Rhetorical Tension in the Bureaucratic University

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Abstract

The managed university functions as the prominent organizational paradigm in higher education. Returning to Max Weber's original analysis of bureaucracy, several fundamental characteristics of the managed university come to surface, including the emphasis on specialization, hierarchy, and secrecy. Among these characteristics is the importance of communication and rhetoric to the enterprise. Despite embodying the spirit of rationalism, bureaucracy employs a mode of organizational subjectivity reflective in the language practices of the system. Within the managed university, manipulations of discourse obscure the increasingly bureaucratic nature of the university and expand organizational control over campus culture.

Bureaucracy Revisited in the Rhetorical Margins

At a cursory glance, bureaucracy does not necessarily strike one as a flexible structure. As a complex organizational hierarchy regimented by a dense collection of procedures, bureaucracy seems rigid. Often, this is the case. Bureaucratic red tape slows organizational responses and frequently hinders work. Such happenings are apparent in governmental and military bureaucracies when chaotic events or rapidly developing crises disrupt the flow of the system.

However, in other situations, bureaucracies prove quite adaptive. A dominant mode of labor organization since the nineteenth century, the modern conception of bureaucracy has persevered for well over a century. Although some scholars argue that globalization or the Information Revolution has reconceptualized the paradigm of institutions so that we now live in a post-bureaucratic or "network" society, bureaucracy has proven quite resilient (Castells, 1996). This is due to a kind of bureaucratic flexibility. While bureaucracies sometimes struggle with external problems, the internal mechanisms of bureaucracies are rather fluid. Bureaucracies craft their own narratives. The nature of these narratives and the lack of transparency in bureaucracy provide these narratives with greater credibility.

Another characteristic of bureaucratic flexibility is connected to the tendency of bureaucracies to expand. Max Weber's canonical account of bureaucracy, in the third volume of his 1922 work, *Economy and Society*, remains prescient. Arising from the military and the state, bureaucracy efficiently transitioned into the realms of industrial capitalism. Specialized hierarchies created modern corporations and other formulations of intellectual labor. Bureaucratic management has appropriated the technological dynamism of the Internet, which is often cast in a role adversarial to the seemingly "antiquated" style of bureaucracy. Through this development, many organizations have integrated more bureaucracy instead of less.

This paper examines the relationship between a Weberian understanding of bureaucracy and the current expansion of the bureaucratic university in the United States, particularly the language practices linking the two concepts. Rhetoric supplies bureaucracies with a great measure of their adaptability. As a mode of discourse intertwined with the subjective worldview of its agents, employing rhetoric seems counterintuitive to bureaucratic practices that aspire

to a rationalized, efficient mode of discourse neutrality. Despite this contradiction, bureaucracies are communicative structures, continually producing texts and asserting forms of discursive control. In this capacity, communicative subjectivity becomes a critical tool in bureaucratic management, one that enables its expansion and hegemonic capabilities.

This proves especially true in the case of university bureaucracy where a vast array of rhetorical appendages is employed to replicate the bureaucratic structure within an environment that is inhospitable. Placing undue emphasis on assessment, reifying terms like "excellence," and distilling complexity of classroom experiences into simplified terms facilitate this process. The original mission of the university becomes subverted as a result, engulfed in a rhetorical vacuum of specious ethos.

Bureaucracy as a Rhetorical Organization

A crucial tension within bureaucratic systems lies within its presumed neutrality. Bureaucracies operate through an assemblage of hierarchy, impersonality, and procedure in order to complete organizational tasks with maximum efficiency (Weber, 1968). Yet, this displacement becomes a rhetorical act, the product of two perpendicular conversations. The first is the conversation bureaucracies have with the external society, and the second is the meta-conversation that bureaucracy has within the organization. Both conversations are reflective of an institutional ideology that belies the neutral character of bureaucratic management.

In understanding the neutrality of bureaucracy, Weber's 1922 analysis remains relevant. Despite nearly a century passing since Weber's work, Weber managed to expose several characteristics at the heart of bureaucracy. Even in the wake of technological revolution, these characteristics persist, the outer shell of

bureaucracy (like that of capital) rapidly evolving, but the inner mechanisms remaining more or less intact. Explaining bureaucracy's superiority over other institutional forms, Weber (1968) offers a proto-technocratic account of how bureaucracy functions:

> "precision, speed, unambiguity, knowledge of the files, continuity, discretion, unity, strict subordination, reduction of friction and of material and personal costs—these are raised to the optimum point in the strictly bureaucratic administration, and especially in its monocratic form" (p. 973).

These components of bureaucracy remain crucial objectives of many organizations. They are born out of an institutional ideology that is dialectically intertwined with the material structure of bureaucratic labor. The internet is typically utilized to reinforce these characteristics as the speed and organizational capacities of the web facilitate bureaucratic work, and surveillance technologies further reduce worker-related friction. Moreover, the mechanized character of these components establishes the popular machine metaphor frequently linked to bureaucracies.

Stemming from Weber's original analysis, the notion of bureaucratic neutrality has developed over time. One can perhaps link this idea to the proliferation of positivist rationality engendered in the Enlightenment. In short, bureaucratic neutrality is the idea that through supervision and scientific management, the possibility of human subjectivity and error is reduced (Roman, 2014). Bureaucracies attempt to interact exclusively with facts and render non-factual information as factual information. A popular example of this idea is Taylorism, a mode of 'scientific' management in the early twentieth century that sought to render the subjective worker experience as pure data. Discussing governmental bureaucracies, Gregory Huber (2007) writes that

> "bureaucratic leaders have strong incentives to *limit subordinate discretion* and *demonstrate political efficiency.* An ideal way to achieve these ends is to engage in the *strategically neutral* implementation of law" (p. 25).

By creating and adhering to strict policy, bureaucratic officials evoke neutrality by contending that policy, as opposed to subjective determination, is the primary decision maker. However, the generation of such policy is the product of deeply wrought ideologies and rhetoric, which render claims to neutrality as problematic.

Weber's analysis is not beyond criticism. Despite Weber's bureaucratic characteristics persisting into the twenty-first century, every bureaucracy is different, and the historical currents that produce a given bureaucracy create any number of aberrations from Weber's model. In "Post-bureaucracy and Weber's 'Modern' Bureaucrat," Harro Höpfl (2006) further discusses the potential weakness in Weber's method:

> "the Weberian corpus does not yield any criteria for deciding which features an ideal type of bureaucracy should properly include or exclude…His work does nothing to explain, either, how ideal types are abstracted" (p. 15).

Reducing bureaucracies to a categorical ideal type limits the effectiveness of Weber's analysis. Therefore, when employing Weber's framework as a way to understanding bureaucracy, one must keep these limitations in mind. Anthony Giddens (1990), in *The Consequences of Modernity*, further problematizes Weber's approach, arguing that his

> "characterisation of bureaucracy is inadequate. Rather than tending inevitably towards rigidity, organisations produce areas of autonomy and spontaneity—which are actually often less easy to achieve in smaller groups" (p. 138).

Here, Giddens exposes a crucial gap in Weber's framework that has expanded dramatically over the decades. Bureaucratic structures are no longer so rigid. Regimented procedures remain central facets of bureaucracies, but they are balanced by adaptive capacities that enable a manner of fluidity within organizations. Despite this oversight, what Weber did accomplish is composing a map of bureaucracy. Despite inconsistencies, he provided an accurate depiction of the general landscape, leaving others to fill in the specific landmarks.

One important piece of territory that Weber sketched in his analysis was that of bureaucratic discourse, and by doing so, exposing a central contradiction within bureaucracy. The mechanical characteristics that enable bureaucracies to be technically superior to other forms of human organization are subverted by the labor housed in bureaucracies, specifically that of textual composition. The bureaucracy is a *textual* institution. As the factory generates commodities and sets them within a circuit of motion, a bureaucracy generates documents and sets them throughout a communicative circuitry.

Weber (1968) situates bureaucratic purpose in a textual realm when describing how "the management of the modern office is based upon written documents…The body of officials working in an agency along with the respective apparatus of material implements and files makes up a bureau" (p. 957). There is great materiality in Weber's characterization of bureaucracy. The bureau is a sprawling institution of laborers, a labyrinth of interconnected offices complete with the material factors of bureaucratic production and textual generation. The nature of these texts is largely reflective of the bureaucracy's impersonal nature. While a bureaucratic hermeneutic may be employed to interpret documents, Weber's bureaucracy is imbued with a manner of positivism. Documents are empirical texts, reporting on observations and

quantitative findings, their assumed neutrality fostering greater efficiency within the organization.

Since Weber's time, however, this neutrality, though still a fundamental aspect of bureaucratic management, has become complicated by other forms of discursive control. No text is beyond ideology. Moreover, the bureaucracy as a communicative institution has been examined through a contrasting lens, one that locates pockets of subjectivity within the iron cage. In *Control through Communication: The Rise of System in American Management*, JoAnne Yates (1989) speaks of this development where Weber's bureaucratic framework proliferates outward into wider forms of language management,

> "the philosophy of management that evolved in response to new needs, later to be labeled systematic management, promoted rational and impersonal systems in preference to personal and idiosyncratic leadership for maintaining efficiency in a firm's operations" (p. 1).

Yates' historical account of organizational management reveals that it is not purely a material development (i.e., vast technological innovations of the twentieth century), but an ideological progression that sought to control the labor process. This ideological progression further disrupted communicational tendencies incongruent with the labor process as the expansion of reporting mechanisms, the manner of work training, and the routinization and management of tasks all contributed to shaping organizational discourse.

What these factors demonstrate is the extent to which bureaucracies are fixated on producing and controlling a mode of textual meaning. This process lies in bureaucracy's essence, its very maintenance and expansion dependent on the generation of an institutional language. Boundaries are necessary for rhetorical

functionality. Popular conceptualizations of language situate language usage in the realms of free-flowing play (Elbow, 1998). Yet, against the grain of such conceptualizations, the concepts of language, discourse, and meaning are all reinforced through the institution of a set of rules and limitations. Roland Barthes (1983) puts forth a similar argument, locating meaning not in the infinite negative space of discourse, but within its boundaries:

> "the production of meaning is subject to certain constraints; this does not mean that constraints limit meaning, but on the contrary, constitute it; meaning cannot appear where freedom is absolute or nonexistent: the stem of meaning is that of a supervised freedom" (p. 161).

This account of language possesses utility when considering bureaucratic deployments of discourse. As an organization of control, bureaucracies are engineered to produce a series of constraints that produces a meticulously contrived meaning. Little is left to chance. Discourse functions as a process that is produced and controlled—bureaucratic discourse supplanting organic discourse.

Therefore, bureaucracies are not only textual institutions, but expand into a boarder realm of language. Contemporary bureaucracies are even more inclined to manipulate not only texts, but the very discourse practices within the organization. Matthew Hull (2005), in "Documents and Bureaucracy," summarizes this tendency:

> "bureaucratic discourses are no longer understood as semiotic constructions ('texts') abstracted or abstractable from their material vehicles—files, forms, reports, graphs, and so forth. The works under consideration explore the relations among materiality and technology, genres and forms, as well as practices" (p. 253).

The material/immaterial dialectic within bureaucratic management replicates and expands within institutions. The great physical forces within bureaucracy— the cloisters of offices, the avalanche of files and reports, the increasing role of technology, and the mass of human labor within it—all converge to rhythm of control, which feeds the more immaterial features of bureaucratic management, particular the control of discourse. The rhetoric within bureaucracies illustrates the immaterial features of this dialectic. Like any form of institutional language, bureaucratic rhetoric serves a great many purposes, but its capabilities to embody contradictory forces make its utilization unique.

These contradictory forces enable the formation of a discourse of substantial multiplicity. As previously stated, bureaucracy has many different types of "conversations." These conversations are both internal and external in nature and proliferate throughout the administrative hierarchy and serve as fragments of a central conversation of organizational purpose. The fragmented nature of this discourse leads to a constructed dialog belying the organic discourse of the organization. In "Postmodernism, Bureaucracy, and Democracy" Ralph Hummel and Camilla Stivers (2010) discuss the nature of bureaucratic discourse, a nature that borders on the artificial:

> "language determines what mangers, indeed anyone, can actually say. Within it they must attempt to justify the separation of the worker from mastery or morality" (p. 334).

Weber perceived hierarchy and specialization as foundational elements of bureaucratic management, enabling for greater efficiency and control. However, these seemingly necessary dislocations generate a mode of discourse that materializes outside the rationalist/empiricist modality Weber attributed to bureaucracy. Hummel and Stivers characterize this discourse as "artificial" and

"separate" from the organic discourse of work, yet this discourse, though functioning as a discursive shadow, has a profound impact on influencing the identity of the organization and its employees. This language is a vehicle for hegemony. In transitioning to the university bureaucracy and the specific utilizations of this discourse, one sees how this discourse creates not one university, but several universities within a singular institution—each variant possessing degrees of realness and fabrication.

Higher Education's Expanding Bureaucracy

In investigating the expanding bureaucratic apparatus within higher education, the initial idea to consider is the extent to which education has always been a bureaucratic enterprise. The relation between educational institutions and bureaucratic frameworks is one of considerable historical depth. However, the theoretical purpose of education does not necessarily require the instillation and intrusion of bureaucratic management. This contention has been at the heart of the conflict between educators and administrators. In *As If Learning Mattered,* Richard Miller (1998) summarizes the nature of this conflict:

> "everyone working in the academy already knows at some level…that all teaching occurs within the context of a deeply entrenched bureaucratic system that exercises any number of material constraints on what must take place on the classroom…and on how those entities and materials interact" (p. 19).

The essence of education is not bureaucratic, nor does it require a bureaucracy to facilitate its fundamental objectives. The pedagogical process runs counter to the hierarchical, impersonal qualities of bureaucracy. This contradictory affiliation generates the constraining relationship that Miller characterizes above. What enables bureaucracy to infiltrate educational environments is the

wide array of processes and tasks in these environments that are external to the pedagogical process. These elements not only invite bureaucracy into educational institutions, but with greater frequency are overshadowing pedagogy.

Educational organizations are more than places to learn. Schools, colleges, and universities are (with the exception of private institutions) extensions of the preeminent bureaucratic structure: the state. In order to interface with an organization that is inherently bureaucratic, an educational bureaucracy is generated to facilitate communication between the two parties, particularly as it relates issues of funding. Moreover, educational organizations are systems of labor. This labor simultaneously holds qualities of bureaucratic labor and qualities that fall outside the bureaucratic purview.

The complexity of these two organizational particularities invites bureaucracy. Naturally, this is not to contend that educators are incapable of handling these elements themselves. Questions of interacting with the state, managing funding, and navigating issues of labor are pivotal issues of power. When administration assumes these responsibilities, educators lose stake in how the institution operates. As the contemporary landscape of higher education suggests, this sacrifice comes at substantial costs, not only in terms of their voice in the institution's direction, but more importantly, their own autonomy as employees and the working lives of themselves and their colleagues.

The discourse surrounding this issue manifests in a different manner. Notions of how an educational institution is run and how labor is structured are not conceptualized as issues of power. Instead, administration presents these issues as tasks that educators are ill-suited for, mere distractions that assume professors' valuable time, preventing them from teaching or performing

research. Administrators administrate while teachers teach. This is conveyed as the ideal scenario, best for all parties.

In a 1911 work, *Academic and Industrial Efficiency*, Morris Llewellyn Cooke (1911) discusses the benefits of such an arrangement—where educators are freed from the shackles of administrative labor and through assessment and proper administrative mentorship, these educators will flourish:

> "this will mean eliminating from the teaching profession those unfitted for the work— a process which will have a good effect on the teachers who remain, because the whole standard of efficiency, and therefore the earning power, of the balance will be increased" (p. 23).

Although expressed in an early twentieth century document, these sentiments persist today. The demarcation between academic labor and administrative labor has grown rigid and distinct. Cooke's report is heavy with discourse that calls for a stronger bureaucracy and greater administrative involvement with the rather honest aim of making the *institution* better and running more efficiently, but this rhetoric conveys little concern for the actual people working within it.

The rhetoric of bureaucracy, originally stemming from the state and corporation, is a rhetoric that seeks to recreate the university in the mold of bureaucratic archetypes, not recognizing the uniqueness and power within higher education. In a much later document, *University as an Institution Today*, Alfonso Borrero Cabal (1993) discusses how universities should integrate a bureaucracy similar to other institutions that have perfected the form in that university bureaucracy should

"be simple and sufficient in its elements, flexible and effective in its actions, and easily intelligible so that the structure responds to the ideal of every bureaucracy" (p. 48).

Cabal's work echoes Cooke's report in numerous aspects, most notable of which is if the university is to function in a bureaucratic manner (which it currently does), then the university should endeavor to incorporate the best practices and ideals of the bureaucracy to ensure the institution's success. This claim makes a good deal of sense, but neglects the fundamental differences between educational institutions and those of the corporation or the state.

As predominately organizations of control, bureaucracies are most effective when problems can be dissembled and scattered throughout a specialized hierarchy. Such problems are "segmented" in that they possess a structured, linear quality that is congruent with the nature of bureaucratic labor. Government offices that are charged with dispersing resources to citizens are perhaps the most prominent example. However, when the problem is messy and complex, bureaucracy is prone to faltering as in the case of military bureaucracy (one of Weber's original bureaucratic forms) charged with resolving the conflicts in the Middle East with no clear starting or ending point in sight. Through this particular manifestation of the bureaucratic form, university administration has increased at a rapid pace. Jon Marcus (2014), of the New England Center of Investigative Reporting, summarizes this increase:

"from 1987 until 2011-12—the most recent academic year for which comparable figures are available—universities and colleges collectively added 517,636 administrators and professional employees, or an average of 87 every working day."

Much like capital, there is a tendency for bureaucracy to expand as long as resources can facilitate this expansion. Increasing enrollments and continually

rising college tuition (paid for by the one trillion dollars of student debt currently owed by U.S. students) provide the resources for university bureaucracy to grow, adding more administrators in the university to control organic elements of student and faculty life. With these outcome-oriented, profit-driven connotations now affixed to these elements, the university can charge higher tuition or transform formerly free experiences into revenue-generating ones, further enabling the university, and the bureaucracy within it, to grow.

This cycle and the specific practices that create its motion are crucial aspects of the "managed university." Encapsulating several of the characteristics previously described, Marc Bousquet (2004) provides a definition of this designation:

> "the managed university names a global phenomenon: the forced privatization of public higher education; the erosion of faculty, student, and citizen participation in higher education policy except through academic-capitalist and consumerist practices; the steady conversion of socially beneficial activities to the commodity form" (p. 25).

Power is the determining factor uniting all of these characteristics. Returning to Weber's original analysis, bureaucracy functions as a rationalist expression of power and control. The university becomes a controlled space; the ontology of the university transformed and redefined to better facilitate efficiency and capitalist imperatives. Disempowering and fracturing the laboring body of the university enables more rigid management.

While these initiatives carry problematic implications, what is perhaps most frustrating to educators is the duplicitous rhetoric often employed by the managed university. Integrating bureaucratic processes with increased

frequency, the university's rhetoric frequently conveys the message that nothing has changed. The original educational principles that created the university system are portrayed as intact if not enhanced, despite tremendous shifts within the inner mechanisms of the university itself. In "Bureaucratic Essentialism and the Corporatization of Composition," Christopher Carter (2004) alludes to this notion, arguing that the administrative body in many colleges employs bureaucratic discourse to reinforce the current power structure:

> "though they pretend to reluctantly accommodate the realities of corporatization, such realties may be precisely what they want and need to remain in position. The more naturally present corporate hierarchy seems, the less effort the managers have to expend to justify the outlandish inequalities pervading that reality" (p. 190).

Under these circumstances, rhetoric is an instrument of power, one that shapes the institutional narrative—weaving a tapestry with threads of reality and fabrication. The managed university is an organization that seeks to create and control communication. The next section will discuss specific nuances of bureaucratic communication within the managed university, illustrating how often empty language serves as stable hegemonic foundation.

Fabrications of Excellence in the Managed University

Bureaucracies are communicative organizations, but what proves intriguing is how they are also rhetorical. Rhetoric's subjective character belies the rationalist account of bureaucracy. However, as an organization of intellectual labor, expressions of such language become inevitable. This is particularly in the university system where there are stigmas attributed to bureaucracy. One crucial principle of postmodern bureaucracy is not to appear as a bureaucracy, language acting as a shroud to mask the iron cage.

Up to this point, "rhetoric" has been used in something of a pejorative sense. Understanding bureaucratic rhetoric is to conceptualize it as a mobilization of language practices that express bureaucratic neutrality. As Weber suggests, bureaucrats have a tendency to conceal power relations and activities from both the general public and those within the bureaucracy to reinforce its hierarchical structure. This occurs through the installation of a complex hierarchy and the reduction of transparency within the system.

Bureaucratic rhetoric further acts as a means of concealment, enabling administrators to disrupt transparency and craft a narrative that facilitates the maintenance of the bureaucracy. In "Distributed Leadership in Higher Education: Rhetoric and Reality," Richard Bolden, Georgy Petrov and Jonathan Gosling (2009) discuss how the utilization of certain terms mask the underlying power relations within the managed university:

> "as with all rhetoric, however, there is a potential shadow side whereby talk of 'distributed leadership' may simply disguise the underlying dynamics of power and influence within universities and be used to mask creeping managerialism" (p. 258).

"Distributed leadership" is but one term in an extensive list of concepts and practices that strike a deepening boundary between rhetoric and reality; these concepts, as Cooke and Cabral allude to, are designed to help the university run more efficiently and effectively, but this efficiency comes at the cost. Martin Cartwright (2007) studies and critiques the notion of "Quality Assurance" and its embodiment in U.K. universities, arguing that there is a disconnect between discourse and practice in higher education systems that are compelled to adopt bureaucratic standards to dictate institutional activities even as these standards largely to serve to routinize education. Critiquing performance-based budgeting,

Annette Beresford (2000) discusses how this process is so detached from the reality of the institution that it acquires a simulated character:

> "Familiar symbols in communication can be understood as information that is disconnected from any 'true' context and valuable by virtue of its own substance" (p. 481).

This language touches numerous aspects of the university experience. Moreover, this rhetoric is reinforced with reports, documentation, assessments, statistics, and metrics. This pervasive 'culture of evidence 'is a great rhetorical device, one that effectively blurs the dividing line separating discourse and reality. The purposes of this rhetoric are multi-faceted. Some of it falls within the marketing ambit of the bureaucracy, drawing students into the university. Another part of it falls within the realm of interacting with the state, which, in the United States, has cut funding to universities (Rosenbaum, 2017). In both cases, evidence acts a form of currency to obtain actual currency. The nature of this evidence, however, is rarely called into question. Instead, U.S. universities are often inclined to bombard stakeholders with evidence, quantifying the seemingly innumerable aspects of the university experience to prove its value.

Perhaps more than any other term, a single word embodies the first aim of bureaucratic rhetoric, a word that drives university practice even though it is charged with so much meaning that the word is seemingly devoid of value. The word is *excellence*. In *The Uses of the University*, Clark Kerr (1963/2011) points to the near mystical implications of the term:

> "It is almost obligatory in educational circles these days to support 'excellence' and 'balance.' They are the two magic words" (p. 56).

With a variety of applications, the rule of excellence pervades virtually every aspect of the higher education experience, a much sought after goal that obscures the university's purpose as much as it clarifies it (Smith, 1986). Excellence is a measure of academics, faculty, and student life. However, what cannot be ignored is that excellence is far more a rhetorical term than the objective standard it portrays.

Although buoyed by rankings, criteria, and assessment metrics, excellence is but a marker that designates a vague and arbitrary conceptualization of success. Bill Readings (1996), in *The University in Ruins*, argues that excellence is but a signifier attached to a vacuous, albeit dangerous, signified that corrodes the very meaning of higher education:

> "the appeal to excellence marks the fact that there is no longer any idea of the University, or rather that the idea has now lost all content. As a non-referential unit of value entirely internal to the system, excellence marks nothing more than the moment of technology's self-reflection" (p. 39).

Readings points to a bureaucratic quality in excellence, one of technocratic significance within the university system, but lacking meaning outside of it.

The university's emphasis on excellence further exemplifies the discordance between the richly humanist and complex nature of education and bureaucratic linearity. Particularly in terms of corporate bureaucracy, excellence is more ascertainable in that a corporation's success is almost purely denoted by its ability to generate profit; otherwise, the corporation falters. Such determinations are far more difficult to make in the realm of education. What makes an excellent student or an excellent teacher? Certainly, one can point to any number of characteristics, but doing so would gloss over a substantial part of the

narrative. Judging a student's 'excellence 'by merely examining that student's grades (as it often is) ignores what makes education meaningful for the people participating in the process. Judging an institution is a different process, but one must first ascertain the purpose of an institution and what standards are utilized to assess it. If bureaucratic standards are utilized, then discipline and efficiency become the hallmarks of excellence. The drive towards efficient universities is frequently embedded in this discussion of excellence, reflecting bureaucratic imperatives. Discussing how universities interface with bureaucratic New Pubic Management (NPM) characteristics, Chris Lorenz (2012) discusses the tension between bureaucracy and faculty autonomy:

> "It is no coincidence therefore that the obsessive rhetoric about professionalization started at the same time as the NPM managers made their appearance in the universities" (p. 616).

Efficiency, like many functions within the managed university, can be both a material process and a term embedded in the discourse. However, in running a university like a business, the careful cultivation of intellectual interests can become marginalized in favor of efficiencies in the classroom and in other facets of student life. Efficiency becomes difficult to localize as other departments and organizations within the university endeavor to become more "efficient," often for its own sake. Daniel Saunders (2010) speaks to this increased proliferation in efficiency rhetoric and practice:

> "changes in the name of efficiency are not limited to the academic labor market, as institutions are increasingly outsourcing their periphery (and sometimes core) functions…As these areas become privatized, their educational focus becomes secondary to profit generation and corporate success" (p. 58).

Superficially regarded as a positive process, efficiency becomes mismatched to the aims of education and instead facilitates more control and elimination of programs and services deemed too costly or unwieldly for bureaucratic management.

In terms of language practices, efficiency, therefore, falls into umbrella terms of excellence—a powerful bureaucratic term with a potential multiplicity of meaning. In *Rhetoric and Resistance in the Corporate Academy*, Christopher Carter (2008) links the fetishization of excellence with capitalist objectives, arguing that

> "the term surfaces in a number of institutional categories in ways that reveal higher education's support of the globalizing aspirations of capitalism. Although excellence means different things in different contexts, those things tend to assume international free-market rivalries as natural goods" (p. 33).

Excellence is a term of mystification. Subsuming more nuanced understandings of things and processes, excellence serves as a rhetorical signifier, one that is correlational to the markets of commodities and services. David Graber (2015) conceptualizes this process as fundamental to bureaucracy, arguing that

> "bureaucratic knowledge is all about schematization. In practice, bureaucratic procedure invariably means ignoring all the subtleties of real social existence and reducing everything to preconceived mechanical or statistical formulae…it's always a matter of simplification" (p. 75).

Simplification is a foundational element of bureaucracy. Bureaucracies are instituted to break down tasks too complex for a single individual and dispersing those pieces through an intellectual division of labor, each division specialized for the particular sub-task. Interestingly enough, contemporary

bureaucracy's emphasis on simplification obscures as much as it facilitates linearity. 'Excellence's readily accessible and understandable, but it becomes generalized to a point of near-meaninglessness as the complexities contributing to the utilization of the term are blanketed.

Bureaucracy has little appreciation for the specific or the unquantifiable, so handy catch-all terms like 'excellence 'are employed to transmute the specificities of experience into that which can be more readily absorbed into the bureaucratic apparatus. This is in no small part a result of how bureaucratic mechanisms interface with individuals. In the managed university, students and staff are treated as human capital. This determination can yield dehumanizing implications for parties involved, for much like a business or corporation, faculty-as-labor and students-as-consumers become marginalized variables, exploited in the name of profit (Heaney, 2015). Bureaucracies function as integral parts of this experience, intertwining in both the labor apparatus and the consumer experience to increase fluidity of profit and exert a more powerful locus of control. Such imperatives manifest quite frequently at a communicative level.

Within the managed university, the bureaucratic system of advisors and staff professionals absorb face-to-face communications (questions about programs and courses, discussions regarding the student experience, and various complaints) that were formerly assumed by faculty. Although faculty may appreciate not having to perform administrative tasks, this separation routinizes the college experience for many students, removing organic discourse between students and faculty and supplanting it with predetermined conversations between students and designated professionals. Glen Godwin and William Markham (1996) conclude in their study that students conceptualize bureaucracy as part of the natural order of university life:

> "it is very likely that most clients, especially organizational newcomers like college freshmen, will define bureaucracy as part of the natural order of things and as relatively efficient, viewing any problems they encounter as minor irritants or isolated incidents" (p. 688).

The managed university functions under the cover of language, enabling greater control and expansion through various realms of experience. Regarded as a natural way of things, bureaucracy has enforced considerable ontological and discursive limitation on the university, instilling uniformity to complex, heterogeneous social and educational processes. Every day, students and faculty speak to the organization that rarely listens, but rather divides and translates their discourse into a different language bereft of organic content.

Bureaucracy as if It Was Not There

One of the findings in David Graeber's (2015) book, *Utopia of Rules*, is that the word, 'bureaucracy, 'reached its apex, in terms of usage in the literature, in the late 1970s and has been on a steep declined since then. Bureaucracy and its influence in our lives have not decreased during this time, but have become more pervasive. The decrease is ideological in constitution. People take bureaucracy for granted to such a point that it dulls the critical senses. One feature of bureaucracy is convincing us that it is not there. People outside of the university system do not commonly perceive the university as a bureaucracy. Moreover, in the Internet age, the globalized, network society seemingly runs counter to the rigid, static nature often attributed to bureaucracy to the point that some are declaring that the rule of bureaucracy is over.

Nevertheless, bureaucracy remains a crucial facet of organizational culture, proliferating into the university. Intertwined with invasive capitalist imperatives

and the neoliberal order, bureaucracy gains new postmodern enhancements, particularly in relation to the narrative that organizations control. In "Academic Resistance to the Neoliberal University," Mary Heath and Peter Burdon (2013) contend that

> "neoliberalism works on us without our consent and despite our motivations as well as being actively taken up by us in conscious ways, constraining us as well as constructing us and being constructed through our responses to it" (p. 386).

There is a neutral character to bureaucratic structures. On the surface, there seems like there is no better way to best organize a professional institution. However, as Heath and Burdon allude to, bureaucracy is rather unnatural and our understandings of it are informed and manipulated through the structures already in existence.

As the complicity with university bureaucracy increases, administrators continue integrating modes of labor control and supervision. Ase Gornitzka, Svein Kyvik, and Ingvild Marheim Larsen (1998), describe how the managed university reflects these processes:

> "in a decentralised and fragmented decision-making system as found within universities, there are few centres or strong and unitary leadership that might be able to curb administration growth" (p. 47).

University bureaucracy has expanded in the past twenty-five years to the point that it has become engorged with administrative and bureaucratic positions that do little to advance the actual mission of the university, but primarily seek to manage it.

The rhetorical practices utilized by university bureaucracy not only further establish the management apparatus, but enable management to divert time, resources, and labor from actual educational activities and praxis to maintain and expand the bureaucracy. In essence, through the systems of rhetoric, coupled with material expressions of power, university labor and interaction are becoming increasingly bureaucratized in order for the managed university to more seamlessly interface with itself and reimagine the university as a corporatized site. University profits are up as are enrollments, degrees issued, and tuition. Faculty and staff powers becoming increasingly fragmented as their relations with students and peers become bureaucratized. The essence of bureaucracy—that Weber exposed and which still persists today—is irreconcilable to the essence of the university.

More critical conversations need to occur regarding both the rhetoric and the reality of the managed university. The gradual divestment of faculty power (e.g., the erosion of tenure, the increased reliance on adjunct and graduate student labor, and the reconceptualization of departmental programs) requires greater resistance as a more organic and humanist mode of organization must act to balance the bureaucratic organization. Conversations within these organizations should focus on the nature of bureaucratic language within their institution, and the material practices that this discourse reflects.

As Weber discusses, there is a deeply alienating tendency in bureaucracy. Each individual is rendered an interchangeable cog in the larger machine; the gears continue to grind towards maximum efficiency. Although the bureaucracy is a communicative organization, conversations within the system, critiquing it, are often silenced. Students, staff, and faculty cannot allow this to take place, but need to organize in order to discuss under what conditions work is being accomplished. There is always an impulse in the university to pursue the

external. A faculty member's work is often outside the university and inside the discipline where research is performed. However, those who work within the university need to cast their critical perspectives towards the university itself in order to preserve this institution and the outstanding way of life that it offers for future generations. This can only occur through authentic conversations that honestly examine and discuss how power is distributed and to what ends power is being employed.

Merely waiting for bureaucracy to reach a point of satiation is pointless. Like capital, bureaucracy is a social relation that continually beckons growth as long as there are resources available. Counter-expressions of rhetoric and action are needed, lest the managed university and the people's university become indistinguishable.

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