

WHAT HAPPENS TO EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION WHEN ORGANIZATION TRUMPS ETHICS?

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ABSTRACT. The managerial strategies of governance prevalent in the private sector have become more and more normalized within educational institutions. These strategies, according to Dutch philosopher Zygmund Bauman, are *denial of proximity*, *effacement of face*, and *reduction to traits*. This article describes these managerial tactics within an educational context and unearths four systemic conditions that give rise to these strategies. These conditions are: *the imperative of efficiency*, *diffusion of responsibility*, *obscurity of cause*, and *simplification of solutions*. Various narratives are offered to demonstrate the effects of these conditions on the practice of educational administration.

**QUAND L'ORGANISATION PREND LE DESSOUS SUR L'ÉTHIQUE :
QU'EST CE QUI ARRIVE À L'ADMINISTRATION EN MILIEU D'ÉDUCATION?**

RÉSUMÉ. Les stratégies de gestion employées fréquemment dans le secteur privé pour gouverner sont devenues de plus en plus normalisées dans nos institutions scolaires. D'après Zygmund Bauman, le philosophe néerlandais, ces stratégies s'identifient comme suit : *négation de la proximité* (*denial of proximity*) *effacement du visage* (*effacement of face*) et *réduction aux traits simples* (*reduction to traits*). Le présent article décrit ces tactiques gestionnaires dans le cadre du milieu d'éducation et révèle quatre conditions systémiques qui occasionnent l'apparition de ces stratégies. Les quatre conditions sont : *l'impératif de l'efficacité*, (*the imperative of efficiency*), *la responsabilité dispersée* (*diffusion of responsibility*), *l'obscurité des causes* (*obscurity of cause*), et *la simplification des solutions* (*simplification of solutions*). L'article offre des narrations variées pour démontrer les effets de ces conditions sur les pratiques administratives en milieu scolaire.

Deliverance is not for me in renunciation
I feel the embrace of freedom in a thousand bonds of delight. . .
No, I will never shut the doors of my senses

Rabindranath Tagore, *Gitanjali*, (1913, poem # 73, p. 49)

INTRODUCTION

Although considerable attention has been paid in recent years to the moral codes and ethical practices in educational administration, most of the discourse has been firmly grounded in an unquestioned belief in certain moral principles reminiscent of the Industrial era: loyalty to the organization, rational or analytic assessment and deployment of strategies, and obligation of the individual to the organization, *inter alia*. This mode of engagement seems to have been unilateral in nature. That is, the obligation of the school organization to individual teachers, students, and administrators, the role of empathy and compassion, and the intersection of mutual interests have seldom, if ever, been part of serious consideration. The assumption underneath this sentiment is that the administrative elite will let teachers, students, and junior administrators thrive so long as they do not interfere with the operations of the organization and so long as they proffer loyalty towards, commitment to, and faith in the organization. This kind of narrative places individuals at the mercy of those who reside above them in the hierarchy, and it strips them of their moral rights and their moral agency. It also serves to insulate administrators from their moral obligations and to protect them from the moral consequences of their actions. This condition is at least partly grounded in the profound influence of Rene Descartes on contemporary society. The power of "I think, therefore I am" has contributed to a culture that prizes rational, analytic thought above all other mental activities. This focus has served to relegate other thought patterns (such as ethical considerations) to the arena of personal associations, to invoke separation between diverse elements of a system, and to dehumanize individual members of an institution. The study and practice of educational administration has not been immune to this kind of acculturation, as evidenced by the historical reliance among scholars and practitioners on rationality and analysis in educational decision making (Marshall, Patterson, Rogers, & Steele, 1996). Such a scientific approach to educational administration has a single view in mind: the well-being of the educational organization.

According to Bauman (cited in ten Bos, 1997), organizational well-being has been accomplished primarily through three managerial strategies: the isolation of administrators from organizational members, the effacement of the personhood of individual members, and the reduction of people to categorical traits. These interrelated managerial strategies are grounded in three tacit organizational underpinnings: the imperative of efficiency, reliance on rational analysis, and a tendency toward simplistic explanations. Together, the managerial strategies and the tacit underpinnings construct a particular organizational narrative that defines the limits within which human activity will be conducted. This kind of organizational construction has implications for moral and ethical behaviour and thus for the lived

experiences of organizational members. In essence, within this framework, morality and ethics are defined in terms of those conditions and decisions that support, sustain, and advance the organization, but not necessarily in terms that respond to the lives of people. Consequently, we see a need to examine the ethical and moral roots of the strategies and their underpinnings to consider the extent to which administrative conduct is effective, just, and viable. We begin the paper by explicating the three managerial strategies as outlined by Bauman (1993; 1998) and ten Bos (1997). We then consider the extent to which the strategies exist in the arena of educational administration, and we move to a discussion of tacit organizational narratives that predispose administrators to the three managerial tactics. We conclude with some suggestions for reconstructing the moral terrain for educational administrators.

MANAGERIAL STRATEGIES

We have been investigating and writing about rule-based ethics and their limitations for the past few years (see Mitchell & Kumar, 2001; Kumar & Mitchell, 2002). Something, however, has seemed amiss in our explorations. We had been examining the terrain with a historical and a conceptual eye, but it appears that the problem is rooted in more immediate and practical operations that inhere in the fundamental constructions of organizations. Consequently, we began to explore the situation from the perspective of post-modern deconstruction. Our attempt to deconstruct the practices and ideologies of organizational governance led us to three managerial tactics in the works of Zygmund Bauman (1993; 1998) and René ten Bos (1997), two scholars who have delved into the world of business ethics.

Our closer scrutiny suggested that educational institutions, too, are subject to the analysis and criticism offered by these interdisciplinary scholars. Specifically, Bauman's and ten Bos' work revealed that specific managerial tactics have penetrated the operations of leaders in various institutions so as to situate the leaders as officers, defenders, and moral arbiters of the organization. In the words of ten Bos (1997), "managerial ideology has gradually taught people in organizations to believe that morality should not be seen as an 'inside job' but as a matter of collective rationality, rather than one of individual impulse" (p. 999). Put another way, administrators, as they build their organizations, foster and erect impenetrable legal walls of policies and codes that deter, stifle, or punish any individual impulses that conflict with or challenge the pervading organizational morality, however morally inclined the impulses might be. This organizational dynamic not only serves to sustain the organization but it also distances the administrators from the people who stand to be affected by administrative decisions and actions. These effects are accomplished through three interrelated

dominant managerial strategies: denial of proximity, effacement of face, and reduction to traits. In this section, we explicate each of these tactics in some detail.

Denial of proximity

In his introduction to this strategy, Bauman (1993) establishes a relationship between proximity and morality. To him, proximity serves as a precondition of morality because closeness breeds attachment. Conversely, distance eliminates or reduces the moral impulse because it is easier to dismiss, discount, or discard people when they are out of sight. Another way to interpret this strategy is to say that distance exempts administrators from their moral obligations to specific individuals. This condition is demonstrated in Bauman's (1998) description of shareholders in a company. These people, Bauman charges, quite happily reap the rewards of the profit that the companies make but remain altogether detached from the companies and their operational practices. Their separation from the day-to-day operations allows them to deny responsibility for operational policies that adversely affect the workers within the organization. The hierarchical distance between the shareholders and the workers allows the shareholders to detach themselves from the moral responsibilities that ownership bestows.

This strategy of separation can serve ends that are either good or evil. René ten Bos (1997), for example, argues that proximity evokes spontaneity and hence unpredictability, which can interfere with the efficient operation of an organization. To avoid tumult, administrators might need to create distance between themselves and those who bear the consequences of their actions. This distance is what creates organizational hierarchies. On the one hand, hierarchies serve to protect people from the moral consequences of the actions they take on behalf of the organization; on the other hand, they strip individuals of their moral obligations, consideration, and, eventually, capacities. In other words, the members of the organization, in their single-minded pursuit of organizational efficiency and effectiveness, become withdrawn from the moral implications of their actions, and they end up playing the role of automaton. Eventually, the moral impulses of the individuals are replaced by a group morality that has been dictated by organizational imperatives and endorsed by administrators. This strategy ensures that organizational well-being trumps any other moral consideration, which can be seen, for example, in the current trend of laying off long-term employees, many of whom stand at the top of the pay scale, to protect the economic profitability of the organization, even though these employees, because of career stage or age, might be the least likely to be employable elsewhere.

Denial of proximity further insulates administrators from the moral consequences of their actions through the complicated procedures, policies, and processes that fill the artificially created spaces between the moral arbiters

(the administrators) and their moral subjects. Administrators occupy unique hierarchical locations, with unique sets of obligations and powers, and as one moves up the hierarchical ladder, the designated obligations and powers connect the individual more closely to the organization and offer greater protection for the individual. Seen in this light, senior administrators have broader and more diverse obligations and powers than do those who sit below them on the hierarchy. Consequently, they can use that broad base to justify any action they take, even in relation to moral issues. They can, for example, use their position to become directly involved in morally sensitive situations or they can use their lofty location to justify taking a hands-off approach. In a more concrete example, if a worker or client launches a complaint of misconduct or corruption against someone in the administrative cadre, senior administrators can, by virtue of the seniority of their position, choose to deal with the complaint or, by virtue of the distance between their position and that of the complainant, refuse to become involved. This example implies that the only alternative to micro-management is hands-off management, which is clearly not the case. Alternative strategies can be found to balance these dichotomies, but alternatives require an investment of effort and time, which renders the process slow, expensive, inefficient, and thus unattractive.

To put denial of proximity into the educational arena, when the well being and preservation of the organization become the standards for educational institutions, individual students and teachers, along with their quest for knowledge, can be sacrificed at the alter of organizational morality. As an example, the inclusion in the administrative lexicon of phrases such as “tough decisions have to be made” implies that the “tough decisions” are likely to advantage the institution at the expense of the people. The low morale that lingers in public educational settings (Castle, Mitchell, & Gupta, 2002) is but one manifestation of this phenomenon.

The denial of proximity also lends itself to the creation of a Cartesian duality between ends and means whereby the end (e.g., acquisition of a particular piece of information) justifies any means. If a child, for example, is subjected to inappropriate instruction or abusive treatment in the attempt to learn the quadratic equation, the child could be irreparably harmed in the process. The teacher, however, might be perceived to be justified if the child ends up mastering the intended lesson. Additionally, administrators can be isolated from the moral tensions in this example because of their distance from the classroom. The limitations of such dualities are increasingly coming to the forefront with the works of pragmatic philosophers such as John Dewey, Richard Rorty, and Larry Hickman, *inter alia*, who argue that it is inadvisable to separate the process (i.e., the means) from the objectives (i.e., the ends). Regrettably, the denial of proximity, as an administrative strategy, accomplishes exactly this undesired consequence and, when it

emerges, serves to dehumanise the students who stand at the mercy of teachers and the teachers who stand at the mercy of administrators.

Effacement of face

The processes by which individuals become humanised or dehumanised have captured the attention of many scholars. In speaking to this concern, Martin Buber (1958/1987) distinguishes between “I-Thou” and “I-it” relationships, and he contends that the latter form does not position people as moral subjects. As well, while I-Thou has an “address and response” structure (a structure of ongoing conversations), the I-it relationship does not. In other words, the symmetry of reciprocity in expectations and obligations of an I-Thou relationship distinguishes it from the asymmetry of reciprocity of the I-it relationship. Bauman (1993, p. 49) locates this distinction in the separation of administrators and organizational members. The gap that is created through this asymmetry is best described in Bauman’s words:

“Being with” is symmetrical. What is blatantly non-symmetrical, what makes partners unequal, what *privileges* my position by emancipating it from the dependence on whatever stance the Other may take, is *being for* – “être-pour-l’autre” the mode of being that precludes not only solitude . . . but also indifference. (pp. 50, original italics)

Thus a clear disparity between groups of people emerges from hierarchical separation and subsequently alters the form of moral engagement. Returning to Buber’s (1958) framework, it implies that organizational workers find themselves in a moral engagement with the administration that is akin to an I-it relationship. Such a relationship serves as a “process of dehumanization” (ten Bos, 1997, p. 1003), wherein a human being is seen not as an identifiable individual but as a faceless entity. This is what is meant by *effacement of face*.

Effacement of face is linked to the distance between workers and administrators to the extent that the individuals on either side of the divide see each other in abstract, disembodied terms rather than in personal, named terms. One harmful facet of this phenomenon is that neither of the sides has a human face that people on the other side can summon in their minds. Consequently, there is a tendency for people on either side of the divide to take a confrontational posture in the relationship, and the others are seen not as companions and colleagues but as enemies. When a face is hidden or masked, it takes on the countenance of an adversary, for the enemy lurks in the dark. But when a face is seen, in all its glorious uniqueness, beauty, and frailty, a friend can be found in the face.

A troublesome consequence of effacement of face is that the members of the community lose their moral consideration and their moral capacity. René ten Bos (1997) observes that it is ultimately the human face that prompts a moral impulse: “[the] Other who gazes at me and in the vulnerability of

whom I sense a moral command" (p. 1003). Bauman (1993) furnishes a more detailed account of this phenomenon by recalling Lévinas' (1987) thoughts.

The face is not a force. It is an authority. Authority is often without force. The face is what resists me by opposition and not what is opposed to me by its resistance.... The absolute nakedness of a face, the absolutely defenceless face, without covering, clothing or mask, is what opposes my power over it, my violence, and opposes it in an absolute way, with an opposition which is opposition in itself. (p. 73)

When the humanity of this face is obscured through managerial tactics, moral considerations fail to be factored into the equation that establishes the mode of conduct in the organization. Furthermore, the symmetrical reciprocity that Buber attributes to I-Thou relationships causes community members to reciprocate the absence of moral consideration that they have grown accustomed to receiving, and the relationship spirals downward into less consideration and more confrontation. This psychologically charged relational posture causes the institution of well-meaning changes and innovations to be scrutinized with suspicion or hostility.

This practice, as both Bauman (1993; 1998) and ten Bos (1997) point out, has become so normalized in contemporary institutions that people see no objection or moral repugnance when they are on the losing end of such an engagement. René Ten Bos writes, "those who are on the 'receiving end of action,' *in casu* the losing competitors, do not themselves expect to be treated as moral persons" (p. 1004). Furthermore, even if a community member's moral impulses were to survive in the midst of such acrimony, these individuals "are jeered at, or at least, are considered strange or exotic, since they cherish unrealistic or illegitimate expectations" (ten Bos, p. 1004). In other words, effacement of face yields an organizational environment in which commitments to moral considerations are considered naïve and irrational.

Reduction to traits

The two strategies of denial of proximity and effacement of face lead to the destruction of people as moral selves. Bauman (1993, p. 127) describes this phenomenon as the disassembly of the object, in which the totality of the moral person is reduced to a collection of traits or attributes that define the expected and accepted location of the individual within the organization. In educational terms, for example, students are there to learn the material, teachers are there to teach the students, and principals are there to run the school. Each of these categories has a particular pattern of activity to which the members are held accountable, and all members of the category are expected to conduct themselves within the parameters of the behaviours that define their role. This view of perceiving organizational members

exclusively through the roles that they fulfil in the organization reduces human beings to little more than automatons that carry out stipulated tasks.

The nature of the engagement between administrators and workers that ensues from such an arrangement encompasses all the expectations and obligations that one is liable to award to an "it" rather than to a "Thou." The most noteworthy distinction is that, while a "Thou" deserves moral consideration, an "it" does not. Hence, to diminish or reduce human beings to their responsibilities is to continue the process of dehumanizing the people in an organization. This occurs because members are deemed to be significant, and therefore worthy of moral consideration, if and only if they can be categorized as either necessary or useful. From this perspective, "in the beat-up language of management gurus, the customer as a person is reduced to a collection of needs and demands" (ten Bos, 1997, p. 1005). Furthermore, the customers' needs and demands are of interest not because they offer moral opportunity but because they offer business opportunity. In this sense, anyone who is awarded any kind of consideration, or who is at the receiving end of an organizational transaction, is said to have been "businessed" (ten Bos, 1997, p. 1005). In this kind of environment, morality, according to Bauman (1993), is only applicable within the limited sphere of one's place in the hierarchy. In effect, moral consideration is only awarded to those select few people who are proximal to us in the organizational hierarchy, who appear before us as humans with faces and names, and whose unique personalities and character we can describe.

This tendency to reduce people to a collection of traits predisposes administrators to expect compliance from members who reside at lower levels of the organization. The extent of expected compliance is evident when a suggestion or advice from a "superior" becomes a "command-in-disguise" (ten Bos, 1997, p. 1006). Any understanding that the organizational members might develop as a result of being immersed in a particular situation is given voice only if it confirms or reflects the decisions or opinions that originate higher up the hierarchy. If the understanding is contrary to that which emanates from above, it must be abandoned. Within the expectation of compliance, those who reside at each level of the organization are reduced to the traits expected of their category, their individual faces are obscured, and the distance between the categories is affirmed. When these outcomes occur, the dehumanisation of the people is complete, and the organization can be said to have trumped ethics.

THE MORAL ARENA OF EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

Questions of concern in this paper are to what extent the three managerial strategies are evident in school organizations and to what extent educational administrators rely on the strategies to protect themselves from moral

fallout. From structural and political perspectives, there is a good chance for both of these circumstances to unfold. From cultural and practical perspectives, however, the chance may be less. These perspectives can be used to frame a consideration of the moral terrain in schools and school systems.

Educational structures, like most contemporary public institutions, are both hierarchical and bureaucratic. In general, the system is comprised of seven main groups: school board trustees, supervisory offices, consultants, school principals, teachers, students, and support personnel. In some jurisdictions, school councils can be added to the list. Each of these groups holds significantly different amounts of institutional power and privilege, with the bulk of the power and influence being held by trustees and supervisory offices and, next, by school principals. In other words, educational administrators, especially those in central offices, reside at the higher levels of the system, they hold distinct functional roles, and they are perceived to stand apart from all other stakeholders. This kind of structural separation lends itself to a denial of proximity between members who reside in separate organizational locations. The very presence of these distinct groups further implies that members in each group (teachers, for example) can be reduced to possessing a set of traits instead of being seen as individual people with unique characteristics, unique histories, and unique points of view.

Structural separation has not diminished over the years but is becoming increasingly calcified. Evidence for this assertion can be found in two recent examples of restructuring from the province of Ontario. First, the removal of Ontario school principals from teachers' collective bargaining units follows a current trend across North America to position school principals as officers of the organization rather than as lead teachers. This location is similar to that occupied by supervisory officers, who have always been "out of scope" and who have traditionally been seen as holding a primary obligation to the organization rather than to teachers or students. Such an arrangement enables administrators, especially supervisory officers, to deny proximity to parents, students, teachers, or support personnel. Second, the amalgamation of smaller school boards has transformed many Ontario school divisions from small community-based boards into jurisdictions of mind-boggling proportions, with a concomitant reduction in the number of central office administrators. This arrangement requires directors and superintendents to hold administrative portfolios that give them oversight responsibility for large numbers of schools and that fill their days with tasks that keep them out of the schools. Under these conditions, it is difficult for them to learn the names of individual teachers, students, and, in some cases, principals. Effacement of face becomes the norm rather than the exception.

Educational administrators are also at the political mercy of the organization. In most jurisdictions, directors and superintendents have no tenure

and can be replaced at the wish of the school trustees. In the case of school principals, the picture is more complex, with different jurisdictions allowing more or less political autonomy to school principals. In the province of Ontario, for example, the same legislation that removed principals from the teachers' unions also negated their right to any collective bargaining, and many school principals no longer negotiate their terms of employment but receive a contract that has been written by their school board. Even in jurisdictions where the principals have been granted some input into their contract, there is no legal obligation of the school board to incorporate the input into the final contract. When the terms and conditions under which administrators operate can be opened and changed without their agreement, they are not likely to take a stance on any issue that is in opposition to their supervisors and trustees. To do so could jeopardize their employment, and they are likely to be cautious about taking a controversial stand. Although principals and supervisory officers might be required and at times encouraged to present differing sides to an issue, the political reality is such that they are not likely to openly oppose the wishes of those above them on the organizational chart if they hope to retain their position.

When a cultural lens is applied to the question of moral obligations, the clarity offered by structure and politics becomes somewhat obscure. One of the fundamental assumptions of education is that, because schooling is a public good directed at a vulnerable population, administration of the educational system is an inherently moral enterprise (Sergiovanni, 2000). This cultural milieu compels administrators to approach all decisions from an ethical perspective and with the best interests of the children in mind (K. Walker, 1998). In order to meet this moral obligation, administrators in schools and in central offices are expected to know the names of individual teachers and students. In practice, this burden of personal knowledge falls more heavily on the shoulders of school principals than on supervisory offices, but central office administrators are expected at least to know the names of the teachers in the schools in their supervisory portfolios. When administrators hold this kind of personifying knowledge about the people who work and study in the schools, it is less easy to perceive them as a faceless crowd that can be herded at will.

From a practical perspective, strict separation of administrators from other groups in the system is quite problematic. Although each group has distinct functions, they are not unrelated. Supervisory officers rely on principals to keep the schools operating, principals rely on teachers to teach the students, and teachers rely on students to learn the material. Furthermore, principals work in the same building where teachers teach and students study. The shared space and the connected functions enmesh the groups and make it difficult for administrators not to see teachers and students as individuals who deserve moral consideration and ethical treatment. Furthermore, if

they fail to consider personally any group or individuals, they run the risk of reducing the co-operation and engagement of the individuals who have been effaced, which can engender a sense of powerlessness and helplessness at all levels of the system (O'Neil, 1995).

This rather quick run through the structural, political, cultural, and practical terrain of the school system indicates that, while Bauman's (1993; 1998) three managerial strategies can find fallow ground in which to take root, some conditions exist to limit their growth. But just what does happen to educational administration when the strategies flourish? And how can administrators strive to nurture the limiting conditions so that the strategies become less productive? These questions will be considered through the stories of actual administrators.

The protagonist of our first story is a recently retired supervisory officer who had held the post of Chief Financial Officer in a large urban school district for over 20 years. As he reminisced about his experiences, he commented that he was proud of his ability to hold the line on budget expenditures and tax increases during his tenure, even though it had meant deep cuts in support services at the school level. A member of his audience observed that these cuts, specifically in the area of library, special education, support, and administrative services, had left elementary school teachers woefully under-equipped to provide resources to the students. In light of these consequences, how could he justify his decisions? His response:

Oh, I have no idea what the decisions meant in the schools. I don't think I was in the schools more than maybe twice in my entire career. In fact, I made it a point *not* to go into schools. I didn't want to know what was happening there because then I wouldn't have been able to make the decisions I did. I had tough decisions to make. I couldn't worry about how those decisions were going to affect the people in the schools.

For this administrator, the teachers and students were somewhere else; he had denied them proximity. They were unknown entities; he had effaced their faces. Although a case can be made that his portfolio demanded fiscal responsibility and that fiscal decisions are usually driven by organizational efficiencies, this is not the only, or even the best, response. Had teachers been asked where dollars could be saved, it is possible that they would have come up with some creative solutions for reducing costs, and it is likely they would have felt far more committed to the process and, consequently, to the organization. Or perhaps they would have made the same decision as he did. What the final outcome would have been is irrelevant. What matters is that the school people, principals, teachers, and students alike, were not even consulted about decisions that had serious implications for the ways in which they did their work. This is a clear example of the organization trumping ethics.

Contrast that administrator with a school principal who, during her first year of service, made a point of spending as much time in the staff room and classrooms as possible. As she talked about her first year as a school principal, she mentioned that she had bought every staff member a Christmas present that reflected something personal about the individual. She commented:

It was easier to do for some people than for others because there are some of the teachers I didn't know well enough at the time. That was a pretty good indication to me that I wasn't spending enough time with them. If I can't pick out a personal gift for each person on my staff, then I'm not doing my job as a principal. Not that I have to buy them gifts, but I should know each one of them well enough to be able to.

This kind of personal attention extended to every aspect of her leadership. In team meetings with teachers, students, and parents, for example, she made sure that each person had time to talk and that others listened attentively and respectfully. When a decision was reached, she went around the table to check on the comfort level of each participant with the final decision.

This is not to say that some cultural politics were not at work in her school. A case can be made that a student or parent is unlikely to oppose a decision made by a teacher or the principal when that individual is sitting at the same table. The point, however, is that this administrator brought all interested parties to the table; she did not deny them proximity. She spoke to all people by name; she did not efface their identities. She dealt with all people as individuals rather than as members of a category; she did not reduce them to traits. Although she might not have made the best decisions all the time, she made them with the interests of unique individuals in mind. The three managerial strategies were not to be seen, and her treatment of the teachers and students was far more compassionate and responsive than was that meted out by the CFO.

IMPLICIT ORGANIZATIONAL NARRATIVES

These examples demonstrate that alternative modes of practice can be adopted and appropriated for more effective, ethically sound, and palatable administrative practices. However, underlying any kind of administrative strategy are organizational conditions that make a particular set of strategies appealing to those who are charged with managerial responsibilities. These conditions constitute the implicit organizational narrative that scripts the lives of the people who work within it. We contend that, in most contemporary organizations, four conditions prevail: the imperative of efficiency, diffusion of responsibility, obscurity of cause, and simplification of solutions.

Together, these conditions serve to render palatable the managerial strategies of denial of proximity, effacement of face, and reduction to traits. In this section, we explore each of these organizational conditions.

The imperative of efficiency

In those matters where there are no options, morality does not factor in. Consider, for example, the numerous stories of people who recount their hardships during the days of economic depression and who describe how the circumstances pruned their theoretical choices so that they might merely exist. Similar accounts can also be found in the heartrending descriptions offered by Victor Frankl (1959/84) of the experiences of the prisoners in the Nazi death camps.

Although these might be extreme examples, one aspect becomes exceedingly clear from such descriptions: When choices and options are eliminated, people's responses to stimuli become predictable, and when circumstances limit choice, the freedom to choose an ethical action is often the first casualty. From an organizational perspective, the choice of an individual to preserve values that run counter to the prevailing values in an organization often comes at such a high personal cost as to militate against that choice as a viable option. Educational administrators are no exception. When they are faced with choices that pit ethics against organizational efficiency, they put their jobs on the line by following the ethical option. So what kind of issue might it be worth losing one's job for? And how many administrators are likely to risk their future for a principle?

The limitation of choice is most evident in those administrative circles where efficiency serves as the dominant narrative to which all other narratives yield. From this mindset emerge administrative strategies that conform, constrict, restrict, or, as Bauman (1998) puts it, "straightjacket" people's moral nature – not by making them immoral but by widening the gulf between people within the organization and the consequences of the actions that they take on behalf of the organization. This "distant view" has served organizations well, for such detached strategies have been used to reduce the fog of partiality and to construct a more fair and neutral process. Furthermore, the strategy of limiting options yields a process that is operationally efficient and that can be managed and controlled with little investment of time and energy. In other words, the quest for efficiency is, at its best, a quest for organizational processes that are generally (but perhaps not specifically) fair and just. With that end in sight, administrators are prone to rely on denial of proximity, effacement of face, and reduction to traits so that they can justify actions that might run counter to their personal moral impulses but that advance organizational efficiency.

Diffusion of responsibility

One defining assumption of organizational life is that the individual members work in concert to accomplish the objectives of the organization. These broad objectives are described in the mission statement, motto, and other maxims of the organization, under the umbrella of which community members march to fulfil the goals. From this interpretation, there exists an ideological connection between all levels of the organizational hierarchy. To further inculcate this connection, the workers are encouraged to develop *loyalty towards* and *faith in* the organizational creed. The relationship, however, is an asymmetrical one. No such loyalty, moral responsibility, or obligation is demanded from the administrative elite because they are charged with the responsibility for constructing the creed from the outset. This asymmetry of reciprocity renders the organizational elite unaccountable for their actions, because most of what happens in administrative circles is not transparent to an outside gaze. Instead, their responsibilities and obligations are diffused in a complex web of organizational activity.

This diffusion of responsibility can be seen in an example offered by Kieran Egan (1997) about an economic crisis during the late 16th century in Europe. The story goes as follows: The citizens of 16th century Europe saw the prices of commodities rise inexplicably. Chief amongst these was the increase in the price of clothing. When clothiers were asked to justify the increased cost, they denied responsibility and blamed the increases on cloth merchants who, in turn, blamed weavers. The weavers blamed the wool merchants, and the merchants laid fault with the sheep farmers for raising the price of their wool. Sheep farmers protested by exclaiming that they had to raise wool prices in order to afford their clothing, which had become exorbitantly expensive. This explanation brought the debate full circle, and responsibility had been diffused to the point where no one action or set of actors could be identified as the first cause.

Egan (1997) draws parallels between this example of diffused responsibility and current problems in the educational system – the *merry-go-round of blame*, of sorts. His argument is that, because the work of educating children is spread across a broad and complex system, responsibility for undesirable outcomes or unanticipated effects is difficult to pinpoint. From our point of view, this further implies that educational administrators, by virtue of their position in the administrative chair, can “pass the buck” upwards toward board or Ministry officers and downwards toward teachers and students. In spite of current pressures for transparency of process and accountability for outcomes among the educational administrative cadre, the organizational condition of diffused responsibility still allows administrators to dodge any moral fallout from their actions.

Obscurity of cause

Returning to Egan's (1997) story, another point of note is that the circular kind of "deductive reasoning" was unsuccessful in identifying the root cause. It took creative thinking on the part of Jean Bodin to solve the mystery. Egan writes,

It took some time, and much blaming, before Jean Bodin (1530-1596) worked out that none of the obvious candidates was at fault. Rather, the general rise in prices was connected with the import into Europe of Central and South American gold and silver and with European monarchs' use of this bullion through their royal mints. That is, the monarchs increased the money supply and thus stimulated inflation. (pp. 1-2)

According to Egan, self-referential descriptions of complex problems yield remedies that are curative in conception but irrelevant in practice because they "fail to identify the real cause of the problem" (p. 2). That is, incoherent or inadequate understandings of a problematic situation often send people on the proverbial wild goose chase, during which there is a tendency to solve the wrong problem. Or solve the problem, but ignore the root cause. In educational administration circles, for example, administrators might be faced with the problem of a student who is exhibiting antisocial behaviour in school. It is tempting to view this behaviour as a problem that resides within the student and the family, and blame might be placed on inappropriate parenting or insufficient self-control. That, however, might not be the complete picture. There might also be larger societal, economic, and cultural pressures that lie at the root of the child's conduct, but probing these deeper causes, much less solving them, is difficult in the extreme. It is more likely that administrators will base their decisions and interventions on apparent causes (or apparent symptoms) and fall back on the strategies of denial of proximity, effacement of face, and reduction to traits if their actions yield unsavoury consequences.

Simplification of solutions

Obscurity of cause leads directly to the organizational condition of simplification of solution. This condition is also implicated in Egan's (1997) European tale in that the initial solutions proposed by the European citizenry were directed at the people who were proximally connected to the clothing trade. Even though they were not the ones who could ultimately bring about resolution, they were the easiest and most obvious targets for intervention. In other words, it was easier to put pressure on wool merchants or sheep farmers than on the monarchs, even though the proposed solutions were unlikely to do anything at all about the cost of clothing.

The condition of simplified solutions highlights the importance of examining a situation in all its perceived and hidden complexities. Regrettably, the

desire for expediency often drives administrators to align themselves with the first explanation that affords the fastest and easiest solutions. To return to the example of the antisocial behaviour, the administrator who is in search of an expedient solution might choose to expel the student because that option will eliminate the behaviour problems for the term of the expulsion. Because that solution does not address the root causes, however, it is unlikely to be efficacious for the long term, and the problematic behaviour can be expected to return to the school with the student. With this example, we do not mean to imply that slow deliberations should always be favoured over fast and efficient resolutions. We do, however, mean to highlight that, in the pursuit of quick solutions, administrators often overlook the subtleties that are hidden to the view of simple or non-creative investigations and rely instead on the managerial strategies to protect them from the fallout from inefficacious resolutions. This discussion should serve as a reminder to educational administrators that subtleties and complexities accompany most human engagements, and that they are not excluded from the necessity of deconstructing these deep complexities, irrespective of their stature in the organizational hierarchy.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Our central argument is that, when educational administrators turn to the strategies of denial of proximity, effacement of face, and reduction to traits, they are falling victim to a Cartesian moral arrangement that springs from hierarchical structures and dispositions whereby the organization is allowed to trump personal ethical impulses. This hegemonic relationship has a silencing effect on teachers, parents, students, and other members of the moral community. Regrettably, these arrangements have become so normalized in contemporary society that even the notion to object to such treatment is considered dangerous. Instead of dissension being seen as a welcome addition to public discourse, solitary objections or competing viewpoints are classified as problematic and harshly dealt with, and collective protests, such as walkouts and strikes, are ruled as unlawful. Work-to-rule legislation in Ontario is a prime example of this trend. So too is the fact that the current “buzz word” in the Ontario Ministry of Education is *compliance*. How sad that the richness that can emerge from collisions between contested perspectives is reduced to a standard set of expected and accepted behaviours. How sad that administrators are expected to serve as officers of the organization rather than as leaders of learning.

In spite of the hegemony of this kind of organizational construction, it does not have to remain intact or unchallenged. Bauman’s (1993; 1998) analysis of the three managerial strategies brings to the forefront specific aspects of administrative conduct that have previously escaped a rigorous examination. Our interpretation of his work suggests that there have been good

reasons for the administrative elite to practice these managerial strategies. These reasons are situated in the organizational conditions of the imperative of efficiency, the diffusion of responsibility, the obscurity of cause, and the simplification of solutions. From an educational standpoint, it is these conditions that we are interested in eradicating. If they can be eliminated, then administrators will perhaps find the managerial strategies less appealing or less efficacious. We argue that, in an educational setting, administrative strategies should emerge intrinsically from within the practices, not extrinsically imposed to meet secondary goals such as efficiency, quick fixes, or surface solutions while keeping all other considerations, including moral ones, at bay.

It follows that open, unfettered communication across all hierarchical levels should be promoted in order to tap into the best that experience has to offer. This kind of democratic administrative conduct favours effectiveness as well as efficiency. One strategy that helps in such an endeavour is the expressive-collaborative model of moral discourse that came to our attention through the work of Margaret Walker (1998) and that we have explored in previous papers (Kumar & Mitchell, 2002; Mitchell & Kumar, 2001). The philosophical and practical propositions we have presented relative to the expressive-collaborative model are antithetical to traditional obsessions with quick-fix approaches to deep-seated problems and are devoid of prescriptions that attend to instant gratification of individuals. Instead, our propositions call for a reflective, democratic deliberative process and a set of outcomes that are reasonably responsive to the moral lives and ethical needs of a diverse moral community.

That goal is not easily achieved because of deep-seated assumptions about organizations. Bauman's (1998) work is once again instructive in that he shines a spotlight on the ways in which language serves to shape human conditions. He argues, for example, that people tend to speak of organizations as if they were people and to attribute to an organization specific human qualities. This, he contends, gives a human face to the organization even as it strips the people in the organization of their own humanity. We have found evidence of this assertion even as we wrote this paper: It has been difficult to remember that an organization does not "allow" or "disallow" anything. We were tempted several times to speak of the organization as effacing face or reducing to traits, only to remind ourselves that the organization, as such, does nothing. It is the people in the organization who wield these strategies. This reminder serves notice that the Cartesian duality is a human construction and, as such, it can be deconstructed. If we remain open to our senses, as Tagore (1913) implores, then we just might find deliverance from the moral straitjackets in which we find ourselves when the organization is allowed to trump ethics.

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