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COMMUNICATION DISTURBANCES IN A WELFARE BUREAUCRACY
A CASE FOR SELF-MANAGEMENT

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The survey data in this study of 1313 caseworkers and income-maintenance workers of the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare provide some elements of a description of white-collar alienation in government bureaucracies. We interpret our findings to indicate that the hierarchical communication network of this department operates to deny implicitly the worth and intelligence of workers. As perceived by employees, the general pattern of message construction, message transmission and message acknowledgment takes no account of their needs for information and validation nor does it allow the information generated at the work place to be fed back to the administration. Thus, the impact of much departmental communication is both disorienting and dysfunctional to many workers. It is disorienting because of the discrepancy between the official goals of humane service and assistance delivery to the poor and disabled and bureaucratic regulations and procedures which hamper the achievement of those goals. It is dysfunctional in that it promotes worker hostility, indifference and ignorance.

The younger, better educated workers in the urban and metropolitan areas come to their jobs in welfare apparently with high expectations of meeting a challenge, making a contribution and finding some fulfillment in their work. These expectations are replaced by aggressive resistance and finally depression and withdrawal. During this process many leave shortly after receiving expensive training. Under these conditions, worker adaptation is dominated by narrow and fixed patterns that often are harmful to both worker development and to clients. To the extent that workers care about client needs and apply their ingenuity in meeting them, their activities clash with the web of welfare rules and regulations. These rules are ambiguous and contradictory reflecting the various conflicts between federal, state, and local government officers and agencies over welfare policy. For example, 61% of the employees reported receiving instructions "which no one really expects me to carry out," 39% said they received incompatible requests and nearly 60% said that it was difficult to know what was expected of them on the job.

More than two-thirds of the workers reported they bent, ignored, conveniently forgot, or otherwise subverted

departmental rules. But this necessary "getting around the rules" is achieved at the cost of making caseworkers and income-maintenance workers vulnerable to disciplinary action. The better the work performed in terms of the client, the more likely this quality is obtained through rule-breaking and the more likely punishment and dismissal for the worker. Under these circumstances the client, particularly the difficult or more needy client, becomes a threat to the worker's survival. This may result in a "creaming" which neglects the poorest of the poor (Miller, et al., 1970).

We found in our field interviews that employees had a rational, detailed understanding of their practical job problems, being particularly sensitive to the monthly and weekly interruptions of work flow caused by administrative audits, grant changes, and special projects. Discussions beyond their immediate situation were dominated by projections and fantasy even though their ideas were extrapolated from their daily experience. In a sense, the welfare bureaucracy works. While information transfer is difficult, real skills are developed and practiced by individual workers. But these skills are learned and employed in isolation, for there are few opportunities to share them with other workers or to utilize the criticism of others to improve them. The work gets done but under conditions of general disorganization without benefit of coordination, coherence, or learning. In adapting to these conditions, workers come to be at war with their work, their clients, and their fellow workers.

The Theoretical Approach

Many communication studies of bureaucracies are based on a "management information system" model which fails to comprehend the unique characteristics of human communication systems. Such studies assume that information systems can be improved to the extent that machines can be substituted for human processing. Indeed, the underlying goal of this technocratic approach to communication seems to be the elimination of human components altogether (Miller, 1967). Summarizing the results to date of efforts to investigate and improve communication systems in welfare

bureaucracies, Ida Hoos concludes:

> The inevitable and universal result in public welfare agencies has not been "management information systems" of a type that could conceivably clarify objectives or improve operations or by any stretch of the imagination reduce welfare costs. Almost the exact opposite has occurred. Expensive and burdensome data-processing systems are factors in consuming resources already scarce.
>
> (1974)

An alternate view, provided by human communication theory, emphasizes people as the most significant element of any system. This view is more concrete and empirical, since what we actually see when we observe a human institution is people talking, writing, sending, reading, and receiving messages. It is also a more critical perspective, since within it human behavior is understood to be constrained by the quality and quantity of available information. The works of psychologists such as Ruesch, Bateson, and Laing, for example, stress the importance of communication for the health and productivity of the individual (Ruesch, 1957; Bateson, et al., 1956; Laing and Esterson, 1970). Their theories postulate that what we call psychopathology is "in essence a disturbance of communicative behavior . . . ." (Ruesch, 1961). As an example of such theories, Ruesch maintains that human beings have an innate need to communicate and that interference with that need is both frustrating and incapacitating. His general theory of communication is based on three assumptions:

> 1) "that information controls action;
> 2) that feedback of the effects of action changes the informational state of the cell, organ, organism, or group; and
> 3) that this new informational state becomes the base for the next action."
>
> (Ruesch, 1966)

Thus, psychopathology may be due to disturbances in the network in which a person lives or works, in the person's techniques of communication, or in the person's ability to process information. In the case of widespread frustrations, failures, and frozen responses in an organization, the network and procedures of the communication system are at once suspect.

Human communication theory provides a lens for viewing bureaucracies in terms of their disturbing impact on individuals. Such an approach is appropriate for taking a "bottom up" view of bureaucratic dysfunctions, a view which suggests not a change in human beings, but instead a redesign and reform of organizations.

We decided to use Ruesch's theory to question how the delivery of welfare assistance and service might be made more efficient and effective by increasing caseworker participation in communication system operation and design. Specifically, we wanted to discover the potentials of the information generated by employees in their daily work for criticizing and correcting policies and regulations. Initially we found that the information generated at the point of client contact took the form of anxiety-induced gripes and complaints about department failures and client problems. We encountered what a communications engineer would call "noise." But this "noise" was not something that could be filtered out or overcome like the static in a telephone line. It was not random or orthogonal to the directing messages of the welfare bureaucracy. Rather, it was a systematic response to certain dysfunctional procedures and inadequate content of organizational communications. We took our task as social scientists to be the articulation of this "noise" as a critical analysis of the impact of the communication system of the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare on caseworkers and income-maintenance workers.

By categorizing the workers' remarks and observations in terms of Ruesch's typology of communication disturbances, we constructed a questionnaire designed to measure three types of variables. We asked our sample of non-supervisory personnel what general kinds of communication difficulties they perceived, what kinds of actions and attitudes they employed to overcome such difficulties and, finally, what

kinds of defensive and perhaps faulty communication habits they had acquired. We labeled these classifications of variables: 1) communication disturbances; 2) remedial responses; and 3) communication distortions. We theorized that a description of the dynamics of the alienation of white-collar workers in a bureaucracy would show a positive relationship between these types of variables. In the shorthand terms we adopted to talk about this complex dynamic, we hypothesized that perceptions of communication disturbances result in remedial responses promoting individual distortions of communication. This dynamic becomes viciously circular when administrators cite evidence of individual worker distortion as a rationale for the imposition of dysfunctional authoritarian communication procedures.

The dysfunctions of bureaucratic communications result primarily from a systematic neglect of the implicit aspects of message transfers. That is, top-down, hierarchical communication systems may be "rational" in some abstract sense but, according to human communication theory, they deny rules basic to the successful exchange of information. All human communication takes place on at least two levels. There is the explicit message conveyed by words or numbers and the implicit message conveyed by voice tone, gestures, vocabulary, style, etc. The implicit messages provide us with the information necessary to interpret the explicit messages.

In large organizations the implicit messages of face to face communication are often missing. Employees must rely on formal aspects of messages for guides to interpretation. Thus, the written language--bureaucratic or casual; the form--order, request, advice; the channel source--official or grapevine, etc. must be relied on to discern the often unknown sender's intention. Likewise, the timing of messages, the volume of messages or the promptness with which messages are responded to are all utilized by workers to interpret the official, explicit messages of the organization.

While the neglect of implicit messages makes bureaucratic organizations ponderous, inefficient, and unable to learn from their mistakes, it also may make such organizations functional in terms of larger social policies. For

example, several authors have argued that poor delivery is important to twin functions of the welfare system--maintaining order among the poor and enforcing the work ethic (Piven and Cloward, 1971; Galper, 1975). According to this view, adequate, accessible, and humane welfare services and income maintenance would eliminate the pressure to accept low-paying and/or mind-killing jobs and thus undermine the structure of authority in the work place. But inadequate, inaccessible, inhumane welfare workers might promote unrest and rebellion among those on public relief, threatening authority of structures with demonstrations and riots. The welfare system in American society in the mid-20th century seems to require inefficient, demeaning delivery and the dedication of personnel to the goals of efficient, humane delivery. This paradoxical situation is possible to achieve, this study shows, but at the cost of the self-respect, the competence and the well-being of the welfare worker.

Implicit messages are potentially disturbing and even damaging because they tell receivers who and what the administrative senders think they are. In a typical bureaucratic setting when too many messages are sent down the line, when messages are always in the form of commands, or when messages are expressed in an unshared jargon, the implicit message is the denial of the worth of the receiver. When the implicit message denies the workers' worth or when the implicit message is incongruous with the explicit message, it is likely that the directives of the sender will be interpreted in unpredictable and hostile ways. In bureaucracies, of course, it is nearly impossible for the administrative sender to discover this and it is against the rules of subordination for the receivers to call attention to inadequate, contradictory, and/or irrelevant instructions.

Worker compensations for such dysfunctional communication include filtering out explicit messages, discounting the intelligence of administrative senders, bending the rules, and avoiding communication as much as possible. These "remedial responses" enable employees to deal temporarily with the problem by discounting official instructions and substituting personal judgment to guide casework. But in the long run these responses tend to result in withdrawal,

frustration, and futility. Since the bureaucratic communication disturbances don't cease, but may even increase because of administrative perception of worker resistence, workers are faced with the implication that they lack the proper capacities to communicate or that the organization is incorrigibly destructive. The first implication is not compatible with necessary human self-esteem and the second implication is not compatible with continued employment.

The last line of defense for workers under these conditions is the utilization of communication for the reduction of anxiety rather than the accurate transmission of information. Rigid habits of sending, receiving, and interpreting messages on the bases of internal need rather than any assessment of others, or the social context, are developed. Such habits or "individual distortions" constitute the practice of functional autism protecting workers from their ability to evaluate the impact of their efforts to aid clients.

Findings

Drawing a clustered random sample of 1350 caseworkers and income-maintenance workers in twenty-two counties of the state, we successfully administered 1313 written interviews exploring communication disturbances. (See Spence and O'Connor, 1975.) The anonymity of respondents was assured and maintained. The questionnaire was designed to measure four kinds of communication disturbances, four areas of remedial responses, and several varieties of habitual communication distortions.

A. Communication Disturbances.

In terms of communication disturbances, results showed that workers perceived that they were barraged with too many messages to process adequately. These messages, in turn, were frequently seen as vague, inconsistent, surprising and difficult to interpret. When workers asked for clarification or additional information, or offered suggestions for improvement, administrative responses were perceived as often absent, too late to do any good, frequently frenzied and judgmental or simply irrelevant. Further, we found the communication

network and its procedures were reported to be beset by patterns of rigid rules, repetitiveness and surveillance practices. These perceived disturbances gave workers the impression that the administration did not understand the conditions and problems of welfare delivery well enough to formulate adequate policies and regulations meant to be taken seriously.

We have been careful to speak of perceptions of communication disturbances rather than disturbances themselves. Although we were provided with many anecdotes of disturbances (e.g., workers not receiving responses to simple questions directed to the administration in Harrisburg), we have not sought to verify that disturbances exist. Such an enterprise seemed unnecessary to us after we spoke informally with many workers and administrators, and observed the work of the department. No observer with whom we spoke denied that disturbances were rife. Instead, we sought to determine which kinds of disturbances were perceived and what sorts of remedial behaviors were related to those perceptions. Faced with disturbances, some workers will leave the organization while others will defend themselves by not perceiving the disturbances. We found, as we expected, that younger, better educated workers in the more urban and metropolitan areas of the state were more likely to report communication disturbances. While in general the more education, the more likely are disturbances perceived, those workers holding M.A. or M.S.W. degrees were less likely to report such disturbances. In counties with less than 50 employees, 60% perceived little or no disturbances while the same figures for counties employing between 100 and 200 workers was 40% and went down to 26% in Philadelphia county. Length of service was weakly related to disturbance perception. Workers who had been in the department for more than one year but less than two reported the highest levels of disturbances. Perceptions of disturbance were not related to sex, income, or size of caseload. Workers perceiving disturbances were more likely to intend leaving the department and were more likely to be critical of the Pennsylvania Social Service Union.

Table I: Percentage of Workers Perceiving Specific Communication Disturbances

Disturbance	% Reporting
Messages do not result in prompt responses	80.3
Too many messages to read or digest	76.6
Officials do not understand daily casework problems	75.6
Officials preoccupied with enforcing bureaucratic rules	63.2
Messages inconsistent	55.0
Failure to acknowledge messages	46.9
Responses frenzied and overbearing	44.5
Messages vague	44.4
Messages surprising	44.3
Records checked excessively	42.2
Instructions are not meant seriously	38.3
Messages difficult to interpret	35.6
Messages repetitive	30.7

B. Remedial Responses.

We found that caseworkers and income-maintenance workers tended to respond to these communication disturbances with

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Table I-A: Relationships Between Perceptions of Communication Disturbances and Other Variables[1]

	Age	Education	County Size	Length of Service	Union Effective	Intention to Leave
Tau*	-.27	.17	.17	-.14	-.18	.23
Gamma	-.35	.27	.23	-.17	-.28	.47
N	1209	1164	1277	1198	1202	1257

*The correlation coefficients used throughout this paper are Kendall's tau_b (for square tables), Kendall's tau_c (for rectangular tables) and gamma. All three of these ordinal statistics vary from +1.0, indicating a perfect positive relationship, to -1.0, indicating a perfect negative relationship. A score of 0.0 would indicate that the two variables are not at all related to each other; knowing an individual's score on one variable would not help in predicting her score on the other variable. A coefficient of -0.27 means that as the value of one variable increases, the value of the second variable is likely to decrease. However, the strength of this relationship is not so strong as to preclude many exceptions. For example, a person who scores as perceiving many communication disturbances is more likely to be younger. But, since the coefficient is only -0.27, there are many exceptions who are younger but perceive no disturbances or who are older but perceive many disturbances.

Both taus and gammas are reported because gamma is a liberal measure which may overestimate the strength of relationships while tau is a more conservative measure in its assumptions. Given the exploratory nature of this work and the vicissitudes in human questionnaire responses, we are inclined to advocate the gamma measure although more rigorously inclined readers will undoubtedly prefer tau.

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general patterns of resistance and hostility. Not only do such disturbances lead to inadequate information about objectives, policies and regulations, they produce reactions of aggression and avoidance. Workers seemed to respond to communication failures in ways that allowed them to a) deal with information deficiencies in terms of how regulations were intended, and were to be interpreted and b) handle their own aggressive reactions to the implied denials of their worth. At the emotional level, workers engaged in affect-laden but indirect protest which conveys the message--"don't talk to me like that" (Giffin, 1970). At the first or functional level, workers engaged in filling the gaps, rationalizing, and generating sufficient information to prevent paralysis (Campbell, 1958; Bavelas, 1960).

Table II: Percentage of Workers Reporting Remedial Responses

Remedial Response	% Reporting
Ignore one or more regulations	72.0
Department needs housecleaning at top	71.3
Regulations don't make good sense	70.9
Reform ideas don't look good	67.0
Would not communicate helpful information	56.5
Try to look busy	50.0
Spend little effort on information requests	42.7
Filter administrative message	39.4
Bend rules often	37.2

We labeled both types of responses as remedial--meaning an activity or attitude on the part of the worker which makes it possible to get the job done and make sense of the situation.

Table II-A: Relationships Between Remedial Responses and Demographic Variables*

Remedial[2] Responses	Age	Education	Demographic Variables: County Size	Intention to Leave
Message Filtration				
Tau	-.24	.23	.15	.22
Gamma	-.33	.37	.22	.47
N	1231	1184	1301	1178
Avoidance of Administration				
Tau	-.25	.18	None	.13
Gamma	-.34	.30		.33
N	1231	1184		1177
Violation of Procedures				
Tau	-.31	.28	.22	.25
Gamma	-.41	.43	.28	.55
N	1240	1193	1313	1180
Restriction of Upward Communication				
Tau	-.15	None	None	.10
Gamma	-.21			.30
N	1227			1175

*Gamma's less than .20 are not reported in this and subsequent tables.

Questionnaire results indicated that workers used their own judgment to disregard many administrative messages, bend rules and ignore regulations. They also judged department administrators to be incompetent and unreliable and said that regulations didn't make good sense. Finally, they developed patterns of secrecy coupled with outward compliance in dealing with the administration.

Again, not all employees reported engaging in remedial responses. The same general pattern of relationships between remedial responses and demographic variables was found as in the case of communication disturbances. Those most likely to respond remedially were the younger, better educated workers in urban and metropolitan areas and those planning to leave their jobs.

We theorized that remedial responses were the result of communication disturbances. To what extent such disturbances are both necessary and sufficient causes we cannot say on the basis of this one study, but we can show that perceptions of communication disturbances and remedial responses are related. This gives some credence to our view that workers' aggression, avoidance, rule violation and secrecy are not to be understood as pathologies that require treatment. Rather, they can be understood as behavioral critiques and challenges of the bureaucratic context (Gordon, 1973).

As can be seen in Table II-B the data support our hypothesis. Each of the remedial response variables is related positively to the specific communication disturbance variable we thought would provoke it. The strength of these relations is weaker than we anticipated. While we do not think that communication disturbances alone cause all remedial responses, we do think they are significant if not the most significant causes. Table II-B also indicates that the effects of perceptions of communication disturbances are cumulative. That is, the combined measure of overall communication disturbances is more strongly related to each remedial response than specific communication disturbances. Thus, while message overload promotes filtering, message overload plus high scores on other disturbances makes filtering even more likely to occur.

Table II-B: Relationships Between Remedial Responses and Communication Disturbances

Remedial Responses	Specific Communication Disturbances	Overall Communication Disturbances
Message Filtration	Overload	
Tau	.10	.21
Gamma	.23	.33
N	1301	1272
Avoidance of Administration	Rigid Forms	
Tau	.24	.38
Gamma	.45	.51
N	1169	1272
Violations of Procedure	Rigid Network	
Tau	.18	.36
Gamma	.29	.46
N	1309	1279
Restriction of Upward Communication	Deficient Feedback	
Tau	.19	.20
Gamma	.34	.31
N	1297	1268

C. Communication Distortions.

The general stereotype of the welfare worker held by the department administration impressed us as one of people

obsessed with anecdotal details, insisting on exacting and specific rules to guide all cases, over-sensitive to criticism and direction, punitive toward clients, inadequately informed of department structure and policies, and unrealistic in their demands. These images appear to be inspired by the facts of worker criticism, hostility, secrecy and the final defense mechanisms we labeled individual communication distortions.

Workers themselves noted that the welfare bureaucracy was a trying place to work and saw it as often damaging to the mental stability and functioning abilities of their colleagues. In field interviews we were frequently given examples of neurotic behavior on the part of employees--ranging from alcoholism through psychosomatic disorders to psychoses. Since Ruesch's theory holds that pathological behavior patterns are learned ways of dealing with disturbed communication networks, we tried to explore the relationship between perceived communication disturbances, remedial responses, and individual pathologies.

The measurement of pathological behavior patterns is a difficult problem. To ask questions about drinking habits, drug abuse, sexual activities, psychosomatic disorders, etc. is both ethically suspect and likely to provoke hostile reactions. Therefore, we restricted ourselves to measuring communication distortions only. Individual communication distortions are learned communication incompetencies, involving rigid repeating patterns of handling (receiving or sending) messages without regard for content or situation. Such distortions are forms of solipsistic communication in which the actions of the worker are based on inflexible internal needs rather than any assessment of the external environment.

We found that many employees ignored or resisted the criticism of their supervisors and insisted that their work should not be evaluated in terms relevant to client satisfaction. Many hostile attitudes toward officials were reported. There was also a strong tendency to generate useless or "noisy" complaints or gripes and some workers frequently exchanged threatening rumors among themselves.

Table III: Percentage of Workers Reporting Communication Distortions

Distortion	% Reporting
Workers complain often about rules	94.5
Officials do not help me see mistakes	70.8
Local officials obsessed with control	64.9
Workers share grief over client problems	61.9
State officials obsessed with control	59.3
Caseworkers should be evaluated on how hard they work	49.2
Cannot do anything about client problems	44.2
Get annoyed when judgment questioned	35.3
Workers repeat threatening rumors	29.7
Best to ignore officials	26.3

Younger workers were more susceptible to communication distortions. Those better educated were more likely to learn to distort communication and those reporting distortions were more likely to be leaving the department. While workers in urban and metropolitan areas reported more

hostility toward department officials they were not significantly different from other workers in other areas.

We hypothesized that two sets of factors would promote communication distortions on the part of employees. Communication disturbances resulting in inadequate information promotes either anxiety or autism, according to Nokes (1961). He argued that employees tend to become anxious and defensive

Table III-A: Relationship of Communication Distortions to Demographic Variables[3]

Individual[3] Distortions	Demographic Variables: Age	Education	County Size	Intention to Leave
Impaired Feedback				
Tau	-.16	.13	None	.16
Gamma	-.26	.24		.38
N	1169	1125		1121
Hostile Response				
Tau	-.31	.20	.18	.22
Gamma	-.39	.30	.24	.48
N	1146	1100	1212	1198
Noise Generation				
Tau	-.27	.21	None	.22
Gamma	-.37	.33		.45
N	1238	1191		1184

when they lack adequate informational support and that occupants of higher bureaucratic offices learn to ignore the need for feedback and become wishful dictators. Since

remedial responses are technically illegal and since they do not change the situation, they promote distrust, withdrawal, and the need for using messages to reduce anxiety rather than convey information (Mellinger, 1956). Thus, both communication disturbance variables and remedial response variables should be related to individual distortion variables.

The hypothesis that communication disturbances are related to individual distortions is supported in five of the six relationships of Table III-B.

Table III-B: Relationships Between Individual Communication Distortions and Perceived Communication Disturbances

Communication Distortions	Specific Communication Disturbances	Overall Communication Disturbances
Impaired Feedback	Rigid Network	None
Tau	.20	
Gamma	.36	
N	1232	
Hostility	Deficient Feedback	
Tau	.35	.42
Gamma	.52	.54
N	1212	1188
Noise Generation	Deficient Feedback	
Tau	.30	.34
Gamma	.47	.45
N	1309	1279

The hypothesis that communication disturbances are related to remedial responses is supported in Table III-C, while difficulties with the impaired feedback measure are apparent. There does not seem to be much difference between the strength of relationships between communication disturbances and remedial responses. However, an analysis of

Table III-C: Relationships Between Communication Distortions and Remedial Responses

Communication Distortions	Message Filtration	Avoidance of Administration	Violation of Rules	Restriction of Upward Communication
Impaired Feedback				
Tau	None	.08	.19	None
Gamma		.21	.33	
N		1301	1232	
Hostility				
Tau	.20	.36	.32	.18
Gamma	.31	.48	.42	.31
N	1205	1211	1212	1206
Noise Generation				
Tau	.15	.26	.31	.20
Gamma	.25	.38	.46	.35
N	1301	1301	1309	1301

variance comparing the three sets of variables suggested that those workers who both perceived disturbances and responded remedially reported a disproportionate degree of individual distortion.

In summary, the findings of our survey showed high perceptions of communication disturbances, high frequencies of remedial responses related to those perceptions, and serious amounts of individual communication distortions related both to those disturbances and responses. In nearly every case the younger, better educated workers in urban and metropolitan counties scored higher on all three indices. In no case were these indices found to be related to worker's sex, caseload size, or income.

Discussion

In experimental studies of various communication networks, the general findings are that centralized structures are more effective when tasks are simple and that decentralized structures are more efficient when tasks are relatively complex and involve interpretation and utilization of data as well as its collection (Shaw, 1964). Certainly, welfare delivery involves tasks of the latter sort. Not only must the relevant data about a client be collected, but those data must be interpreted in the light of existing programs and utilized to provide the necessary services and aid. To attempt simplification and standardization at this point is to promote a bureaucratization that stigmatizes the client and demeans the worker.

A debureaucratized welfare worker-client relationship is one that a) is personal, b) emphasizes the unique needs of each client, c) implies interactions outside of offically relevant roles and d) relies on interactions of exchange, persuasion, etc., to achieve results (White, 1969). This relationship stands in contrast to the impersonal, equality-of-treatment, strict-rule-enforcement, specific-and-narrow-interactions and reliance-on-coercion-and-status characteristics of bureaucratic systems. In debureaucratized relationships the client is seen as an adult peer in need of services and instruction, rather than as a subordinate child in need of reform. This relationship is promoted by

making the welfare worker dependent to some extent upon the client to offset the client's dependence on the worker. One of the ways of doing this is to evaluate caseworkers and income-maintenance workers on the basis of client satisfaction.

While the debureaucratized type of worker-client interaction is widely advocated today, the need for a redesigned organizational structure which would support it gets less attention. But the formal adoption of a client-centered standard of service without changing the bureaucratic communication network like that which exists in many welfare departments is tantamount to a declaration of war between workers and administration. At best, such a standard would result in increased, rather than decreased, paternalism.

A debureaucratized communication system would mean that workers are not regarded as subordinate children, but as adult peers. It would be a system ". . . in which management respects the dignity and ability of the (worker) by directly asking his aid with reference to his performance . . ." (Goldman, 1959). This implies that workers at the county level must have the means to correct, criticize, and even instruct, administration and staff. While all this may violate traditional ideas about hierarchical organization and the necessity of status differentiation, that only means the time has come to question and criticize those ideas.

Exploring alternative organization models for social welfare, Perlmutter comments that ". . . in the United States . . . self-management and citizen participation are the exception rather than the rule" (Perlmutter, 1974). Woodrow Wilson, the father of American public administration, insisted that politics and administration could and should be kept separate and that democratic procedures and participation had little to do with the latter. As he put it, "Directly exercised, in the oversight of the daily details and in the choice of the daily means of government, public criticism is . . . a clumsy nuisance, a rustic handling delicate machinery" (Wilson, 1887). However, the response of many workers to the publication of these findings on the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare was to point out that self-management offices and agencies responsive to clients and local conditions could solve many of the

problems reported. A committee, consisting of members of the Pennsylvania Social Services Union, was formed to design a proposal for an experimental self-managed district office in Philadelphia. That proposal has been completed and submitted to the department for consideration. (See Spence, Battista, et al., 1976.)

Given the present reluctance of most public officials to encourage participation and self-management on the part of government workers and clients the proposal is in for difficult times. But its existence represents both an indictment of the inadequacy of present managerial models of welfare administration and reform and the seeds of a more humane and efficient alternative. Workers develop many ideas about how to improve work performance and welfare delivery. These ideas have been forged in the heat of daily coping with over-sized caseloads, mountainous paperwork, and uninformed directives. Opportunities to further sharpen and apply these ideas are not available in traditional bureaucratic organizations. Indeed, employee suggestions along these lines are treated often as insubordination. As a result, new reforms lack the essential precision of detailed knowledge required for success and the capabilities of a well-educated, highly motivated work force are wasted. There is a need requiring the efforts of professionals, social scientists and clients alike to develop self-managed welfare delivery systems. This is needed not just as a solution to problems of employee morale and productivity but as a means of recovering the wasted human resources that present bureaucracies entail. As Cornuelle has expressed it:

> Our institutions make us less than we could be. So there are enormous backlogs of vitality, ingenuity and humanity which cannot be expressed through our present social machinery. That is the price we pay for allowing society to be managed.
>
> (Cornuelle, 1975)

While "self-management" has become a cosmetic concession in the case of many faltering institutions of industry, it also contains the seeds of actions and attitudes leading to broader political changes. The struggle

of caseworkers for self-management reforms is a radical activity in the following ways. First, to the extent that it succeeds, it both improves the conditions of work and undermines the repressive functions of the welfare system. Second, to the extent that it fails, it reveals the hypocrisy of semi-automatic mechanisms of worker and client manipulation inherent in the system and underscores the need for the fundamental transformation of American society. Workers in welfare bureaucracies are likely to be among the vanguard of those pressing such transformations because the elements of alienation in their daily working lives disclose both the failures of present society in human terms and the debilitating success of this society in exploiting human concern and misery. As Alain Touraine has argued:

> . . . the groups which demonstrate particularly sharp resistance to the domination of technocrats, bureaucrats, and technicists are those associated with the life of great organizations, who feel themselves responsible for a service, and whose activity puts them in constant touch with consumers.
>
> (Touraine, 1971)

Welfare workers are such a group and their organized resistance and struggles are likely to be a lesson and inspiration to other white-collar workers and to challenge social scientists of the left to provide the radical descriptive analysis of American society and institutions needed to inform a humane reconstruction of this nation.

Footnotes

[1]The measure of perception of communication disturbances is a scale formed from measures of four specific communication disturbances--message overload, rigid forms, rigid network and deficient feedback. Rigid forms of communications are indicated by unshared coding assumptions between management and employees, repetitiveness of messages, and a lack of proper preparation of employees for new messages so that, as a result, employees do not understand how messages are intended to be interpreted. A rigid network of communications is indicated by exaggerated control from the administration and interference with and delay of message flow due to long serial transmissions. Deficient feedback is indicated by quantitatively and qualitatively inappropriate responses to employee requests or messages. For details on scaling procedures, see Spence and O'Connor, 1975.

[2]These measures are detailed in Spence and O'Connor, 1975. Message filtration is the development of decision rules by which only certain messages from superiors receive attention while other messages are ignored. Violation of procedures is essentially the breaking or bending of department regulations in order to provide better service to clients.

[3]Impaired feedback capacities involve the inability to utilize criticism from superiors and the absence of systematically applicable criteria for evaluating work. Without such criteria and the acceptance of criticism, workers are unable to judge and improve their work. For a detailed discussion of this and other measures of communication distortions, see Spence and O'Connor, 1975.

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