

The Work of School Board Chief Executive Officers

Gerald T. McLeod

ontario institute for studies in education

Recent studies of educational administrators have produced detailed descriptions of their work. Analysis of the purposes that shape this behaviour has received less comprehensive attention. This report is a result of field research involving observation of 16 board of education chief executive officers. The investigation goes beyond work characteristics and reasons for specific segments of work activity. It examines the personal-career axis of executive motivation. Second, it explores how relevant is the mental outlook of the functionary for insight into the conduct of school board officials. Implications are suggested for: (1) career planning; (2) organizational leadership; and (3) the administrator's influence over policy outcomes in the field of education.

Les études récentes portant sur le travail des administrateurs scolaires présentent des descriptions détaillées des activités de ces personnes. Par ailleurs, les motifs à partir desquels ces comportements se structurent ont été relativement peu analysés. Cet article rapporte une étude sur le terrain et notamment une observation structurée portant sur 16 personnes occupant des postes de cadres supérieurs dans des commissions scolaires. Au-delà des caractéristiques de leur travail, ou des raisons qui justifient des segments précis de leur tâche, cette enquête s'intéresse à la motivation des cadres et particulièrement à leur motivation de carrière. Dans le second volet de la recherche, l'auteur s'intéresse à la mentalité du fonctionnaire et à la pertinence de ce concept pour la compréhension des conduites des cadres de commissions scolaires. Des implications sont dégagées touchant (1) l'établissement de plans de carrière, (2) le leadership organisationnel et (3) l'influence des administrateurs sur les résultats des politiques dans le domaine de l'éducation.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years educational administrators have been criticized for allegedly obstructing some public control over policy and the course of schooling in general. These attacks are usually accompanied by inferences, if not by specific accusations, that school officials abuse their excessive power in favour of occupational interests, too frequently to the detriment of those whom the system educates.

Dismayed by what they perceive as a gross distortion of altruistic motives, educational administrators have strenuously resisted what seems an ill-conceived and unwarranted encroachment upon their professional prerogatives. On the other hand, they have demonstrated a willingness to engage in discussions and to make accommodations with regard to appropriate spheres of influence over decision making on education matters. Unfortunately, there is no clear delineation between professional authority and public interest.

Educational officials have been hampered in contributing to the dialogue, because serious ambiguity surrounds their role and the purpose of their office. That insufficient attention has been addressed previously to the rationale that governs their everyday work activity is one shortcoming identified by the committee of examiners for the Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development as early as 1975. Its *Report on Educational Policy in Canada* expresses concern that administrators are not sufficiently conscientious with respect to their "roles, duties, modes of operation and social significance." This article discusses the underlying administrative purposes revealed from observation of administrators at work.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

According to Campbell (1978: 1), the mainstream literature in educational administration reflects perspectives derived from such disciplines as sociology, psychology, social psychology, and political science. In the field itself, four basic views of administration have been paramount for several decades: management theory; human relations; structuralism; and open systems. The two latter categories manifest themselves strongly in the "theory movement" in educational administration with which such authorities as Griffiths (1959), Halpin (1966), and Getzels et al. (1968) are associated, and which strongly influenced instruction and research on school organization until relatively recent times. Radical departure from established behavioural tradition is now, however, in full swing. Greenfield (1973, 1979) and Bates (1982) are two of numerous writers now arguing persuasively for fresh approaches to educational administration. They rebel against superficial behaviourism, while favouring critiques which focus upon administrative practice that emphasizes those facets pertaining to issues of domination and submission in the everyday organization of schooling.

One result is renewed interest in anthropological and ethnographic research. During earlier years some inquiry along these lines had been conducted, but a review by Lutz and Iannaccone (1969: 105) concludes that its findings were "seldom or only sketchily published." Wolcott's (1973) ethnography of an elementary school principal significantly enlarges the field of knowledge concerning school officials' activities. Studies by Pitner (1978), Duignan (1979), Kingstone (1980), and Schwartz (1981) comprise but a tiny sample of inquiry into the work of educational administrators that reflects, not only the influence of Wolcott, but also of Henry Mintzberg whose 1973 study gave new impetus to academic inquiry. Thomas et al. (1981) provide timely assessment of complex methodological issues that arise from this burgeoning interest in observational research. Owens (1982: 17) also expresses concern over the need for rigorous standards to govern the conduct of naturalistic inquiry.

Reporting technique is of particular importance to him. In order to capture the qualitative essence of the real-world situation he sees the need for "*thick description*, portrayed in *ordinary language* in a *lively* manner" (author's emphasis).

Following Owens' suggestion, anecdotes of the type described are interspersed through the following description and analysis.

THE NEED TO IDENTIFY PURPOSES OF ADMINISTRATION

Questions about administrative goals may be discussed for at least two reasons. First, management by objectives has been a source of interest for several decades. Second, by examining the manner in which educational administrators go about their work in everyday settings the purposes of that work may be identified. The reason for this examination is not to help them become more efficient at what they are observed to do. Rather, the goal is to help officials to reflect upon the wisdom, desirability, morality, and so forth of what they do almost routinely.

Work characteristics or actual managerial activities were described by Mintzberg as a means of inferring the purposes for their conduct. It is here suggested that examination of specific acts alone is not sufficient. It is argued that on such narrow analysis Mintzberg was led to rely upon structural interpretation to fill gaps in an inadequate data base. In other words, managers are portrayed as heavily committed to courses of action which assist with pattern maintenance, internal integration of the organization, as well as its ability to adapt to an environment. Are these perceptions the result of actual evidence or of underlying preconceived assumptions of the analyst? Questions about administrative purposes may be framed at two additional levels of abstraction to avoid misleading preconceptions. For example, Cohen and March (1974) sought to capture the spirit of their subjects' overall perspective on excellence in their profession. It may also be asked, to what degree is the conduct of administrators coloured by the experience of growing, living and working in society where bureaucratic organization is ubiquitous? For answers to the latter the researcher must turn to literature informed by the ideas of Weber, Simmel, Michels, and Marx. Speculation on the mind set of members of the modern elite of professional managers is explored, for example, by Burnham (1941), Howton (1969), and Djilas (1974). How well does the modern cadre of administrators in education fit their descriptions?

THE PROBLEM

The purpose of the present study is twofold. First, it attempts to describe precisely the actual activities of a group of senior educational administrators. The second objective is interpretive. What are the purposes of

administrators in their courses of action? What are their immediate reasons for their particular acts? What are their overall goals? To what extent is their official purpose reflected in the manner in which they broach their everyday responsibilities?

METHODOLOGY

The study, pursued over approximately four years, depended primarily upon structured observation. However, it was preceded and followed by general field research. Subjects were interviewed as the results of structured observation were disseminated, and interviews were carried out with other educational administrators who did not participate in structured observation.

Structured observation was conducted by two researchers. They focussed on the work of 16 senior administrators employed by boards of education in Ontario, Canada. These top officials are appointed by boards of elected school trustees. Each acts as a chief executive officer (abbreviated CEO) for the school board.

Typically in both Canada and the United States, these officials are known variously as the superintendent of education, the superintendent of schools, or the school superintendent. However, within Ontario their official designation is director of education. Their subordinates in the hierarchy are superintendents with particular job-related designations. To avoid confusion, the study's subject will be referred to as a director of education or CEO.

The 16 directors of education were not selected at random. They were chosen according to such factors as regional location, board student enrollment, geographic size of jurisdiction, and history of the school board. Personal factors included the past experience and the possession of linguistic competence in French as well as in the English language. Some officials were selected on the basis of authoritative recommendation.

The methodology described by Mintzberg (1973: 230–275) was used. Briefly, this involves documentation of the following: What kinds of work is done? Where? With whom? To what immediate ends? At whose instigation? For what duration? The answers supply the data upon which chronologies and verbal contact summaries are constructed.

A separate report (McLeod 1980: 53–252) describes and analyzes the work characteristics revealed by this exercise in enumeration and categorization. Basically, it is constructed around the five areas which Mintzberg suggests involve managers primarily – the telephone, desk work, unscheduled meetings, scheduled meetings, and tours.

Four directors of education were “shadowed” for a period of four consecutive weeks. The remaining eight were each accompanied by an observer for five days of a single week. Approximately one year after the

six-month observation phase, interviews were scheduled, at which time the researcher probed for further clues as to each administrator's overall professional purposes.

Interviews with other school board CEOs served three objectives. They helped confirm impressions gained during the observations. These talks broadened the representativeness of the sample of directors in the study. Finally, visits to additional boards of education reassured the researchers as to the typicality of situations in which observation had taken place.

General field research prior to the observation phase served to facilitate access to observation sites. Subsequently, field investigation was initiated at intervals during the long period required for computation and analysis. Such inquiry kept the researchers abreast of current developments. It also provided the ongoing opportunity to check the validity of impressions being built into the analysis.

SYNOPSIS OF FINDINGS

Two kinds of tempo distinguish the pace at which senior administrators were observed to work during the course of the study. On the one hand, these officials work at the torrid pace described almost invariably in work studies of this nature. The harried executive responds to numerous interruptions, frequently switches the focus of attention, and copes with diverse administrative tasks in a seemingly superficial, but expeditious manner. On the other hand, long hours pass with the same person immobilized during attendance at scheduled meetings, only to emerge briefly for another spate of frenzied activity.

Protracted meetings, usually involving large numbers of participants, claim approximately one-half to two-thirds of the 50 hours which directors of education averaged at work during the five observation days. Meetings of the school board, its committees, senior administration, and so forth rarely last less than 90 minutes. On two or three occasions each week two such meetings are scheduled in succession commencing in the evening. Some school boards are disciplined to terminate these sessions at 11:00 p.m. Others proceed interminably. Notwithstanding the late hour at which these gatherings adjourn, administrators feel obliged to arrive punctually at the office with the rest of the staff early the following morning. Meetings with trustees induce administrators to schedule caucuses for the purpose of rehearsal and debriefing among themselves. These regular gatherings are only a small part of work activity whereby members of the administration constantly "touch base" with each other to share information and check strategy, especially insofar as it has to do with the process of "handling" the trustees, teachers, a parent, or members of the public generally.

Because their superior's office door is rarely closed and since experi-

ence has taught them of the importance of up-to-date information for the survival of the administration, colleagues frequently "drop by" the director's office for informal briefings and to pass on current news. The CEO actively seeks to remain abreast of the latest developments by inviting conversations, albeit fleeting, during tours of the office building and schools. Corridors, parking lots, and cafeterias are venues where contacts of this kind supplement the data gleaned from conversations during intermissions at a wide variety of meetings and conferences.

Desk work roughly parallels the tempo described for verbal contacts, but it usually consumed only about 9 to 13% of total time worked during the period of observation. Priority matters, first of all, are handled rapidly. This is usually done as the administrator intercepts the mail on its arrival, sometimes before a secretary has sorted it. Letterheads and return addresses on envelopes give clues to contents which the director believes must be handled without delay. Other printed matter is allowed to accumulate. It can be processed in two or perhaps three "basket cleaning" sessions of 30 to 45 minutes. The rest is taken home to be done at weekend. If not, it is viewed during meetings.

The large amount of time that must be reserved in the daily diary for travel does not quite match the blocks required for attendance at scheduled meetings. Yet, directors of education in the study group spent about 9% of their time shuttling between office and school or to meetings outside their school board's jurisdiction. In rural areas as much as 20% of the administrator's time was consumed in travel.

Little time is left for long-range planning at the office. Furthermore, the perceived necessity of the "open door" as a sign of responsive and accountable administration encourages interruptions that undermine the concentration that is required. Some subjects argue that their private residence is the only place where they may work on plans for the organization, and that the only opportunity for this reflective activity occurs at the weekend or during an exceptional evening when meetings are not scheduled. They believe that to close the office door or to leave the office early would present an unwise opportunity for eager critics.

Also, members of the study group would disappoint the management scientist with their reluctance to apportion their time into regular appointments of limited duration. Generally speaking their daily schedules are partitioned into large blocks of time during which they interact with groups that are rarely smaller than three, and may amount to the scores of people. On the other hand, a management scientist would lament the scarcity of meetings scheduled at 15- or 30-minute intervals at which the official would talk with one or two visitors. Yet, in defence of their behaviour, directors of education could make a strong case to support their apparently unscientific work practices. Their conduct serves a number of key stated and unstated objectives.

PURPOSES THAT SHAPE EACH DAY'S WORK

The desire to be recognized as an official who is approachable, accessible, and responsive contributes strongly to the observed behaviour patterns. Some of the group even interpret the notion of accountability in such strict terms as to include the insistence upon monitoring and then re-routing most of the mail received at the office. In other cases the director is alert to handle telephone calls rather than relying upon a secretary. Visibility is prized as well. Therefore, the director's participation in numerous public activities including trustee meetings, conferences, staff functions, and school tours is seen to confirm that someone is in charge. Very often this kind of participation and public display is the most that can be managed in the domain of "human relations." Such is the case when the administrator stands at the head of a school board representing a wide geographic area, or one which employs thousands of teachers working in scores of schools at all grade levels.

The leader fears the consequences of being considered aloof, disinterested or ill-informed. Teachers, for example, appreciate efforts by senior administrators to observe classroom activities even if they are less enthusiastic about attempts to evaluate performance. Officials suspect that trustees and others take offense if the administration does not show enough interest in committee work to attend meetings.

Finally, political considerations are as important as the "open door" and the visibility in shaping the senior school board administrator's work characteristics. They are of both a defensive and offensive variety. That is to say, a defensive need to keep track of every development that has the potential for harming the administration drives senior officials to frantically search for information and ways to seal the trouble spots. Offensively, the contest over policy making in education has become so intense that administrators must move with dispatch to assure that their traditional interest in the outcomes is not severely compromised.

The more fundamental purposes that manifest themselves in the conduct of school board administrators are discussed in the next section under two headings. First, objectives are reviewed as the outcome of conflict between the individual's strict goals as a professional educator, and those which seem to be necessary for career advancement. Second, the aims of the administrator as a functionary are described. These descriptions serve as a prelude for reflection upon their ramifications in at least three areas: (1) What are their personal consequences? (2) How does this analysis reflect upon the part played by the administrator as a key actor in educational organizations? and (3) What issues does it raise with regard to the shaping of educational policy?

Meanwhile, exploration of these issues is punctuated with slice-of-life vignettes drawn from settings in which structured observation was

conducted. As summarized by Owens (1982: 17) the purpose of these pen pictures is “‘to take the reader there’ – to provide ... a rich sense of *understanding* events and of having *insight* as to their *meaning*, or more likely, *meanings*” (author’s emphasis).

THE MORNING OF THE BOARD MEETING

The office of the Stafford Board of Education becomes a hive of activity as the day dawns for the regular bi-monthly evening meeting of school trustees. Telephone conversations convey fresh information pertinent to matters scheduled for discussion. By mid-morning senior administration retreats into conference. Secretaries and assistants fend off potential interruptions. “I’m sorry but the Director is not available this morning – he has an important meeting. No, the Superintendent of Student Services cannot be disturbed either. Could you leave a message? They may be free this afternoon. Otherwise, could you call back tomorrow?”

Meanwhile, with their cups of coffee and their loose-leaf binders spread in front of them, the director, his administrative assistant and five superintendents get down to the business of their “dress rehearsal” for tonight’s meeting. Minutes of the last meeting are confirmed. Today’s agenda is endorsed. Alex Fairbourne, the director, reacts with concern to the news that a school principal has been admitted to hospital suffering from a heart ailment. He jots a reminder to phone the official’s residence. In anticipation of the day’s events he feels tension constrict his own chest and stomach. It can only be hoped that he will be spared the migraine that often accompanies his meetings with trustees.

Once, his only worries concerned the fate of his designs for the betterment of instruction in schools. That was almost a decade ago, when he came to the job full of vigour and ideals. It’s a different story now. Regardless of their thorough preparation, Alex and his colleagues know that they can only narrow the range of criticism directed at them. They face too many people with their own axes to grind on issues that do not necessarily pertain to schools. Chastisement of administration, to the beleaguered officials, seems to be an end in itself.

The Personal-Career Axis

The senior administrator’s cherished personal ideals for exceptional organizational performance pursuant to quality education frequently collide with a reality that forces painful compromise. When asked to identify administrative features which they most admire, school board directors list basic worthwhile objectives.

By way of introduction and without exception, they espouse their interest in improving what they perceive as quality education. First and

foremost, though, they assert that the director and superintendents must be alert to safeguard the perceived right of the administration to administer – to retain control of the organization. Second, the organization must be supervised in such a manner as to operate without major disruptions or surprises. Emphasis upon technical competence is matched by the director's desire to foster a sense of common purpose among subordinates in order to maintain high productivity. Directors responded to the question on their personal aims by expressing the hope that they exemplify the finest qualities of trustworthiness, commitment, and professionalism representative of their school board. Other purposes involve the well-being of subordinates. High morale is a primary concern. Another is the importance of professional growth desirable as an integral part of their subordinates' association with their chief.

How well do these people fit their described image of "super Boss?" Career and political factors conspire to place the two most highly prized objectives substantially in opposition to realization of the other subsidiary goals. What are these factors? How do they result in such heavy emphasis on control and containment that only marginal progress is possible in the remaining designated goal areas?

How the senior school board administrator perceives personal career prospects exerts a profound influence over that individual's preoccupation with the organization's orderly functioning, as well as prevention of nasty disruption to the normal course of the educational enterprise. Notwithstanding the fact that the director of education, for example, stands at the pinnacle of the world of school board administration, serious insecurity encourages caution and a general desire that "things be not allowed to get out of hand."

At the time when the study was first conducted the CEOs in question faced an uncertain future. Some had reached the expiration of their first four-to-five year appointment. A few had reached the 10-year milestone. As well, a group of young recent appointees had joined their older confreres in an office increasingly subject to attack from opponents within trustee ranks and from critics outside the board of education. In each case administrators were troubled by uncertain career prospects, either in the event of their retirement prior to statutory pensionable age or as a result of dismissal by a hostile board of trustees. What choices are open to those who are too young to qualify for pension or who wish to continue their careers? Some administrators want eventually to return to teaching. Others search for second careers as consultants, or in the academe. In the province where the study was conducted, a strong tradition still discourages directors of education from being appointed as CEO with another school board. In summary, then, since teaching positions are scarce both at the grade school and the post-secondary level, the person for whom school board administration has become a thing of the past must look to other responsible positions where credibility and a reputation for

soundness are highly prized. In other words, for appointment to a government agency, a commission of inquiry, or as an arbitrator, the former school board administrator must be able to stand on a record of credible performance.

Since credibility constitutes a major instrument for career security, how do senior school board officials acquire the reputation? Conventional wisdom suggests one formula but practical experience mandates another approach. In so far as the former is concerned, one would imagine that a record of performance measured each year against concrete objectives spread across a range of recognized fundamental tasks of educational administration would suffice. Alas, such qualitative indices do not enjoy widespread currency or legitimacy, at least in the jurisdictions in which this study was conducted. Neither the general goals of education or the precise role of administration, as it is linked with excellence in teaching and learning, are subjects of specific accord even within the ranks of officialdom.

Since the quality of work is difficult to assess in terms of what is right, strong temptation arises to evaluate quality in terms of what does not go wrong. Here, experience plays a vital role. For example, in Ontario where boards of education may be comprised of as many as 25 trustees (the number is rarely less than 10), directors of education are hard pressed to maintain harmony even if other potentially abrasive interest groups and cliques within the organization's hierarchy remain docile. The office is so conspicuous, moreover, as to make the CEO a lightning rod for political storms arising from various groups dissatisfied with what is happening in schools. Not surprisingly, the administrator is tempted to withdraw behind carefully constructed defenses.

Of what does this reactive pose consist? It is predicated upon the realization that an administrator cannot be blamed easily if glaring malfunctions in the school board's operations are nonexistent. In addition to the image of a "tight ship," the prudent administrator cultivates appearances of normalcy with regard to teaching, curriculum, and evaluation (Bernstein 1975) in his/her particular board of education's schools. In short, to allow the organization to deviate too conspicuously from the traditional image of schools and schooling is to leave the CEO vulnerable to a maelstrom of political controversy even at the best of times. Such is the fragility of credibility that the administrator feels compelled to invest energy in containment and control to a degree that exceeds the obvious necessity in any organization for efficiency, orderliness, and quality service.

This extraordinary preoccupation with administrative control and technical proficiency tends to undermine the administrator's chances for successful realization of other purposes. For example, the espoused interest in high morale and professional growth of employees is subverted partly because senior officials are left without sufficient residual resources

to cope with these matters, especially after having largely exhausted themselves in securing their defensive position. Second, their humanistic designs are too often frustrated, because they work at cross purposes to administrative controls. Initiative, creativity, independent action, and uncoordinated ventures increase the vulnerability of an embattled administration. On the other hand, impregnability may be purchased at too high a price. Employee cynicism, alienation and resistance flow from the perception that their leaders avow one set of humanistic goals, while their actions show that they strive for other less humanistic results.

AND THE BEAT GOES ON

In the conference room Alex and his superintendents work through each agenda item for tonight's meeting. Wording is tightened up. What will the trustees say to our recommendation on the next item? The director draws his aides' attention to a particular document. At this time it is potentially too explosive to take to the board. Reroute it through channels! Another possible trouble spot provokes discussion on how the situation can be piloted through the meeting.

The director wants a briefing on agenda item #3. He knows that it falls within the Superintendent of Business's bailiwick. Yet trustees like to quiz their CEO on whom it seems. Besides, his subordinate will benefit from this rehearsal.

Alex takes his turn at giving background information. He explains the budget situation. Attention then turns to a forecast of higher energy costs. The director counsels his superintendent on how to present the figures to trustees. After 70 minutes and scrutiny of 13 agenda items, the administrators disperse. It is almost lunch time, yet many errands must be done before preparation for the board meeting is finalized.

Chief Executive as Key Organizational Actor

The role played in a board of education hierarchy by its most senior official may be outlined according to at least two alternative images. One of these reflects strongly popular notions of leadership, where the top person is referred to in common parlance as a "mover and doer," or more colourfully, as a "mover and shaker." The alternative image is somewhat less dashing and romantic. The image is that of the functionary, a term used occasionally although not entirely accurately as a synonym for the technocrat. The unsavoury connotation that links it to management, petty bureaucracy, and/or engineering also contributes to the reluctance of researchers and practitioners in educational administration to countenance the implications of the functional-rational mind set of officialdom. Two unfortunate consequences are likely to stem from such reticence. First, neglect of this perspective imposes limits on understanding of how

administrators actually exercise power, from positions that seem powerless. Second, this blind spot in analysis inhibits discussion on vital issues pertaining to the ethical dimension of high quality administration.

School Board Chief Executive as “Mover and Shaker”

In many respects this parallels the image of the “transformational” leader described by James McGregor Burns (1979). The educator cast in this mold demonstrates leadership qualities by working at the cutting edge of change and progress in the profession. This person inspires followers, mobilizes resources and generates ideas, while performing services that are instrumental in bringing the organization’s efforts to successful fruition.

The “mover and shaker” exercises power conspicuously. A proactive stance is the hallmark of this kind of leadership. Consequently, if administration suffers reversals in the face of efforts to achieve objectives in this overt manner, people tend to view the apparent setbacks as evidence that power has been eroded or has been exercised ineptly.

This line of reasoning often leads commentators to search for solutions that may be ill-founded, inappropriate, and possibly antithetical to principles governing the accountability of administration. For instance, the villain in the piece may be identified as the official’s incompetent wielding of power. Alternatively, other individuals and groups may be blamed for their temerity in opposing the will of administrators. Condemnation in the first instance produces insistence that officials sharpen their political skills by mastering the kinds of techniques suggested by Machiavelli. In the second instance, governments are enjoined to protect civil servants from allegedly unwarranted trespass upon the supposedly time-honoured prerogatives of administrators and professionals. However, if officials more accurately reflect the attributes of the functionaries than charismatic leaders, the foregoing suggestions amount to ill-chosen solutions to a misperceived problem.

School Board Chief Executive as Functionary

Bureaucratic organizations have grown so large, influential and ubiquitous in modern industrialized society that they have created in public consciousness a single dominant prototype for executive behaviour – that of the functionary. That is to say, modern managers and administrators have been encouraged by cultural socialization and experience in bureaucracies to incorporate as their own the logic upon which these organizations are founded – functional rationality. Therefore, according to Howton (1969: 5) a new kind of person has been created upon whom a single constraint has been placed in deciding the course of events. This

type, the functionary, deals only in the limitations that rationality places upon the "choice and use of means in relation to a given end."

Clearly, much of the credit for the progress and material comfort enjoyed today by advanced industrialized nations must be credited to the rational-legal bureaucratic organization of the factors of production. As members of the new professional class of functionaries who control the apparatus that has brought about these achievements, educational administrators have made a major contribution. They, for example, have applied their talents to develop rational strategies subsequently institutionalized as habits, routines, standard operating procedures and so forth, which mobilize the resources reserved by society for a massive enterprise in public education.

Unfortunately, the functionary's ascendancy has brought something of a mixed blessing to society. The negative side, first of all, is the difficulty that arises in establishing consensus with respect to the *socially-desirable ends* pursued by the functionary using the *most rational means*. Particularly when the collective will is weak and social bonds disintegrating, ambiguity frequently obscures the substantive ideals of the populace. In these situations, means which are the "province of the functionary" fill the vacuum with the result that ends are tailored to satisfy rational means (Howton 1969: 32).

The fact that the functionary enjoys privileged access to key decision making constitutes a second instance where the potential for abuse of power must be monitored, even in instances where social cohesiveness is sufficiently strong to forge a clear consensus on policy objectives. The functionary's office sits athwart primary communication channels. It controls agendas, while interpreting the parameters of issues and regulating the timing in which they are resolved. Matters that are not stalled or sidetracked may still yield to the will of the functionary who reserves the right to articulate a range of rational feasible choices for the people who actually vote to formalize outcomes.

Consequently, should the school board administrator be presumed to operate as a functionary, then analysis of this person's power must focus upon its less obtrusive manifestations. Evidence of what Bachrach and Baratz (1970) describe as the second face of power exists, for example, in the relationship between administrators and school trustees. Part-time involvement in the business of a school board makes most trustees particularly vulnerable because they depend so heavily on administrators for information, explanations, counsel, and recommendations. A phenomenon known as the non-decision also enhances the power of officialdom while relieving it of the necessity to show its hand too frequently. In such cases outsiders internalize the logic of the functionary to such an extent that they are likely either to overlook possible courses of action that would be in their best interests, or engage in self-censorship along functional rational lines.

This image of administrative purpose forces the analyst to concentrate on solutions to problems that differ from those produced within the framework of the “mover and shaker.” That is to say, the removal of obstacles to official freedom of action shrink in relative importance. The new problems and solutions do not equate, either, with those associated with “transactional” leadership (McGregor Burns, 1979) or Weick’s (1978) notion of the “docile” leader. Instead, interest is shifted to the appropriate reconciliation that must be sought between the predilection of administration for orderliness and rational allocation of scarce resources, on the one hand; and on the other, that which Daniel Bell (1976: 366) summarizes as “the politics of interest and the politics of passion” – a collision between technocracy and democracy.

Already, the previous section has revealed some of the more serious problems that this conflict of wishes produces within the ranks of the hierarchy. Equally important are issues pertaining to the role of the school board chief executive as a key actor in policy-making where elected trustees and outside interest groups are involved.

AND SO ... THE DAY WEARS ON

Following his slightly prolonged lunch break that the director plans for the day of the board meeting, Alex is ready for some paper work. He is at his desk by 1:30 p.m. But the board meeting is never far from his mind. He briefs his secretary on procedure for recording its minutes. A superintendent arrives to explain how the chairman of the Salary Committee plans to win the support of dissident trustees who oppose the recently concluded memorandum of agreement with teachers. In answer to his aide’s questions, the director stands firm in his resolve to bring the question of annual salary adjustments for administrators to the same meeting.

Again he is interrupted. A member of the support staff has a question. Paper work is terminated for the present. Another superintendent walks in to explain how he has averted potential conflict between two committees. Alex Fairbourne takes the opportunity to point out to the superintendent how he should steer discussion at a meeting scheduled for the next day on the subject of declining enrollment.

Following 30 minutes during which the director commences work on a speech, the arrival of the Superintendent of Business offers a welcome chance for a chat about the coming meeting. They are joined by another who warns of the danger of a particular trustee who will almost certainly oppose the salary package proposed for teachers. While in the office the informant is schooled on the best way to elicit trustee support for his recommendation on the appointment of a school principal this evening. Additional “eleventh hour” conferences punctuate Alex’s afternoon as he continues intermittently with paper work and other unscheduled chats

with people who take the chance to “drop in” since they are passing by his office.

Eventually, it is time to make a relatively early departure in order to arrange the necessary papers in the board room. Also, the director likes to give himself an extra half hour over the supper period. He knows that he will need all his conserved energy to perform well at the private and public meetings that await him.

REVIEW OF SELECTED ISSUES

In this section, three basic areas of concern that emerged during field work on the educational administrator culture are used to distinguish between various issues that warrant attention by practitioners, researchers, and others concerned for the ability of institutions of learning to offer the best possible service to clients. First, improvements hinge upon alleviating difficulties that confront administrators in the personal-career domain. Second, certain aspects of working relationships within the hierarchy of school board organizations have been overlooked to the detriment of effective operations. Third, the requirements of these officials concerning their unavoidable involvement in the policy-making sphere must be ascertained.

Career Prospects, Credibility and Motivation

Various strategies suggest themselves as preliminary for redefining what amounts to administrator credibility, as well as for steps designed to alleviate much of the conflict and anxiety commonly associated with observed patterns of administrator behaviour. Chief executives at the school board level, in Ontario at least, suffer for want of further attractive career opportunities. Tradition substantially hinders efforts to move from one position as director of education to the same position with another school board. Similarly, although the individual may wish to take up teaching again, opportunities are scarce. Such a transfer within the home organization may be discouraged while lack of a doctoral degree militates against employment at the post-secondary level. Furthermore, additional study for a Ph.D. or an Ed.D. immediately upon retirement is not an attractive prospect for the most senior school board official.

Support services of a more flexible and transitional nature are needed. For instance, an intermediate step between the school board office and the world of business or the consultancy field would help, especially if it adds to the retiree's credibility. Reorientation programs must be supplemented, however, by networking that breaks down the CEO's isolation even while fully engaged with the business of the school board. The work of administrators is likely to suffer, while they feel obliged to “tough out” professional and personal challenges in isolation simply because seeking assistance might appear a sign of weakness – evidence that they cannot

“hack it.” In these situations career counselling and opportunities for an embattled official to withdraw gracefully, if only temporarily, both would be helpful. Finally, at a more concrete level, pressure on senior officials can be unnecessarily intensified, if they are not sufficiently well advised on how to reach sound agreement with their school board on matters pertaining to salary, evaluation, and termination of appointment. Suffice to say, structured observation of a group in which no women are represented can hardly produce adequate insight into the immense career difficulties facing half of the members of the education profession.

Relationships and Procedures Within the Hierarchy

That the head of the senior administrative team within a school board may be forced to search outside the organization for a support network represents something of an irony, given the strong emphasis that the literature and consultants place upon cooperation, collaboration, and effective communication. The field study indicates that an atmosphere characterized by such qualities as openness, trust, and risk taking is not easily cultivated in school board administration, though such an atmosphere would assist an administrator to cope with the complexities of internal operations and decision making or with personal problems associated with mid-career crises.

Very little of their experience in mass society and their organizational socialization to the functional rational ethos prepares officials for these delicate assignments. Furthermore, structural and situational factors tend to obstruct the fullest expression of their empathy for colleagues, especially their chief executive and leader. The fact that the latter occupies office located at the apex of the organization's authority hierarchy sets this person apart from former equals. By virtue of superior rank the CEO is perceived to hold some sway over the fortunes of subordinates. A further contributing factor is bureaucratic rivalry. Senior office is won through competition. Finalization of the chief executive's selection does not curtail rivalry for subsequent promotion, nor does it always carry with it remedies for frustrated ambition and bruised egos. Such pain remains particularly acute in school systems where declining student enrollment has reduced the availability of supervisory appointments.

Even without these potential inhibitors, confusion as to whether the senior administrator should perform as a “mover and shaker” or as a functionary often leads to disillusionment and mutual mistrust. For instance, the apparently reactive postures of the functionary disappoint chief executives and subordinate administrators alike, who have been led to believe that school officials should be proactive. In Ontario school boards the CEO who is thoroughly committed to proactive administration is likely to chafe at resistance forthcoming from superintendents in staff and line positions who suspect bureaucratic encroachment on their

territorial interest. Frustrated by the counsel of one aide to the effect that he should “get out” of the day-to-day operations of the school system, thus delegating responsibility to his three superintendents, one director explodes, “And how then am I going to know what the fuck is going on around here?”

Without realizing it the chief executive’s frustration and suspicion closely approximate that which he creates in school trustees who resent his perception that they should be prevented from “dabbling in administration” or from “tampering with the curriculum.”

The Chief Executive and School Board Policy

The present study of educational administrators reveals clearly the inadequacy of the view that the administration’s function is to *implement* policy, while the function of elected representatives is to *formulate* it. For example, Pitner and Ogawa (1981: 61) describe senior officials as heavily engaged in “translation of societal preferences into their schools’ policies and practices.” The Ontario study reported here indicates that the educational administrator acts as something more than an honest broker between competing interests. The evidence seems compatible with views expressed by Willower and Fraser (1980), Duignan (1980) and Martin (1981) who suggest that principals and superintendents of schools possess a much greater capacity for exerting power and influence than has been suspected.

As a functionary upon whom the school trustee must rely heavily, the administrator enjoys special access to channels of communication. Information can be filtered, agendas controlled and debates tailored largely to accommodate the administration’s timetable. Of most vital importance, however, are the tools remaining at the administration’s disposal that may influence substantially the nature and range of policy options considered by politicians.

Second, equivalent time, energy, and inventiveness can be assigned to projects, the aim of which is to shape school trustees in patterns of behaviour and modes of thought which are compatible with the interests of administration. New board members are encouraged, often assisted by previously elected trustees, to develop an understanding of how they are “supposed to act” as members of a corporate public body. While the basic intent of this exercise may be quite honourable, the venture is susceptible to excessive measures that could lead to the impairment of clear, independent judgment.

AFTER THE MEETING, ANOTHER DAY DAWNS

The trustees adjourned finally at 12:25 a.m. Before that, they had heard delegations. They rejected a motion to revise the committee system, after their director opposed the proposal. Rules were suspended over his

ruling on a certain voting procedure. Reports were heard. Administration was accused of dereliction of duty in matters of maintenance standards. Trustees demanded more reports on student discipline and standards in Physical Education. At intermission the director had talked to the press and mingled socially. Later he was accused of "empire building" along with his superintendents. Trustees approved the collective agreement with teachers. Some were astonished at the size of salaries listed in the report requesting annual increases for superintendents and the director. A few trustees said a lot. Fourteen others said little. They approved the package on a divided vote. By the time the director arrived home, the Carson Show was finished. But, sleep did not come quickly or restfully.

At 8:22 a.m. he is among one of the earliest to reach the office. He switches on the lights before the secretaries arrive. Striding to the door of his superintendent's office, he throws it open. "They 'bought' the salary proposals," he remarks with unconcealed satisfaction. He turns to his desk where the unfinished speech for the declining enrollments meeting awaits his attention.

CONCLUSION

In these pages administration at the senior echelon of school board bureaucracy is portrayed as a series of contradictions. Numerous verbal contacts fill protracted and fragmented daily work schedules. Yet the administrator often is immobilized in meetings of interminable duration, during which boredom must be resisted lest a sudden crisis erupt. Notwithstanding this official's ongoing involvement in social interaction, the chief executive emerges as a solitary figure. Struggling constantly to personally understand the school system, this top official in the hierarchy is alone held accountable by trustees, teachers, and parents. Ironically, the individual who reaches this pinnacle of achievement, at a relatively youthful age often suffers in isolation great anxiety over mid-career and pre-retirement prospects.

With credibility as a key to further success the administrator is drawn into activities where credibility as pioneer of educational change and progress is likely to be subordinated to mundane strategies designed to keep matters under control. While emphasizing the latter, even if only as a survival tactic, the would-be implementer of policy routinely becomes immersed in processes that shape directions taken by elected policy makers.

But, where should the functional-rational logic of organization yield to principles pertaining to popular control of public education? And within this contest, how might the administrator balance personal and professional preferences, backed by the tools of the functionary, against the moral responsibility to perpetuate democratic ideals regardless of incon-

veniences and disorderliness? Two conversations with directors of education leave some cause for doubt as to how well prepared these administrators may be for such vital issues. In reaction to the tale of Alex Fairbourne's frantic efforts to outfox potential dissidents on his board, one director points out that he doesn't have to do this. "We are organized to get all that business tidied up far ahead of time," he observes missing the point entirely. Another intones the value of collaboration between directors. Remarking proudly on a recent joint venture with administrators in his region, he confesses proudly, "And we beat the shit out of the trustees!"

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Die neusten Untersuchungen der Arbeit pädagogischer Verwalter haben eine ausführliche Beschreibung deren Arbeit ergeben. Verhältnismäßig weniger umfassende Bedeutung wurde der Analyse der Absichten des derartigen Verhaltens beigemessen. Dieses Referat ist das Ergebnis einer Feldforschung. Ein Teil davon enthielt die organisierte Beobachtung von sechzehn Hauptverwaltungsbeamten der Erziehungsräte. Die Untersuchung geht über die Arbeitseigenschaften und Gründe für Arbeitsunterteilung hinaus. Sie untersucht die persönliche und Laufbahn Motivation der Verwalter. An zweiter Stelle erforscht sie die Geisteshaltung der Beamten, um Einsicht in das Verhalten der Erziehungsräte zu gewinnen. Folgerungen werden vorgeschlagen für (1) Laufbahnplanung, (2) organisatorische Leitung, und (3) Einfluß der Verwalter auf Planungsergebnisse im Bildungswesen.

Estudios recientes sobre el trabajo de administradores escolares han producido descripciones detalladas sobre lo que tales personas hacen. Se ha prestado una atención relativamente menos comprensiva a los motivos que fundamentan su comportamiento. Este informe es el resultado de una investigación en el campo en la que se observaron, en forma estructurada, a dieciséis funcionarios superiores principales en el campo de la educación. Más bien que las características de su trabajo o de las razones justificativas de tareas específicas, esta investigación estudia los motivos de los funcionarios, y en especial su motivación de carrera. El segundo aspecto de la investigación involucra la mentalidad del funcionario y su relevancia al comportamiento de los miembros de las comisiones escolares. Se destacan implicaciones en cuanto a: (1) establecimiento de planes de carrera, (2) liderazgo dentro de la organización, y (3) la influencia de los administradores sobre los resultados de las políticas en el campo de la educación.

Gerald T. McLeod is an Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Administration at The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Toronto, Ont. M5S 1V6.