

## **Professionalism and Bureaucracy: Can they develop together?<sup>1</sup>**

*Thillainayakam Velayutham*

This paper does not take an 'either-or-view' of the roles of bureaucracy and professionalism in matters of educational development and provision. It is proposed that bureaucracy and professionalism can not only exist together, but also work together in complementary and synergetic ways. Bureaucracy is here to stay in spite of its alleged shortcomings. Imagine if one of us had the extraordinary power to abolish the whole bureaucratic apparatus and its associated functions today by proclamation or decree; we would find ourselves in a bewildering and chaotic situation. To put it simply, 'to move any thing' within a formal organisation or a system, some degree of bureaucracy is necessary in the modern world. Let us not 'throw out the baby with the bath water', even if bureaucracy does not always perform up to expectations.

Very often to do things better, or enlarge our activities, we expand and/or strengthen the bureaucratic machinery and procedures. This approach works up to a point - beyond that it has its limitations, sometimes even severely dysfunctional. It is then that a professional approach to organised work becomes necessary and even enhances the quality of the administrative processes and organisational outcomes. The argument here is that bureaucracy and professionalism can go beyond coexistence to actually combining in a complementary and synergetic fashion. Without some sort of a minimum bureaucratic arrangement to start with, an organisation can indeed go 'crazy'!

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<sup>1</sup> Text of a keynote address delivered at the Sixteenth Annual Conference of the Fiji Institute of Education Officers held at the Fiji College of Advanced Education on 2nd September 1994.

## **Research studies**

Having emphasised the need for both professionalism and bureaucracy in a modern organisation or a system, it is useful to dwell a little on some research studies to show how once these were found to sustain contradictory conceptualisation and work practices; later studies show them to be operating simultaneously but with little or no interaction and interpenetration. Following that, it will be shown how both professionalism and bureaucracy could be improved to make them more responsive and productive.

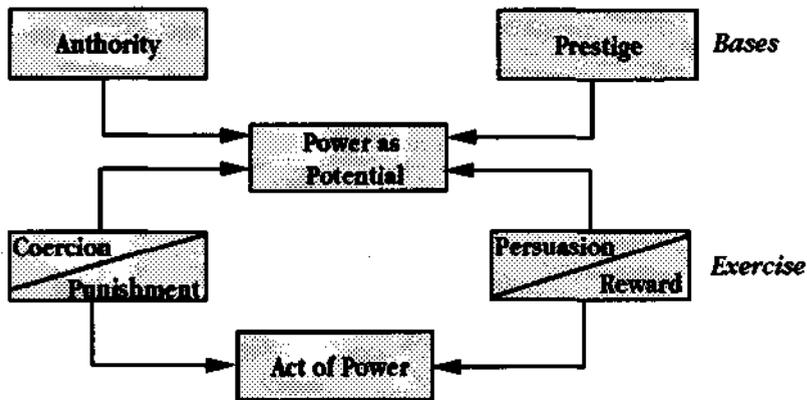
The German law student - turned social historian - Max Weber is credited with the introduction of the concept of bureaucracy for understanding systematically organised social endeavours with predictable and regulated outcomes. Some of these basic characteristics still persist in our contemporary bureaucracies, though some of them have over the years become dysfunctional with unintended detrimental consequences. So much so, that the concept itself has taken on a derogatory overtone nowadays.

Weber in his earlier works viewed bureaucracy simply as an instrument of power. It was later on that he saw bureaucracy as a legitimate mechanism for accomplishing social purposes; a legal - rational approach to the use of power. This legal aspect was based on the idea of 'rule of law' and the rational aspect, or reasoning.

## **Sources of power**

Abbott and Caracheo (1988), refer to two sources of power, power derived from authority and power derived from 'prestige'. The former is exercised through coercion/punishment, and the latter by persuasion and forms of reward. They believe that the potency and amount of power can be considerably increased if an incumbent "simultaneously occupies an authoritative position and enjoys the esteem of others" (:242). These ideas are diagrammatically represented in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Bases and exercise of power**



Source: Abbott and Caracheo (1988)

They refer to French and Raven's typology of power as rewarding, coercive, legitimate, referent and expert. Referent and expert powers are considered as elements of 'prestige' characterised by persuasion rather than edict. Reward rather than punishment would constitute professional use of power in their formulation.

Sousa and Hoy (1981) found four underlying bureaucratic dimensions in the organisational structure of educational institutions, all having relationships to the broader system of which they are constituent parts. These dimensions and their attributes are as follows:

- 1 Organisational Control: hierarchy of authority, rules, procedural specifications, and standardisation.
- 2 Rational Specialisation: technical competence and specialisation.
- 3 System Centralisation: centralisation and autonomy.
- 4 Formalisation of Routine: formalisation and routinization.

It is submitted that the **system centralisation** dimension of an educational bureaucracy may induce a sense of 'helplessness', even a kind of 'learned helplessness', among middle-level system administrators. Having come through the school system to positions of authority, they need to view their new roles from a system perspective rather than the institutional perspective that had shaped their professional lives in the school. They may find that they may want to do something for a school which they are supposed to serve from their present position. But the applicable rules, precedents, elaborate procedures to be followed and resource constraints, or the matter not falling within their responsibility, or sometimes having to submit requests to some high level in the administrative hierarchy for clearance/approval, may make it impossible for them to operationalise their preferences. Thus, they may end up feeling helpless and frustrated. If that becomes their pitiable situation, just imagine the folks in the schools they 'control'!

### Use of power

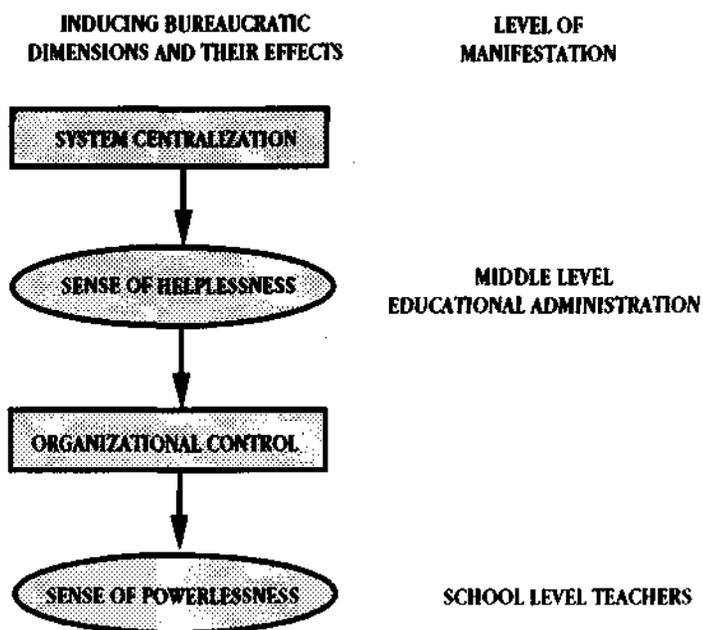
At this point, the suggestion is that this **system centralisation**, perhaps mediated through the feeling of 'helplessness' of the middle managers within the system's bureaucracy, paves the way for **organisational control** to manifest itself within school organisations. This may, in turn, induce its own sense of 'powerlessness' among teachers and a tendency to view their roles as mere functionaries rather than professionals at their own levels and within their own terms. Isherwood and Hoy (1973) found that teachers in authoritarian school organisations tended to experience a greater sense of 'powerlessness' than those in more collegial kinds of school organisations. If such powerlessness is not progressively reduced and ultimately eliminated, it could lead to what Di Paola and Hoy (1994) refer to as "limited conflict associated with militancy". They further assured that it did not (:87):

disrupt the harmony in the schools. On the contrary, militancy seemed a natural growth of a professional perspective; it was a teacher militancy resisting a blind faith in the bureaucracy, emerging from professionalism of teachers, and demanding experimentation and change.

Although one may immediately see a contradiction between "limited conflict associated with militancy" and "harmony", on closer examination it is likely to be apparent rather than real. This is because one does not come across a total conflict situation associated with outright militancy, or a totally harmonious situation where all activities are synchronised and unified. Such extreme organisational contexts are hard to come by in real situations of educational systems and organisations.

Kasten (1986) argues that the sense of powerlessness could be corrected by redesigning teachers' work within a professional framework. This pervasive influence of system centralisation on the organisational control within schools and the resulting 'helplessness' at middle management levels and 'powerlessness' at the school teacher level is shown in Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Effect of bureaucratic dimensions at different levels of the education system**



Litwak (1961) listed three models of organisations. They are:

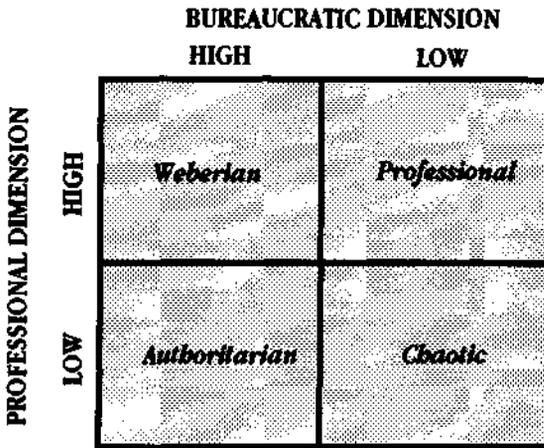
- 1 Weberian model - work involving uniform, standardised and routinized tasks.
- 2 Human Relations model - work involving non-uniform tasks and people related tasks.
- 3 Professional Bureaucracy model - work involving a way of bringing together potentially contradictory social relations of a bureaucracy and a profession.

Referring to the need for incorporating professionals within a bureaucracy, Litwak suggested that these contradictory organisational structures should coexist "without ruinous friction" (:87). The authority based on bureaucratic norms resides in hierarchy and rules. The authority of a professional resides in the professional norms and appropriate technical competence. How can these two forms of authority coexist and more importantly work complementarily and synergetically?

Isherwood and Hoy (1973) developed a typology of organisations based on a two-dimensional grid. The dimensions are the bureaucratic and professional dimensions. Using this two-dimensional grid, they came up with the following possible organisational arrangements. (See Figure 3). These are as follows:

- 1 Weberian type - that ranked high on both bureaucratic and professional dimensions.
- 2 Professional type - that ranked high on professional dimension and low on bureaucratic dimension.
- 3 Authoritarian type - that ranked high on bureaucratic dimension and low on professional dimension.
- 4 Chaotic type - that ranked low on both professional and bureaucratic dimensions.

Figure 3: Typology of organisations based on a two-dimensional grid



Source: Adapted from: Isherwood & Hoy (1973)

### Professional bureaucracy

When Weber conceived of the concept of a bureaucratic organisation, he had in mind the intended consequences of systematic, orderly, predictable organisational behaviours. Such intended consequences of organisational behaviours cannot be expected from a purely bureaucratic organisation. These can be expected only in an organisation in which professionalism coexists with bureaucracy. The Weberian type of organisation with a high degree of both professionalism and bureaucracy could be termed **professional bureaucracy**, although they are traditionally seen as "natural enemies". Though potentially contradictory forms of social organisations, they need not necessarily be exclusive to one another. For instance, Litwak (1961) noted that professionalism and bureaucracy could be two different patterns of structuring within the same organisation. Scott (1965) found the same to be true in his study of a public welfare agency. Hall (1968) found positive correlations between certain elements of bureaucracy and professional dimensions and concluded that:

An assumption of inherent conflict between the professional or professional group and the employing organisation appears to be unwarranted (:104).

Research of Balderson (1977) and Marjoribanks (1977) in school settings seems to lend support to the view that professionalism and bureaucracy are not necessarily antithetical to each other, and given the necessary and appropriate organisational conditions these two dimensions could function complementarily and synergetically. If professionalism is not able to coexist with bureaucracy, then the latter's 'close cousin' managerial technology will take the place of professionalism. Roger Dale (1989) predicts this likely scenario and that they would "coexist in various and shifting combinations" (:35). Therefore it is in the best interests of the educational profession, that it works closely and constructively with bureaucracy. In this respect, I think that we need to improve both professionalism and bureaucracies.

It has been taken for granted that professionalism is always inherently perfect. However, we learn through the media how members of respected professions are guilty of despicable workplace offences. Sometimes professionals view their roles very narrowly, without sensitivity to certain human and social situations. Have not professionals been accused of dereliction of their professional duties?

Of course bureaucracy has also been criticised by the public for delays, insensitivities, overlapping functions, unacceptable defensive postures, not being accountable and responsive, and for a host of other deficiencies. Bureaucracy is blamed by politicians when their promises to the people are not matched by performance. How can bureaucracies be improved or 'tamed'? Let us consider ways in which educational bureaucracies could be improved, if not radically changed, to make them more professional in their outlook and approaches.

### **Reforming bureaucracies**

Bureaucracies have been described as not amenable to external changes, as organisations that merely absorb the changes initiated from outside without

themselves undergoing those changes. If they change at all, they do so only to consolidate and strengthen their already entrenched positions. When officers confine themselves only to their offices and the 'bureaucratic paper chase', there can be little appreciation of the subtleties and realities of the situations and settings about which decisions are taken. Even if things go adrift or go wrong, officers defend themselves by recourse to rules, procedures and precedents.

### **Learning realities**

This situation can be corrected to a great extent by requiring an officer to spend a significant part of his or her time in the field, to promote greater appreciation and understanding of the 'distant' realities. A South Asian country tried this strategy and succeeded to some extent in enabling officers to grapple with realities in the field (Velayutham, 1980). Of course, the ready answer would be that allocation of travel funds for office staff is limited. Not only increased allocation for official travel, but also for office-bound staff to take turns to visit the field should be considered. It is not unusual to find officers who have been confined to the offices for a major part of their career. If they are afforded opportunities to visit the different parts of the country in the course of their work, it would go a long way to improve their attitudes, belief systems and their world views. They should also learn to listen to the people they are expected to serve - the clients and the beneficiaries, rather than expecting them to be a passive audience and silent recipients all the time (Strivers, 1994). Listening and acting on the basis of information available from the grassroots should lead to more acceptable policies and a more responsive bureaucracy.

Referring to their research on administrators' perceptions of policy influence, it has been cogently pointed out by Wirt and Christovich (1989:9) that:

These findings relate to the larger question of inherent tensions in modern bureaucracies between administration and participation. Democratic theory posits as a central position the responsiveness of public authorities to citizen demands.

Another strategy would be to incorporate into the job descriptions and provisions for career advancement a compulsory period of field service for office-bound staff, and for field staff to spend a stipulated minimum period of service in the office. Deployment of central office staff to rural, outlying and remote locations on a regular rotational basis is desirable in this respect.

### **Administrative preparation**

Pre-service and in-service education in Educational Administration, Policy and Planning would be another effective way of improving attitudes, work practices and world views. Ultimately it is the attitude, work practice and world views based on conceptual understandings, reflective practice, and research-based knowledge that can significantly influence organisational behaviour. This has to be undertaken both at the individual and group levels. Such preparation for administrative positions has been available in many developed nations; however, it is only in the last decade that educators of developing nations have realised the need for professional preparation of educational administrators. Universities and tertiary educational institutions have responded with remarkable swiftness.

Dr James A. Maraj, a former Vice Chancellor of the University of the South Pacific, had this to say in 1981 while addressing the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors at their centenary celebration in London on the theme *The Professions and the Developing world : A view from the South*.

May I remind academic colleagues that very few universities, in the North or South, have as yet begun to give serious thought to new professions - those which will be needed for the next decade and beyond. It was not so long ago that many of today's newer professionals were regarded as undeserving of the universities' dignified imprimatur. Yet it is these professionals who are in the forefront of their countries' development. No doubt many of my friends will reply, how can we create new programmes and spawn new professions in these times of financial stringency? My answer is simple, unless we rediscover

our mission to prepare people for tomorrow's professions - a task which we did so well in an earlier era, our recovery as universities and as seedbeds for preparing professionals may be even longer delayed. In my own university we must, even at the expense of some still needed programmes, move ahead to produce hydrologists, marine geologists, land management specialists, etc. I believe it is in so doing that we may once again command the support we need and restore to the university the importance it deserves.

Within four years from the time this plea was made in London, the University of the South Pacific's Department of Education initiated the Diploma in Educational Administration programme, which has helped many serving and aspiring administrators, planners and policy makers in the South Pacific region to receive the kind of professional education and preparation referred to above. This programme allows at least half the number of its courses to be cross-credited towards a Major, Minor or as an elective in a BA or BEd Programme. It includes a school and a system strand, if one wishes to specialise in either of the strands. In this eight-course programme, a course in the area of curriculum and another in educational research have been included to give the breadth of professional preparation. It is one of the many pro-active initiatives of our department that has been well received by the education professionals in the region, notably by Fiji. In fact its success has led a number of graduates and diplomates to enrol subsequently in postgraduate diploma and MA programmes, some of whom have completed these programmes or are at various stages of progress. This programme has been so successful that the university has been requested by countries such as Solomon Islands, Kiribati and the Marshall Islands to mount in-country projects.

In addition, the staff in the Department of Education and Psychology (Formerly the Department of Education) in collaboration with the university's Institute of Education has undertaken consultancies and has run short-term training workshops. Together they are committed to further short-term and long term needs in professional development and training.

## Policy and planning

Another way of improving the bureaucracy is not to continue to separate the administrative processes such as policy formation and planning from other ongoing administrative processes. Instead these two processes should be considered as multi-level functions to be undertaken at successive levels with a view to giving even better effect to those decisions taken at the preceding levels. This takes us to another important matter that needs careful consideration.

To some extent, policy making and planning functions are inextricably intertwined with an educational administrator's responsibilities. However, these functions need to be also undertaken as specialised functions at the highest level or near the highest level possible within a Ministry of Education. A policy unit and a planning unit, directly under the Permanent Secretary of the ministry, would very much enhance the potential of the ministry to play a pivotal role in educational development and provision. Thus all sections of the ministry can expect to receive policy advice and planning guidelines from these two important units. Perhaps the present Research and Development Unit could be upgraded and incorporated into this proposed new Planning Unit. The Policy Unit could be staffed by a very small group of policy analysts supported by part-time or contracted personnel from outside the ministry to form an interdisciplinary team.

Many developing countries do not recognise the need to review their achievements and development work in such important sectors as education. At the other extreme are countries that review their educational plans and programmes too frequently to the extent of disregarding the need for continuity of direction and purpose. It was pointed out last year at the Labasa College prize-giving celebrations (Velayutham, 1993), that 25 years after the last major Education Commission Report, the time was ripe to look forward to the next 10 or 15 years with the benefit of hindsight, when we would be already in the 21st century. These two units strategically placed at or near the highest level of the ministry would be able to service an Education Commission that may need to be set up to recommend future directions and priorities for educational development and provisions. With Fiji taking the bold and progressive step to legislate for introducing

compulsory education up to Form 4, and in view of significant developments in other areas being contemplated, the need for these two units becomes even greater.

### **Extended professionalism**

A professional organisation can play an important role in improving the professional capacities of its members. The professional organisation for education officers has to be further strengthened and consolidated, even if its record has so far been very good. In developing countries they could take a more active role than now in social, economic and political developments. As individuals they may not be able to take as much of an active role as collectively as an association of respected professionals. In so doing, instead of narrowly defining their professional role, they should take a more coherent, holistic and overarching view of nation building and national development, befitting their professional role and status. This does not need militancy as some would think, but it needs quiet diplomacy together with active dialogue, informed discussion and contribution to consensus building.

One of their professional aims is to maintain very high standards of ethics in their work. The professional leaders and educators should be in the forefront of attempts to instil a sense of honesty and integrity. Without these two qualities of mind, finding expression in their work situations and their private lives, all other efforts to develop themselves and the nation simply would not 'bear fruit'.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, it may be said that the profession of educational administrators and others in the business of education are uniquely placed to make a significant and meaningful contribution, in that their professional work can extend to and influence most aspects of national development, in turn contributing to further the democratic ideals we cherish. Perhaps, the

education officers may consider some kind of further dialogue and linkage with other professional associations in the field of education to realise the goals of relating education even more closely to development efforts and then to further strengthening the democratic framework, each of which cannot and should not be disassociated from the other.

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