

Revisioning Bureaucracy for more Effective Government

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Sitting around the Round Table, producing new fashions in etiquette was the ruination of King Arthur's court. While the knights tended to blame Guinevere, it was their own addiction to playing cosmetic games that destroyed Camelot.

What do Camelot and the Round Table have to do with today's organization? Politicians and government critics love to sit around the table and talk about bureaucrats, the Guinevere's of the American Camelot.

There are only two problems. First, Guinevere isn't to blame. The fault maybe with the knights who seem not to understand bureaucracy and who have provided little in the way of leadership for revisioning bureaucracy.

Second, the knights are long on stories but short on practical and conceptual strategies for revitalizing Camelot. In fact, most don't have a clue of what bureaucracy is.

Bureaucracy has run its course. The knights are right. The irony is that the knights don't seem willing to revision bureaucracy. Instead, they devote much time and energy to nostalgia, ideology and principles which won't improve or revision bureaucracy.

What is bureaucracy? First, bureaucracy exists when the coordination and responsibility for control of work resides above those performing the work. Second, the design of the work system is the responsibility of experts and managers. Third, bureaucracy breaks down work process into fragments. These fragments are called, departments. It also involves breaking downs work into repetitive simple tasks. Fourth, hierarchy is a characteristic of bureaucracy as is we vs. them. Hierarchy maintains power and directs control upwards. Fifth, bureaucracy creates more and more A, B. and C people with limited knowledge. In other words, we can become as Humpty Dumpty without the intelligence to know we can't put ourselves together again. Finally, the predominate images of bureaucracy are mechanical as the machine and factory.

You might ask yourself:

Do our organizations operate as if it were a mass production factory? Do they liberate employees and individuals? Or, does they shift and/or maintain power and control upward? Do our organizations have unnecessary paper work, controls, policies and regulations? Or, do they add value to citizen and people's lives? Are we directed by intelligence and knowledge? Or, are we grounded in hierarchy and ideology?

Revisioning Bureaucracy: The Process and Methods

How can you in ending and revisioning bureaucracy? Four methodologies are proposed to achieve required outcomes: (1) Scouting, (2) Open Space conference, (3) Search conferencing and (4) Participatory Work Design conferencing. These methodologies will produce the following outcomes: (1) information and knowledge for dealing with these challenges, (2) a future vision, (3) vision implementation action plans, (4) a coordinating structure for action plan implementation, (5) a redesign of organizational work systems to support collaboration and (6) a "real world" collaborative experience.

Scouting

First, scouting would be undertaken. Scouting is the process of organizing, gathering and using external information and knowledge for continuous and discontinuous improvement. (See bibliography for in depth scouting characterization and examples of uses.)

Scouting involves the following tasks:

Scouting Tasks

- * Define Scouting Purpose.
- * Create Scouting design team.
- * Characterize Scouting organizing form.
- * Select Scouting information sources.
- * Engage in actual scouting.
- * Assess scouting findings.
- * Prepare scouting finding materials.
- * Disseminate materials and/or create and implement scouting action plans.

Scouting supports personnel in experiencing collaborative methods. It also supports the need for existing system change and may provide insights and models for supporting change. Finally, it reduces implementation anxiety by providing tangible successful examples.

Open Space Fact Finding and Energy Developing Conferences

Second is conducting Open Space conferences. An Open Space conference is large group self-organizing conference. This conference represents a rapid and quality fact finding methodology. The conference is open to whoever wishes to participate. Participants would be provided with scouting results. In fact, scouting participants would likely participate.

Open Space Conference Stages

- * Preconference Work with
- * Open Space Design and Conference Implementation Team
- * Conference Performance
- * Editing

- * of Conference Proceeding
- * Dissemination of Conference Proceeding

It has a single theme. It's guided by four principles: (1) whoever attends are the right people, (2) whatever happens is the only thing that could happen, (3) whenever it starts is the right time, and (4) when it's over, it's over. Participants would self-organize into groups to explore issues and develop alternatives. Each would produce a verbal full conference presentation and a written text. In fact, lap top computers and video recorders might be provided for text writing and to document discussions.

This text and video would be the conference product and outcome.

Open Space Conference Outline

- * Introduction by the sponsor
- * Conference Management Team Introduction
- * Statement of Conference Team
- * Statement of Expected Outcomes
- * Conference Constraints and Commitment Statement
- * Introduction to How the Conference Works
- * Housekeeping Statement
- * Introduction to Open Space Principles
- * The Actual Conference Begins
- * Presentation of Conference Outcomes
- * Conference Closure

The text, conference proceeding and video would be presented to executives, managers, organizational stakeholders and people unable to attend for additional comment and review. A team composed of stakeholders could be formed for comment review and to finalize a document. A similar processes would also be used for documenting and sharing scouting findings.

Search Conferences: Creating Common Ground and a Shared Desired Future

Third, Open Space conference proceedings would be feed into a Search conference(s). (See bibliography for in depth Search conference methodology characterization and case studies.) Search conference participants would also engage, if necessary, in additional fact finding.

This might take the form of structured interviews and/or participant environ scans as presented in the Search methodology.

Dealing with organizational redesign requires creating "common ground" and a shared vision amongst competing groups' mind sets, viewpoints and economic interests. A Search conference would be used to support "common ground" visioning. Search conferences have been design for this purpose and possess a track record for creating common ground.

Search conference is based on the following assumptions.

Search Conference Assumptions

- * Ordinary people have real world knowledge and can organize it.
- * Ordinary people can self-organize and perform tasks without experts.
- * People can create their own futures.
- * People want opportunities to use their bodies, minds and hearts.
- * People prefer cooperation to competition.
- * Developing shared perceptions is critical to create a new context for shaping the future and action plan formulation.
- * Egalitarian participation supports more productive and effective conferences, visioning and action planning.
- * Diversity must be respected, appreciated and valued.
- * Developing shared reality perceptions is critical to understanding the environ.
- * Effective and successful change arises from involving all stakeholders in the design, development and implementation process.
- * Designing the conference and change process is as critical as conducting the session and implementing plans.

Search conference involves participants performing the following selected tasks.

Search Conference Tasks

- * Changes in the world important into the future
- * Trends and forces directly affecting our system
- * Common history of our system
- * Our current system: what to keep, throw-out and create
- * Desirable future of our system
- * Engaging in Action Planning
- * End of the search conference: community diffusion and plan implementing

Search outcomes would be a vision and action plans. It ought to also support community social structure development: a social network which provides for focus actions amongst diverse groups.

Participatory Work Design Conference

Vision and action plan coordination and implementation would result from the establishment of democratic self-managing teams arising from the Search conference. These teams would coordinate implementation activities. A modified Participatory Work Design conference could be used to establish the teams and their coordination processes and structures. And, it would be the first step in supporting system wide collaboration. Such conferences would also be used to revision the existing organization.

The following are the assumptions upon which a Participatory design conference is based

Participatory Design Conference Assumptions

- * Organizational members have important knowledge and can organized it to design and improve their work place.
- * Organizational members can self-organize and perform work redesign tasks without experts.
- * People can create their own work place. And / or system.
- * People want opportunities to use their bodies, minds and hearts.
- * People prefer task diversity.
- * People prefer cooperation to competition.
- * Democratic participation supports more productive and effective work system design.
- * Effective and successful change arises from involving those performing the work in the design, development and implementation process.

Participatory Work Design conferences (PWD) could also be deployed for work system redesign to support collaboration and the development of clusters. The following are the productive and effective work conditions guiding a PWD conference.

Conditions for Productive and Effective Work

- * People want adequate elbow room to influence their work and to make decisions without asking permission with a knowledge of the work to be performed.
- * People want to continually learn by setting challenging goals and receiving time results feedback.
- * People need task performance variety.
- * People want cooperation and support from their co-workers.
- * People want meaningful work which contributes to improving other's lives and contributes to improved social welfare.
- * People want work which allows them to advance, improve and develop their potential.

PWD conference involves participants performing the following tasks.

Participatory Design Conference Tasks

- * Presentation of the differences between democratic self-managing organization and effective and productive working conditions and bureaucracy.
- * Assessment how work is presently done.
- * Assessment of where and how the current way of working falls short of six conditions for effective and productive work.
- * Work place redesign based on democratic self-managing organization, effective and productive working conditions.
- * New work place action implementation plan development.

PWD conferencing, with scouting gained knowledge and ideas, will afford organizational members the opportunity to revision the existing system as not only to improve collaboration, service delivery and resource utilization but also staff working conditions.

Revisioning Bureaucracy: Concluding Thought

When asked what was the most difficult challenge and biggest fear experienced, Baldrige Quality Award winning company leaders stated, "giving up control." City, state, and federal executives, mayors, governors, state legislators and council members may face the same when considering this process. Control will have to be given up. But as Baldrige leaders found, people can rise to challenges, have much to contribute when presented with responsibility, and can make quality and community improving contributions. So can parents, public servants and taxpayers. The question is: Isn't your community, state and nation's future worth facing this challenge and fear?

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