic to knowing how to deal effectively with them.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND PEOPLE

A major theme, perhaps the dominant one, in organizational theory for well over a half-century has been the interaction between organizational structure and people. It can be argued, for example, that the structure of an organization is the prime determinant of the behavior of people in the organization. For example, one study stated:

[O]ne of the persistent complaints in the field of penology, or juvenile correctional institutions, or mental hospitals, or any of the “people-changing” institutions is the need for better workers. Their problems, we hear, stem from the lack of high-quality personnel. More specifically, the types of individuals they can recruit as guards, or cottage parents, or orderlies typically have too little education, hold over-simplified views about people, tend to be punitive, and believe that order and discipline can solve all problems.¹

However, in this study, Perrow describes previous research in which applicants for positions in a juvenile correction institution were tested and found to be quite enlightened and permissive, but after they had worked in the institution for a while, they became less permissive and showed a punitive, unenlightened view regarding the causes of delinquency and the care and handling of delinquents. Such is the power of organizations to shape the views and attitudes—and thus behavior—of participants.

Nevertheless much of the literature of organizational theory is devoted to the belief that the people in the organization tend to shape the structure of the organization. This focuses attention on the impact of the behavior of people—in the processes of making decisions, leading, and dealing with conflict—on the structure, values, and customs of organizations. Attention has been devoted increasingly to strategies for improving the performance of organizations not by changing their structures as a way of inducing more effective organizational behavior, but by dealing with participants in ways that bring about desirable changes in the structure of the organization and—more important—in the character and quality of the social

Organizational Theory

environment in which people work. *We are talking about changing the organizational culture and the organizational climate of the school.*

General Systems Theory

Attempts to describe, explain, and predict organizational behavior generally depend—as does all modern scientific thought—on systems theory. A biologist, Ludwig von Bertalanffy, is generally credited with having first described what is now known as general systems theory.² Here is one way to describe the basic concepts of general systems theory:

An organism is an integrated system of interdependent structures and functions. An organism is constituted of cells and a cell consists of molecules which must work in harmony. . . . Each molecule must know what the others are doing. Each one must be capable of receiving messages and must be sufficiently disciplined to obey. You are familiar with the laws that control regulation. You know how our ideas have developed and how the most harmonious and sound of them have been fused into a conceptual whole which is the very foundation of biology and confers on it its unity.³

This captures the basic way of thinking about complex situations that is now generally used in both the physical and the social sciences. If we substitute *organization* for organism, *group* for cell, and *person* for molecule in the above statement about biology, it has relevance for thinking about organizations:

An *organization* is an integrated system of interdependent structures and functions. An *organization* is constituted of *groups* and a *group* consists of *persons* who must work in harmony. Each *person* must know what the others are doing. Each one must be capable of receiving messages and must be sufficiently disciplined to obey.⁴

Take a simple example. A young child might think of a nearby pond as a wonderful playground, away from the ever-watchful eyes of grown-ups. A fisherman might see it as a great place in which to fill his creel. A farmer might think of it as a good source of water for irrigating crops. A biologist, however, would tend to view the pond as a system of living things, all of which are interdependent in many ways and all of which are dependent in some ways on the larger environment in which the pond exists (for example, the air and sunlight). In terms of understanding the pond and being able to describe it, it is obvious that we are dealing with different levels of insight. However, in terms of being able to predict more accurately the consequences of things that might be done to the pond—such as pumping a large volume of water from it or removing large numbers of its fish—the biologist clearly has the advantage when he or she thinks of the pond as a system.

It is this advantage in dealing with cause and effect that has made systems theory so powerful in the study of organizational behavior. There is a strong tendency in our culture to ascribe single causes to events; in fact, the causes of even relatively simple organizational events are often complex. We may be unwilling to accept this fact and, as a way of rejecting it, choose to apply simplistic cause-and-effect logic to our problems.

This was illustrated by congressional interest in reducing automobile accidents in this country, which started out by concentrating on the automobile as a primary cause of accidents. From this flowed a logical line of thought: If we require automobile manufacturers to improve