

ALIENATION IN ORGANIZATIONS
Implications for Educational Administration

por
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1. Introduction

The concept of alienation has a long past in the history of ideas. It has been dealt with in the works of some great writers of the past. Alienation has influenced philosophers during different eras and it is best known after Marx's theories. Since Marx, the «anthological-ethical» and the «psychological-sociological» views of alienation have gained wide acceptance. With Marx, the theories of alienation have been built upon certain assumptions and concepts about human nature and the relationship between man and society (Israel, 1971: 11). Marx's analysis of alienation comprises three aspects: religious, political and economic. He indicated that economic alienation is the most basic and is rooted in the alienation from labor. This paper looks at alienation in organizations, traces its sources and deals with its various dimensions and effects.

For the purpose of this paper alienation is defined as «... an estrangement or separation between parts or the whole of the personality and significant aspects of the world of experience ...» (Kurt Lang, 1964: 19).

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2. Review of Sociological and Psychological Theory and Dimensions of Alienation

In the literature on organizations a great deal of attention is devoted to alienation. In this section the *concept of alienation* is reviewed from the sociological and psychological perspective.

The term alienation has been employed in many different ways. Two usages are especially dominant: the first referring to sociological processes, and the second to psychological states. The double meaning of the concept of alienation — its reference both to sociological processes and psychological states, creates some confusion in the literature.

The concept of alienation as a sociological process is characterized by the fact that, the «... individual's productivity, his work, and the results of his activity have become independent and have gained command over the human being ...» (Israel, 1971: 5). According to this characterization, sociology can be criticized for its tendency to psychologize the term «alienation» and transform it into a psychological concept.

Alienation has been studied in modern times by numerous social scientists. Josephson and Josephson (1962: 12-53) indicated that social scientists have used the term to refer to a variety of disorders such as loss of self, anxiety states, anomie, despair, depersonalization, rootlessness, apathy, social disorganization, loneliness, atomization, powerlessness, meaninglessness, isolation, pessimism, and the loss of beliefs and values. They reviewed some social science literature in an attempt to identify the linkage between these concepts and alienation. The Josephsons (1962: 12-53) review includes reference to three aspects of Marx's alienation: the self, social organizations and society.

Alienation from the self is for Fromm (1955) the feeling of the man whose acts and their consequences have become

his masters. Alienation from organizations was anticipated by Weber and has been reaffirmed by Fromm, Reisman, Mills, Goodman and others. Alienation from society has been characterised by personal despair and selflessness (Nietzsche) rejection of traditional values and beliefs (Josephsons) and powerlessness (Marx).

Fromm (1955), who tried to combine the Marxist and Freudian perspectives, described the alienating features of moder society as follows:

In the nineteenth century the problem was that God was dead; in the twentieth century the problem is that man is dead... The danger of the past was that men became slaves. The danger of the future is that men may become robots. True enough, robots do not rebel. But given man's nature, robots live and remain safe, ... they will destroy their world and themselves because they cannot stand... a meaningless life (Fromm, 1955: 360).

2.1. Dimensions of Alienation

Seeman (1959: 783-791) analysed the definition of alienation and defined it in terms of psychological states experienced by the individual. He distinguishes between five states, namely powerlessness, meaninglessness, normless, isolation and self-estrangement. Seeman has expressed concern about the variety in the usage of the term alienation. He indicated that because alienation is central to much of research and writing in sociology, it is necessary to provide a clear statement of the meaning of alienation, such that the traditions of sociological thought will be maintained.

The five dimensions of alienation identified by Seeman (1975: 91-115) are now described, to provide a basis for the psychological examination of alienation.

Seeman defines powerlessness as «... the sense of low control versus mastery over events» (Seeman, 1975: 93). He attributes the identification of this dimension to Marx, and its extension to uses beyond the work situation to Weber and Mills. The use of powerlessness as an expectancy results in this version of alienation being more closely tied to the internal and personal aspects of human functioning, rather than to factors such as chance, luck or external reinforcement, which lie outside the person's control. Initially, according to Seeman the use of his first meaning, was limited to man's relation to the larger social order. Later he states that expectancies for the control of outcomes through an individual's behavior will vary with the behavior involved, as well as with different areas of activity.

Meaninglessness is defined as «... the sense of incomprehensibility versus understanding of personal and social affairs» (Seeman, 1975: 93). Meaninglessness refers to the sensed ability to predict behavioral outcomes, whereas powerlessness refers to the sensed ability to control outcomes. Thus, meaninglessness refers to an individual's sense of understanding of the events in which he is engaged. In this regard the individual experiences a high degree of alienation when his survival standards for clarity in decision-making are not met. Seeman (1959: 783-791) attributes the origin of this meaning to Mannheim who theorised that as society becomes increasingly organized on the basis of functional rationality, individuals are left with less and less opportunity to act on the basis of their insight.

Normlessness is described as the «... high expectancies for (or commitment to) socially unapproved means versus conventional means for the achievement of given goals ...» (Seeman, 1975: 93). This definition is attributed to a derivation from Durkheim's anomie in which common values which govern and reassure individuals in their behavior are submerged and individuals seek satisfaction by any means which may be successful. Seeman (1975: 91-115)

explains that the transition from meaninglessness to normlessness seems natural, given that both of these ideas have roots in the notion of anomie. According to the author anomie is a property of the social system and not of individuals. He suggests that when eventually prescribed goals are not congruent with available means for their attainment, normlessness develops and individuals react in a way assuring success, whether the procedures may or may not be culturally legitimate.

Isolation is defined as «... the individual's rejection of commonly held values in the society (or sub sector) versus commitment to the going group standards ...» (Seeman, 1975: 93). Isolation does not imply a lack of social ties but rather the willingness to renounce desirable goals or beliefs, which are generally acceptable, for those which an individual might choose for personal reasons. Seeman suggests that whereas the innovator who uses culturally disapproved means to achieve his goals displays normlessness, he who demonstrates isolation would be rebellious, and his actions would lead to a greatly modified structure.

Self-estrangement is «... the individual's engagement in activities that are not intrinsically rewarding versus involvement in a task or activity for its own sake ...» (Seeman, 1975: 93). He observes this form of alienation displayed by those who see reward outside the activity in which they participate. The self-estranged person is unable to find reward in a activity pursued for its own sake, but must always seek outside reward. The individual does not find intrinsic meaning or pride in his work.

Seeman (1975: 91-115) has indicated that all five categories of alienation refer to psychological states experienced subjectively. They do not refer to sociological processes.

Israel (1975: 6) explains that the ways Seeman and others have measured these dimensions as described, confirm the «... psychologizing of alienation ...». He points out that it is not difficult to combine both sociological

and psychological approaches to alienation. The analysis and description of economic-sociological processes which affect the individual, his role and work in society, together can be explained on a sociological level. On a psychological level, the individual experiences can be analysed as a consequence of his relations to persons and objects. This double aspect of the concept of alienation — its reference both to sociological processes and psychological states — is, according to Israel (1971: 5-7), one of the reasons for the confusion prevailing in the literature.

In the preceding section the concept of alienation was presented and five dimensions of alienation identified by Seeman were reviewed.

3. Review of Research Studies on Sources and Results of Alienation

In this section, some research studies, relating widely accepted propositions, from five different types of alienation, will be reviewed.

Schaar (1961: 264) considers that alienation from work «... is at the core of all alienation ...» just as Camus, cited in Friedman (1961: 1), holds that «... all life without work goes rotten» and according to Hughes (1958: 43) «... a man's work is one of the most important parts of his social identity ...».

DeTocqueville (cited in Seeman, 1971: 135-143), one of the early critics in the mass society tradition, never uses words «alienated labor», he argues though, that industrialization and division of labor led to the degradation of the worker by saying that the workman «... becomes more weak, more narrow minded, and more dependent».

Blauner (1964: 7) discussed the relationships between technology, social structure and personal experience. His report considered the worker's relationship the sociological organization of the factory; whether or not the worker

experienced in his work a sense of control rather than domination, meaningful purpose rather than futility, social connections rather than isolation, and spontaneous involvement and self expression rather than detachment and discontent. He concluded that there was no easy answer to the question of whether a factory worker was alienated.

The majority of the studies reviewed considered alienation as a global concept, therefore an attempt is made to introduce the dimensions, separately.

Powerlessness

A review of the studies dealing with alienation as powerlessness is now presented.

Neal and Seeman (1964: 225) studied alienation among workers associated with work-based organizations compared with individuals not associated with work-based organizations. They found that membership in work-based organizations generally led to a lowered sense of alienation in the form of powerlessness. The authors also reported that highly mobile persons felt more powerless when not associated with organizations.

Clark (1959: 849-852) measured the powerlessness dimension of alienation among members of an agricultural cooperative and related this to satisfaction and to the degree to which expectations of the cooperative were perceived by the members to have been achieved. Powerlessness was found to have a wide range among members. As member powerlessness increased, satisfaction with the operation of the cooperative decreased.

Self-Estrangement

Seeman (1975: 91-115) indicated that this version of alienation is more like the master theme of alienation studies than simply a variety of it. Marcuse (1964) cited

in Seeman (1971) refers to self-estrangement as a failure to realize one's human potential. Coopersmith (1967) cited in Seeman (1971) defines it as a failure to the individual's level of self-esteem; Seeman (1966) likens it to behavior that is more or less ritualized or stereotyped. More recently, Johnson (1973) relates self-estrangement to action which is characterized by a disfunction between behavior and object.

Sennet and Cobb (1972) interviewed 150 workers and concluded that there is a considerable emphasis on the sense of low control at work, on the denial of self respect on the job, on the importance of intrinsic satisfaction, and on symbolic rather than material rewards.

In the report of a Detroit longitudinal study, Duncan, Schuman and Duncan (1973: 74), concluded that «... the instrumental, or even hedonistic values suggested by high income short working hours, are gaining at the expenses of the values intrinsic to work ...».

Drucker's (1973: 87-92) critique of Duncan's study affirmed that «... it is an exaggeration to say that there is not one shred of evidence for the alleged turn from material rewards».

The problem lies, it seems, in the fact that these two job features (intrinsic and extrinsic rewards) are more difficult to separate empirically than conceptually.

DeCharms (1968: 328) proposes that in fact the two job features are intimately tied. An investigation of the generalization of work effects (Kohn and Shooler, 1973: 97-118) argues that «occupational self direction, which includes the closeness of supervision, routinization of work, and the complexity of it, is an important influence on self-esteem and other psychological factors. In this study, there is also some mixture of external control (i. e. supervision) and the work itself, viewed as routine.

Form (1972: 727-738) affirmed that given work settings produce the expected worker attitudes (highly bureaucratic worker environment yield higher work alienation).

Meaninglessness, Normlessness and Isolation

At the present time, few studies dealing with the meaninglessness, normlessness and isolation dimensions of alienation are available. It seems that interest in measuring this dimension has lagged well behind revealed interest in assessing the issues of powerlessness and self-estrangement, especially in large scale organizations. According to Neal and Groat (1970: 460-473), the meaninglessness dimension could be ordered along with measures of normlessness, powerlessness and isolation into a scale measuring overall alienation. It is surprising to find so few studies covering the meaninglessness, normlessness and isolation dimension of alienation given its overall importance for the study of alienation in organizations and the relative ease with which studies on this dimension could be incorporated into ongoing research on alienation.

Certain observers consider some destructive processes as part of alienation, branding them as debilitating consequences of organizational involvement. These processes have been known to exist for a long time, to such an extent that theorists tend to place them among the many problems experienced by workers (Scott, 1982: 294).

Marx (1963) described how a worker may be alienated from the product of his work. The worker loses control over his product which comes to exist «independently, outside himself, and alien to him», and «... stands opposed to him as an autonomous power ...» (Marx, 1963, cited in Scott, 1982: 295). Workers may be also alienated from the process of production. This may happen to the extent that

... the work is external to the worker, that it is not part of his nature; and that consequently, he does not fulfil himself in his work but denies himself, has a feeling of misery rather than well-being, does not develop freely his mental and physical energies but is physically exhausted and eventually debased (Marx 1963, cited in Scott, 1982: 295).

In their defense, capitalists argued that alienation is not caused by work but by exploitation of work by the misuse of power.

Evidence that some of alienation studied by some researchers, are caused by some characteristics of work has been provided in the previous section. The dimensions of alienation which have most meaning in the work place are powerlessness and self-estrangement and this generalization seems to be consistent with Marx's distinction (Scott, 1982: 295).

According to Scott (1982: 296) there is a large amount of research reporting generally high levels of worker satisfaction and morale, but large variation in satisfaction and symptoms of alienation occur among occupational types and work situations. These studies show that higher satisfaction is associated not only with intrinsic interest for one's job, but also with level of control, level of pay and economic security and opportunities for social interactions.

Scott explains that these results do not hold true for more specific and detailed studies on the relationship between job characteristics and worker attitudes. Moreover, expectation that employees would exhibit higher satisfaction and lower absenteeism, in more challenging and complex jobs, was not supported. These studies indicate that there is no simple or direct correspondence between job characteristics and individual reactions. It may depend on a great variety of factors: type of work, personal factors and environmental factors. Different types of work have different characteristics; some people may value challenge and variety, others do not, depending on their needs, experiences, and dispositions.

Scott (1982: 297) points out that some analysts have claimed that the influence of organizations on their employees extends far beyond the walls of the organization. Argyris (1973: 141-167) summarized several studies which indicate that workers' experience of «constraint and isola-

tion» on the job influences their free time. The workers were less involved in organized leisure-time, community, or political activities.

Kanter (1977) reviewed a number of studies and described how occupational experiences by both men and women have implications for their family roles. She points out that these studies contradict the «... myth of the separate world ...» which is maintained by organizations which «... do not wish to assume responsibility for the effects of their policies and practices on the personal lives of their employees ...» (Kanter, 1977: 73).

Ouchi (1979) describes that employing organizations fail to recognize their psychological casualties by explaining that:

The costs of psychological failure are not born entirely by the firm, but rather are externalized to the society generally. That is, employees who reach the point of emotional disability, who become unsatisfactory workers, are the first to be laid off during depressions or, in extreme cases, are fired. The firm which has 'used up' people emotionally does not have to face the cost of restoring them. In much the same manner that firms were able to until recently pollute the air and the water without paying the costs of using up these resources, they continue to be able to pollute our mental health without impunity (Ouchi, 1979: 36-37).

In this section research studies on sources and results of alienation were reviewed. An attempt was made to review and discuss studies, wherever possible, related to each dimension of alienation.

4. Implications for Educational Administration

Anderson (1974: 63-75) found that students' subjective experience of alienation is related to the degree of school bureaucratization. Frequently, assertions are heard related to schools contributing to alienation. It may very well be

that whoever makes such statements is concerned about the growing numbers of conflicts between youth and adults. In education, some parents are concerned with schools, and so are students, teachers and administrators. However, many people are «turned off» by schools. Are there in fact, conditions in schools, which lead or encourage alienation? Are schools growing bureaucracies? If so, what are some of the organizational characteristics of schools that are contributing to alienation.

Earlier research by Punch (1969: 43-57) has shown school bureaucratization to be related to the way in which school principals have some degree of control over the phenomenon of alienation. Society places a great deal of importance on schooling. It is viewed as leading to success in a society which demands more and more of its members. The school is seen as the way to upward mobility. Thus, schools have to be better, as well as students, teachers and administrators. Life chances are dependent upon education and schooling. Failure or success is earned by the students to the work placed as stigmas which may well confound their chances for success in later life. The school's failures are the «drop outs» as society prefers to label them. It may well be, according to Seeman (1975: 91-115) that, when culturally prescribed goals are not congruent with available means for their attainment, normlessness develops and individuals react in a way that assures success, whether or not the procedures used are culturally legitimate.

One task for the school is to help students to achieve a sense of personal identity, worth, meaning and power as a preparation for life. It is possible that when the school does not help to develop those values, students may demonstrate isolation as defined by Seeman (1975: 9-115), be rebellious and their actions may lead to greatly modified structure. In a technological oriented society, there is also an increased need for a variety of talents. Thus, the importance of schooling is emphasized. Schools are organizations

which prepare students for occupations. Even for jobs requiring simple skills, students need several years of formal school training, notwithstanding the fact that curricular content may not always be relevant for the job thought or obtained. Seeman (1975: 91-115) describes self estrangement as a form of alienation displayed by those who see reward outside the activity in which they participate. Therefore, the student may become self estranged and unable to find meaning in school, he seeks outside rewards.

Research on the relationship between organizational structure and teacher alienation from work is very sparse. Isherwood and Hoy (1973: 124-137) studied powerlessness as one aspect of teacher alienation from work in different school bureaucratic structures. They used the dimensional structures of bureaucracy as described by Hall (1963: 32-40) and concluded that in terms of powerlessness, authoritarian schools seem to have a greater alienating effect on teachers than the collegial schools.

Anderson (1971: 9-12) studied bureaucracy and student alienation in schools. He added a seventh dimension, centralization of control, to those described by Hall. Anderson's study suggests that student alienation from school is related to school bureaucratization. This proposition, together with research by Punch (1969: 43-57), which indicates that school bureaucratization is related to the way in which school principals behave, may lead to reduction of student alienation, if principals change their behavior style. The modification of the organizational structure towards a less bureaucratic way may prove to be beneficial in reducing alienation in schools. Therefore it seems to have major implications for educational administration.

In a study involving school students, Alves Pinto and Formosinho (1985) found that alienation results more from a problem arising within the school than from social class origin. These authors suggest that alienation should be

understood in the context of social organizations, namely the school.

The few studies reviewed, suggested that alienation was found in schools. Thus, the school as an organization may be for some a source of abnormal psychological states.

Corwin (1965: 38) affirmed that complex organizations are bureaucratized and schools are no exception.

Etzioni (1964) used the term organization rather than bureaucracy, but whatever terminology is used, the process which we are concerned with here is the same. He wrote:

In contrast to earlier societies, modern society has placed a high moral value on rationality, efficiency and effectiveness. Modern civilization depends largely on organizations as the most rational and efficient of social grouping known. By coordinating a large number of human actions, the organization creates a powerful social tool (Etzioni, 1964: 1).

In searching for means of how to prevent, deal with and combat alienation a type of bureaucracy is identified: the professional bureaucracy.

Professionalization is a growing concern among the teachers. They are the organization personnel who carry out the school's main tasks. Teachers are highly trained and are increasingly organized in associations which negotiate contracts and specify their rights and obligations and those of their employees (Willower, 1982: 89-110).

In the professional bureaucracy, the professional has a control over his own work meaning that «... he works relatively independently of his colleagues, but closely with the client he serves ...» (Mintzberg, 1979: 349). The organization structure is loose: the teacher works alone in the classroom, and he has a broad discretionary jurisdiction within the boundaries of his classroom. This type of organization leads to greater closeness with the student, and a better understanding of the situations which may arise.

Whereas the «machine bureaucracy» is based on a hierarchical authority — the power of office — «... the professional bureaucracy emphasizes authority of a professional nature ...» (Blau, 1967: 68, cited in Mintzberg). This source of authority needs to be recognized by educational administrators, so that fewer impositions are made on the student. Thus, it seems that high formalization of professional work should not be applied in schools.

Mintzberg (1979: 358) indicated that professional bureaucracy is democratic in nature. He pointed out that «... not only professionals control their own work, but they also seek collective control of the administrative decisions which effect them ...» this organization of work of a democratic nature should lead teachers to develop an awareness regarding the schools toward delegation of responsibility. Task planning should be controlled by professional teachers, involving colleagues, administrators, parents and students. Thus decision making related to curricular functions could involve different groups, such that the entire process is decentralized and task made more relevant to the goals of the clients.

Ratsoy (1973: 161-170) suggested that in western cultures, the decision-making pattern has changed from leader dominated to participative. From a review of studies of bureaucracy and decision-making in education he concluded that the moves toward participative management may lead to certain positive consequences. Thus, it may be concluded that decentralized decision-making and the involvement of different partners may bring beneficial results to schools as a means of reducing alienation.

Impersonality is another aspect of bureaucracy which may result in alienation. Anderson (1966: 1-24) indicated that impersonality results from the rules of office in bureaucracy. He suggested that impersonality prevents outside influences by the clientele upon the organization. Often the result is conflict between the organization and its clients.

Schools are public organizations and, according to Willower (1982: 89-110), they are accountable and politically vulnerable. Because schools are public, public intervention is legitimate. Moreover, the nature of the schools' clients influences school environmental relationship. Therefore, it is suggested that full participation by parents related to issues concerning students should be welcomed.

Some authors share the conviction that the work place must provide the worker with tasks that are more self-fulfilling and self-respecting and that a greater latitude for securing personal control over the work should be available (Blauner, 1964; Herzberg, 1966 and Wilensky, 1964).

Considering that a student's daily activity in school is his job, the above perspective is fully applicable to the problem of alienation in the school. To recognize this is to prevent the occurrence of undesirable behaviors which result from feelings of alienation.

Scott (1982: 298) offers a perspective endorsed by social analysts which holds that organizations should involve most of the participant's personality traits. According to social analysts, organizations should become the primary focus of social integration, personal identity, and meaning and they should function as a new community. He agrees that organizations have some impact on the personal characteristics and mental health of participants, but cannot accept that organizations should be viewed as the principal centers of survival and social integration. He provides the rationale on which he based his opinion. He sees «... the emergence of organizations as special purpose systems as being closely associated with the emergence of individualism, including the doctrine of natural rights and the value of individual freedom ...» (Scott, 1982: 298).

In this section, some aspects of contemporary schooling which may encourage or contribute to alienation were presented. A few studies which indicated the relationship between bureaucratization and alienation in schools were

discussed. Some characteristics of the professional bureaucracy were presented, since they might have the potential for decreasing or eliminating alienation in organizations. The understanding of the conditions leading to alienation might be helpful to those educational administrators who are concerned with identifying means to prevent and combat alienation in their schools.

Conclusion

The existence of alienation in organizations is a reality in our society. Although alienation has existed for a long time it has become the focus of greater attention since Marx. It seems difficult to believe that alienation, in its many different ways and forms could be eliminated in complex modern organizations. Technological advancement will not necessarily lead to a decrease in alienation. Our knowledge of alienation in educational settings is scarce. Bureaucratization is present in all social life. Is the school, as an organization, contributing to teacher alienation and consequently affecting the student/teacher relationship? How should professional bureaucratization be deemphasized as a means of encouraging fewer formalities in the classroom? The school, as a public organization, is politically vulnerable. Thus, full participation by parents should be positively considered. Are the schools helping students to develop a sense of identity, worth, meaning and power in preparation for life? More research is needed to identify the conditions leading to or encouraging alienation.

Knowledge of the antecedent conditions, as shown through available research, might be helpful in determining ways to prevent and combat alienation in organizations.

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