EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION AS A MICROPOLITICAL EXERCISE

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The administration of a school is usually perceived of as occurring within the confines of the school facility itself. This research seeks to highlight the reality of administrative procedure within the context of promotion to senior management positions in some denominational secondary schools in Trinidad. The data were gathered through interviews with practitioners in the field and from other key players in the promotion scenario. Key players in this research are teachers, aspiring school administrators, past and present school administrators, Church Board members, and members of the Teaching Service Commission. The qualitative analysis of the data brings to the fore pertinent voices that spell out for us those practices which demonstrate how micropolitics is manifested in the promotion process. The findings point to some consequences of micropolitical activity in the promotion process, and suggest a way forward for this selection process.

Introduction

In societies where traditions are held fast and have the capacity to shape future development, it is always essential to pause and reflect.

In the context of promotion, there have been dominant patterns and behaviours that have been engendered by and perpetuated by sociocultural determinants. This research examines the status and nature of the promotion process and procedures, whilst exploring the human element which is the controlling agent. It takes a necessary bold look at human behaviour and social systems, specifically in an educational context. In the first instance, its major premise is that micropolitics is an underlying feature of promotion and leadership in the context of education. More specifically, its usefulness lies in its ability to cite and analyse instances of micropolitics and to trace its influence. The identification of these realities alerts us to the need to be more self-aware and self-critical if our professed professional and constitutional goals are to be realized. It compels us to confront the threat that micropolitics places on equality and social justice. An examination of micropolitics penetrates the façade of professionalism and rectitude, and uncovers the reality of human frailty. It highlights the irony that although social

systems are designed to facilitate fairness and objectivity, they are, in fact, the breeding ground for subsystems of bias, dishonesty, abuse, and unethical behaviour.

In Presbyterian secondary schools in Trinidad, there have been rumblings underground of dissatisfaction with the lack of Presbyterianism in the schools, and from teachers and even Church Officials, Board members, and past and present candidates that the promotion system in those schools is not fair.

The significance of this research lies in its dependence on the perspectives and the voices of its participants, many of whom have regarded this research effort as an opportunity to express opinions and share experiences that have profound personal and professional meaning for them. In an era where cross-cultural initiatives are being encouraged, and where developing countries are engaging in imported consultancy work, an insider's perspective can serve to counter the inappropriate adoption of "clinical" international theory, policy, or practice.

Additionally, this research provides the decision makers in the promotion context with some tools for self-appraisal and appraisal of the present system. The mere existence of this research is an opportunity to take stock, to recognize the researcher as partner in a collaborative effort, and to become agents of positive change.

The major aim of this research is to investigate the ways in which micropolitics is perceived to play a role in the promotion process in Presbyterian secondary schools in Trinidad. It seeks to afford key players the opportunity to voice their views and perceptions, and to share their experiences.

The research also aims to show that though formal procedures do exist, the power of the informal or the covert is not to be underestimated. It also seeks to demonstrate that in addition to practice, policy is also seen to be determined by micropolitics.

Most importantly, the hope is that participants' involvement in the research would stimulate their own critical reflection as a forerunner to true professional emancipation and empowerment. On one level, emancipation from a colonial mentality is essential to the attitudinal and social progress of the Trinidadian. On the other more universal level, as human beings, emancipation from the narrow and negative possibilities of self affords one the opportunity to be open to more constructive and worthwhile potentialities such as community and nation-building, achievement of ideals, assessment of and provision for human needs, and the creation and realization of systems that provide for these.

It is hoped that the findings of this research would aid understanding of the context, and would serve as a stimulus for initiating continuing

dialogue and transparency. The promotion context, hopefully, would be just one of the areas in which this approach to policy and practice would be evident.

Literature Review

In the following section, italicized sub-headings represent the categories used in the analysis of data.

Micropolitical Nature of Organizations

(*Micropolitics is a reality*)

The influence of the micropolitical must not blind us to the fact that organizations are in and of themselves "political" in nature. There exist political norms, that is, informal and disguised signals, which direct members' behaviour. Especially in situations where uncertainty is rife, there is much reliance on political skill. Organizational political behaviour has been defined as social influence attempts that are discretionary (not formally prescribed or permitted), that are intended to promote or protect the self-interests of individuals and groups, and that threaten the self interests of others (Porter, Allen, & Angle, 1981).

While many influence attempts are consciously undertaken, and people often attribute political intent to others, such behaviour in itself is described as apolitical. The actor's awareness is such that he approaches an encounter with an expectation of the outcome, of how he will act, and of the role the other will assume, including any resistance or encouragement. If incompatibility results, a process of negotiation follows. Participants' ability to accommodate facilitates the continuation of the interaction. This behaviour is characterized by struggle and resolution, negotiation, process, and flux. Flux, because shared understandings are transient and must be reaffirmed or renegotiated (McLean, Simms, Mangham, & Tuffield, 1982). The bottom line is, as Porter et al. (1981) remind us, that situational ambiguity or lack of structure may provide an opportunity, but it is personal stake that may provide the incentive to engage in political behaviour.

Networks

(*Lobbying and canvassing*)

Organizational political behaviour has been defined as social influence attempts that are discretionary, that are intended to promote or protect the self-interests of individuals and groups, and that threaten the self-interests of others (Porter et al., 1981).

Perhaps it is in light of such social influence attempts that Raab (1992) pursues the necessity of taking networks seriously. Group membership and popular participation in decision making were surely elements of democracy, after all. Groups have come to play an important part in the process of administration and, as Raab has pointed out, "policy implementation is…itself a political process open to influence, games, bargaining, and representation" (p. 72). He continues: "the games of a policy network go on behind closed doors, through which only relatively few can enter…their relative covertness makes them less amenable to research. In time, however, games may become institutions, to which public legitimacy is accorded, and perhaps even some degree of transparency" (p. 74).

Manipulation

Implicit in this claim is that human beings are capable of behaviour that is consciously selected and planned, and of choosing objectives and procedures. We are conscious of our own acts and those of others so that we present ourselves in a manner intended to control the behaviour of others. As such, each individual is capable of consciously manipulating his own behaviour and that of others.

Why would we want to manipulate? Human needs have been elaborated and may range from physiological to spiritual or even ethereal (Maslow, 1954; Murray, 1938). In organizational settings, the most outstanding needs have been said to be achievement and power (Atkinson & Feather, 1966; McClelland, 1965; McClelland & Burnham, 1976). Our need to attain these controls our behaviour, so that we ourselves "psyche-out" others in order to understand how to deal with them. In other words, we categorize others in order to adjust our behaviour to suit that role: "It follows that we have done unto us what we do unto others; we conduct ourselves in the knowledge that others will seek to typify us just as we seek to typify them" (Mangham, 1979, p. 109). We seek comfort in being able to predict the conduct of others, and by our personal "assessment" treat them with due approbation, emulation, circumspection, or as we see fit.

Fitting in

(Grooming)

The concept of being able to predict the behaviour of others falls within the paradigm of the well-established theories of socialization and even indoctrination. Organizations engage in socialization consciously, unconsciously, and even surreptitiously. This is most blatant in the

recruitment process where candidates are screened not only for skills and aptitude, but for being able to "fit in." Apart from having selected the particular organization themselves for what they perceive to be their own "fit," the organization places high value on "falling in line." Gradually, the recent recruit may come to adopt the "meanings" as his own (Kaufman, 1968; Perrow, 1972). Such is the impact of socialization, or even indoctrination, that not only are they *disturbed* by suggestions that change is required, but they are *astounded* because any other pattern is unimaginable (Kaufman). The "internalization" and taken-for-grantedness brought about by socialization consequently constrains the consideration of alternatives. It must be noted that the internalization discussed here refers to both formal and informal norms. The latter is the stuff of which much of the more colourful and intriguing micropolitics is made, and will be the subject of further discussion.

This notion of being a good fit is not quite as clinical and worthy as it may seem on the surface. If there is to be a good fit between the applicant and the needs of the post, then those needs must be scrutinized closely enough to include the overt and the covert. The issue of micropolitics comes back to haunt us. Wellington (1989) examined recruitment procedures in the information technology (IT) industry and the rise of networks. In two of his five case studies, recruitment policy was directed, to a large extent, by the use of personal networks or the "grapevine." The metaphor of a "growing family" was used to describe the development of the management core of one of the cases. The use of personal networks is seen to be a cause for concern, since it may deny opportunity to those outside the network. The "fitting in" concept in selection serves to maintain the status quo and so may be found in conservative cultures and typically in small communities. "Certainly recruitment policies with such unwritten laws within them would seem to be doing little to affect existing working practices and career structures. Such policies must surely also disadvantage existing minority groups in society" (Wellington, 1989, p. 226).

The potential contribution of minorities to education has been researched by Su (1997). This study found that minority teacher candidates in the United States (US) aspired to move out of teaching into administration to be able to effect great changes in existing schools. "No chance for advancement" was cited more often by them than by "mainstream" (white Caucasian) candidates. Because of their keen awareness of inequalities suffered by the poor and minorities, they see the role of the good teacher as taking the responsibility for transforming schools and society. So that, in the first instance, the fitting in concept

would be an obstacle to recruiting the most committed, whether at entry level to teaching or for promotion.

Fitting in from the applicant's perspective is also worth considering. That an organization hopes to select a specific type of individual does not necessarily mean that that type is going to be attracted to the position. School districts in the US have adopted recruitment practices which involve sending an organizational representative who is demographically similar to an applicant in order to increase the applicant's attraction to the employing organization (Lin, Dobbins, & Farh, 1992, as cited in Young, Place, Rinehart, Jury, & Baits, 1997). Research (Young et al, 1997) has shown that the content of recruitment messages (job advertisements) can influence the type of persons who apply. The personal warmth of the principal as organizational representative was found to influence applicants' perception of the attractiveness of the vacancy. The principal's age had no effect (Young & Heneman, 1986, cited in Young et al., 1997) and gender did not influence candidates' reactions (Young, Kennedy, Newhouse, Browne, & Thiessen, 1993). To avoid the cocooning effect that some societies encourage within organizations, diversity of personnel can only be achieved through effective "recruitment practices and informed recruitment policies" (Young et al., 1997, p. 104). Viewing diversity from a wider lens, there are broader cautionary notes to be drawn from Bartolome and Macedo (1997). They analysed issues and messages in the mass media and news events in the US and concluded that academia in the US has purposefully ignored issues of race in education. The presence of xenophobia in that society and others has major implications for recruitment practices and the perpetuation of ideology and the ideology of perpetuation.

The Promotion Interview

(Abuse of promotion interview)

Discussion leader and chairman

Whereas the members of a group contribute to its overall operation, the pertinence of the discussion leader and a chairman has been outlined by Klein (1963) who, in presenting conditions by which ideas can be changed, asserts that a good chairman is the greatest single asset that a committee can possess. The chairman's main function is that of facilitator. He/she discourages irrelevancies, allows time for thought and consideration, circulates memoranda beforehand, skilfully invites contributions without interrupting discussion, and keeps order. Maier (1952) suggests several useful instructions for an expert who must work with an unskilled group (Klein, pp. 123–124). Yet, as Klein further

indicates, committees do not necessarily have to be handicapped by a chairman who is weak or otherwise ineffective; nor should they use him/her as a scapegoat for their own weaknesses. It is possible for a committee member to perform this role informally instead of allowing the procedure to break down. In this way, valid and useful contributions from diffident or low-status members would be encouraged.

An important point Klein (1963) makes about group procedure has to do with the process of steering a proposal through a committee. The suggestion made is that the matter should be first introduced under "any other business" and then discussed with the chairman and secretary for placing it on the agenda for the next meeting. This discussion should be of a factual nature, bearing in mind that sound ethics and considerations of courtesy dictate that these are not occasions for canvassing support or for persuasion (Klein, pp. 128–129). It becomes obvious that following procedure, technically and ethically, leaves little room for the negative fallout of micropolitics that is not constructive.

The interviewer

The importance of the interviewer in the selection process cannot be overstated. Training may be the compromise in the effort to control the possible subjectivity of an interview situation. Apart from the interplay of information in an interview, there is also the "sword dance" of impression management (Baron, 1986; Gilmore & Ferris, 1989; Goffman, 1971; Tedeschi & Reiss, 1981; Wayne & Kacmar; 1991; Wood & Mitchell, 1981). More recent research has found that impression management tactics, especially self-promotion and ingratiation behaviour, run the risk of creating undesirable impressions on interviewers (Crant, 1996). Applicants are better advised to use self-focused tactics (Kacmar & Carlson, 1999). Yet, it is possible that personal factors play a role in determining the effectiveness of the use of impression management tactics (Kacmar & Carlson), one example being the perceived similarity between interviewer and interviewee (Wayne & Liden, 1995). In a related study, it was confirmed that interviewer and, to a lesser extent, applicant characteristics may both have a role to play in the use of impression management tactics by applicants. For example, applicants used entitlements more with less apprehensive interviewers or, as the researchers point out, interviewers who were perhaps perceived as less apprehensive. Older, more experienced, and longer tenured interviewers seem to have discouraged the use of entitlements and encouraged the use of enhancements and self-promotion. Issues that arise out of such findings are interview validity and the value of structured interviews and, again, interviewer training (Delery & Kacmar, 1998).

Bureaucracy and Efficiency

(Formal mechanisms)

Within society, various interpretations of control and order exist. Weber's (1947) theory of bureaucracy has influenced much of the thinking in this field. Theorists writing in this tradition assume that organizations have a clear-cut division of labour with high degrees of specialization and expertness. When the authority structure is hierarchical and official, official decisions are governed by a system of rules and regulations to ensure uniformity, continuity, and stability. Eventually, bureaucracy is seen to be efficient and rational. Thus, personal considerations are disregarded; technical qualifications are emphasized; persons are appointed and not elected to positions; and advancements are determined by seniority or achievement, or both. Political, family, or other connections have no role in this "bureaucracy." The clinical elements of the organization's objectives and sub-goals are of primary importance.

Blau and Scott (1969) comment, however, that what is missing from this view are the inherent dysfunctions of the system, which manifest themselves in the form of conflict. They also indicate that Weber (1947) ignores the informal relations and unofficial patterns that are bound to develop in formal organizations.

As if in extreme polarity with an organizational structure that prioritizes control and order, a "loosely-coupled" educational organization is structured according to "ritual classifications" of curriculum, teachers and students (Meyer & Rowan, 1988). These classifications become social norms and, more often than not, are not subject to close inspection or are not required to be accountable. According to Meyer and Rowan, the work of the educational organization, that is, the instructional activities, are quite casually coordinated. One is left to surmise, then, that the crucial linkages with educational organizations are so loosely-coupled that there is room for displaced and/or incompatible goals and visions which may be coexisting in disharmony.

The issue here is whether "loose-coupling" facilitates disharmony and, consequentially, conflict, and whether conflict is actually an "unnecessary evil" which allows for flexibility. The flexibility inherent in schools as organizations gives rise to the assumption of good faith—the "logic of confidence," whereby "parties bring to each other the taken-for-granted, good-faith assumption that the other, is, in fact, carrying out his or her defined activity…the plausibility of their activity requires that they have confidence in each other" (Meyer & Rowan, 1988, p. 105).

According to these theorists, not only does the success of the organization depend on the accounts they give, but the "actors" within must also take into account the *appearance* of what they are doing.

Control of Information

(Lack of communication)

The malfunctioning of communication flows in organizations will have negative repercussions for efficiency and effectiveness. Such malfunctioning may be related to the transmitter, the timing, or the nature of the communication (oral or written) (Guetzkow, 1965). The "networks" involved in communication in organizations are prone to difficulties that hamper proper functioning. Legitimacy with respect to the issuance of directives and commands is an issue that creates conflict in organizations. Inaccuracy, misinterpretation, and inappropriate communication channels are some of the problems to be encountered. There is also the view that experts prefer to avoid authoritative channels in order to "get on with their work" (Dalton, 1950). Friendship and status are also components of the network of communication channels in organizations and impact upon the flow and the nature of messages.

The effective transmission of messages is linked to both the origination of communication and the reception of the message. If both points are widely varied, the variation of interpretations will be greater (March & Simon, 1958). The importance of non-verbal communication cannot be understated, and has been explored by a large number of researchers, including Knapp and Hall (1997) and Feldman and Rime (1991).

There are times when the contents of messages may be transformed, either through omission—due to various factors such as saturation or overload (Roby & Lanzetta, 1957; Shaw, 1955)—or intentionally. Distortion also occurs at various levels and for different reasons (Allport & Postman, 1947; 1954; Allyn & Festinger, 1961; Campbell, 1958; Cohen, 1958; Read, 1962).

It can be said that such "malfunctioning" may not always be dysfunctional, in that ambiguity facilitates interpretation that has more meaning or significance to participants in the organization. No doubt, ambiguity may also result in ignorance, but the value of ignorance as a component of communication has not been greatly explored in communication systems apart from initial work by Moore and Tumin (1949). To avoid omissions and inaccuracy in message contents (Baker, Ballantine, & True, 1949; Macy, Christie, & Luce, 1953; Willis & Hale, 1963), repetition via variation in form and channel, and verification

through feedback are used. But "not only do the very devices invented to alleviate communication difficulties tend to produce new sources of communication trouble, but even success in the surmounting of such difficulties itself produces new blockages in the already existing structures in organisations" (Guetzkow, 1965, p. 561).

Honesty/Dishonesty

(Dishonesty, negotiation, game-playing)

Where important decisions are made governing people's careers, and where impressions, perceptions, attitudes, and personal preferences are expected contributory factors to such decision making, the notion of truthfulness or honesty must figure in the collage of behaviour. Backbier, Hoogstraten, and Terwogt-Kouwenhoven (1997) conducted a study of situational determinants of the acceptability of telling lies. Lying is introduced as a "functional communication strategy," in that a lie is a message from a sender designed to influence a receiver in a certain way (Buller & Burgoon, 1994, as cited by Backbier et al.). A lie is being regarded not as an end, but as a means to achieve a certain goal (Miller & Stiff, 1993, as cited by Backbier et al.). Interviews were conducted with 180 women between the ages of 30 and 40 (age and gender differences were avoided as distracters). Motive, situation, and relation (the other person) were found to be influential to the judgement of lies. There was a strong relation with the role of the motive of the liar and the relative importance of the situation. Motives for lying were seen either as social—where the person who is lied to has the greatest interest in lying—or as individualistic and egoistic—where the person who is lying has the greatest interest in lying. Lying may be seen as more acceptable for social motives and lesser so for individualistic and egoistic motives. In the context of promotion, decision makers and candidates have at their disposal yet another weapon, or another instrument for realizing their goal.

Quite a number of researchers have focused on issues in assessment and recruitment, but not many have included the voices and input of the full cast of players in the promotion scene. Research done so far shows clearly a need for bold entry into research that can marry elements of selection, promotion, and micropolitics, and Church as an organization, all in the context of schools. As such, this research sought to identify the micropolitical elements present in the promotion exercise in a denominational secondary school. It is an opportunity to investigate the claim made by Ball (1987):

> The promotion process appears closed, secretive and biased. The criteria for promotion are regarded as unfair or politically distorted; they are open to interpretation. Promotions are regarded, rightly or wrongly, as political acts. (p. 172)

> Micropolitics…is multifaceted, indexical and obscure. It intervenes when least expected, it underpins the fleeting encounter, the innocent-sounding memo, the offhand comment…. The hint, the guarded reference, the euphemism are the lexicon of politics. It is the stuff of mutual understanding and misunderstanding, of later denial, of informed sources and second-hand accounts. (p. 245)

Methodology

The methodology chosen for this research is guided by the need to understand how subjectivities are produced and the influence of historicity on social organization and behaviour. The qualitative approach to this research will enable the research itself to make "the comfortable strange and disconcerting" (Dippo, 1994, p. 203). It will also provide the opportunity for the researched, including researcher, to engage in self-criticism and self-reaction through introspection. It is the vehicle through which the researcher will attempt to "peel back the leaves of understanding" (L. Barton, personal communication, 1999) and to "unsettle questions, texts…to challenge what is, incite what could be, and imagine a world that is not yet imagined" (Fine, 1994, p. 30). It is also influenced by the postmodernist stance that multiple voices do coexist, thus suggesting varying interpretations of reality.

This researcher finds that the qualitative approach allows for the understanding of circumstances and conditions which are central elements of the particular research context (Rubin & Rubin 1995). Understanding, however, though it comes with the "baggage" of bias and subjectivity, can still be achieved through enquiry that is consistent, transparent, and reflexive. The reflexivity and transparency of the research also commit the researcher to the limitations inherent in the situational reality of the research. One example of this is the limited capacity of the emancipatory paradigm to have an encompassing role within this research context, which is limited.

To a large extent, data collection is largely dependent upon the telling of "stories" and, as such, the role of language in the construction of worlds (Usher, 1997) must be considered. The choice of data collection methods and data analysis methods is also influenced by the significance

of language as powerful and political. Reflexivity guides the essential peripherals of the research, such as journal entries, memos, and notes, which shape the "progressive focusing," as delineated by Arksey and Knight (1999). The unfolding of this research can certainly be seen as progressive focusing, since fieldwork directs and redirects foci.

This researcher is both insider and outsider. This may have had some effect on data collection, but I have sensed that both could have been an advantage. "Insiderness" has certainly helped with access and a positive attitude by some to the research.

Data Collection and Analysis

Pilot interviews informed the interviewing of 44 persons, including a key informant, Board/Church personnel, present principals, present vice-principals, past principals, past vice-principals, present candidates, past candidates, teachers, and Ministry of Education/Teaching Service Commission (TSC) officials. The interviews were semi-structured and varied slightly for each category of respondent, to suit their position and experiences. Questions focused on participants' knowledge, experience, opinions, and interpretations of the promotion process and related elements within the context. All interviews were electronically recorded and transcribed. Respondents verified their transcripts.

One of the significant features of this research is the importance attached to comments made by individuals as opposed to a focus on the frequency of occurrences. This is due to the reality that each interviewee represents his or her distinct experience of the relevant context. Individuals are also highlighted because of the nature of micropolitics, where one voice potentially has much significance.

Data were coded and categorized under broad headings initially and eventually re-coded to create new subcategories. Care had to be taken not to lose the human element of the research. As such, much of the actual words of respondents have been used in the data presentation and analysis.

Findings are presented according to the subcategories of the analysis.

Findings and Discussion

Micropolitics is a Reality

Comments of influential persons and candidates specifically state that there is a political element in promotion or promotion-related activity, including Church involvement. On varying occasions, individual Church Officials commented on "*the stress of Church politics*," with one adding

that "*in the Presbyterian community you have a little more bacchanal than in a typical small society*." With regard to one promotion scenario one principal admitted that a "*lot of politics were involved,*" while a past vice-principal "*wasn't aware of the potential and actual tensions involved.*" A candidate for promotion "*was unaware* [then] *of the undercurrents…the corruption*" and concluded that "*reality…depends a lot on politics*" and recalls that "*the vice-principalship of* [School Name] *was a very sort of messy situation re the build up.*" A Church Official recalls "*confusion… for* [School name] and "*sweated.*"

With regard to the actual selection process, one candidate explained that "educated people don't want to put themselves on the Board…don't like the politics of the organization. The politics of the Presbyterian Church is the downfall in terms of the selection process," while a teacher declared that "so much depends on the character of those engaged in the selection process. It matters little what system is in place if the system is accompanied by those more concerned with politics and not principles."

Actual Strategies Evident in the System

Lobbying/canvassing

All statements in this category contained variations of terms such as *lobbying*, *canvassing*, *campaigning*, *influence peddling*, *arranged*, *their own candidate*, *press for*.

A past principal revealed that "all kinds of canvassing of a very devious nature take place" and that in one scenario "...they politicised the whole business of appointing people…just like how politicians want to ... indulge in patronage…they become the agents of either organized prejudice or good decisions…." Even Church Officials seemed to be aware that "people do lobby for candidates" and that "some principals have their own candidates" so that "they will sit down night and day and will use telephone, just to keep you out." Corroborating such views, an influential person comments that "very often, when recommendations come to Synodical Council, a lot of politicking goes on, canvassing goes on behind the scenes…." Two teachers from Presbyterian secondary schools respectively are of the view that "the system is not fair (and) candidates' friends and family lobby for them and generally the best person is not given the job but the one with the most connections," and that "it is unfortunate that there seems to be too much lobbying for candidates rather than who really qualifies for promotion." While a Ministry Official guesses that "there is a lot of campaigning and so on," a past vice-principal puts forward the view that "the objectivity of the TSC perhaps balances the lobbying and biases of the Board."

Manipulation

Manipulation comes in many forms. Potential candidates become "active strategists" (Lyons, 1981) and become visible in Church or become involved in school management. One non-Presbyterian candidate, it is reported, was baptized in the Presbyterian Church three years prior to being appointed as principal. According to one candidate "*...people who never attended Church get themselves nominated to serve on Boards, preach and then finish with that,*" and another reports on one version of one such scenario by saying that "[regularity of Church attendance] *was a blatant lie...Because soon after he received the promotion he has discontinued his interest in the group.... His attendance to Church has fallen.*" Verifying this type of occurrence, a Minister is of the view that "*...the link with Church will always be a problem. They have people sometimes who know how to play the game, they come and they get involved with the Church and they make sure that people who have to make the recommendation see them...and as soon as they get their promotion they back off.*"

Grooming

Grooming by a principal is one of the more common forms of manipulation. If a principal grooms a candidate, the general expectation is that that individual would be recommended.

One candidate recalls that "…the Principal had the teacher sign documents for him as Principal designate…. I took these documents…. I said well, what is this? Is this an official post? Principal designate? It means that everything is being railroaded." A past principal recounted seeing a specific teacher "with that kind of potential, and I started giving him extra responsibilities. Made him a Dean, Head of _____ Department…. My view was not just getting the work done, but training for successors."

Teachers, too, have perceived the grooming practice to be the cause of potential conflict, but many have also described the conflict that can arise from appointing outsiders. In this case, the micropolitical strategy may be represented in the resistance of opposing staff. Words suggesting staff's strategy are *tension*, *clash*, *friction*, *not be welcomed*, *resentment*, *unacceptance*, *hostility*, *reception is cold*, *alien*, *like a bull in a china shop*, *misfit*. So, the power to strategize is also held by the "minor" players—the teachers.

Many candidates also speak of other people in the system who encouraged them to apply for administrative positions. These efforts to manipulate a situation may stem from a fear of the unfamiliar and a need

to know that the status quo will be maintained. Principals who have spent years labouring at an institution seem to think it is their duty to "pass the baton" on to someone who has an appreciation of their own efforts. They therefore find difficulty considering "outsiderness" and the potential "undoing" of all that they have managed to build and maintain as one of their life's major accomplishments. Notwithstanding that manipulation breeds inevitable lack of justice, the human need for perpetuation and stability is the pertinent factor here. From the perspective of an inside observer, the manipulation that is evident in the promotion process is akin to nepotism in organizations. Schools see themselves not just as individual communities, but as families.

Abuse of the promotion interview

Candidates report sensing unfair biases with reference to their Church attendance, with one reporting being "*badgered with questions about this log book*" …and having "*the distinct feeling that this* [person] *already knew who was going to be recommended.*" Tone and approach were found to be inappropriate as a candidate wondered if he was "*at a scolding session…at a blaming session*" and described the interview as "*disappointment,*" "*agony,*" "*an inquisition,*" dealing with "*frivolous matters,*" "*niggling things that had nothing really to do with my Presbyterianism—if you want to call it that.*" The candidate was left with the impression that "*obviously they knew I did not go to Church so they harped on that fact,*" and that behaviour at a particular interview was inappropriate as "*half the people (interviewers) eating while half the people asking the questions.*" Even at the TSC level, there was the perception that the Commission had already decided "*…it was not going to overrule the recommended candidate. It was going through the motions of giving me the satisfaction that I was being heard.*" By conducting unsatisfactory interviews, the Board is not fulfilling its role and shows contempt by making its biases blatant. Abuse of the interviewing process serves to undermine the morale of potentially well-intentioned and capable candidates.

Formal mechanisms and ad hoc practices

Ad hoc practices serve to perpetuate not only the inefficiencies of the system, but also the negative perceptions held by participants and observers, in addition to the culture of micropolitics. Several accounts reveal incorrect and inconsistent procedures while some are indications as to how these are perpetuated. Misinformation was seen to be one of the causes of dissatisfaction in the area of promotion. In the past, much bitterness ensued due to a lack of direction about acting administrative

positions in denominational schools, because the correct procedure had not been constantly adhered to on some occasions.

One principal reports that "the Secondary Schools' Boards… usually ask the Principal, off the record, for a recommendation as to who…would be the most suitable.…" Principals are faced with a challenge involving ethics and strength of character when the Board asks them for their unofficial recommendation for administrative positions in their schools.

An influential person explained that there are times when some persons on the Synodical Council are not au courant with correct procedures for promotion. Arms of the Presbyterian organization are responsible for the perpetuation of this adhocracy in procedure. To reiterate the words of the **Church Guide**, "democracy irresponsibly practised can lead to anarchy and confusion" (p. 48).

Formal mechanisms constitute the façade which facilitates further micropolitical tactics. **The Church Report** is one mechanism which generates much apparent dissatisfaction among candidates for promotion. There is the perception that "regularity of attendance" at Church is interpreted in varying ways and that, according to one Minister, even "*Official Boards have so blatantly lied about the person's involvement and activities.*" Due to deliberately inaccurate Church Reports "*a committee has now been formed to look into ways of ensuring valid Church Reports,*" according to the then Chairman of the Presbyterian Secondary Schools' Board of Education. It is also possible that the Board's decisions can be overruled by the Synod, which votes without having interviewed the candidates.

Teachers may choose to **challenge the system** by exercising their rights. One candidate reports about another saying that "even though the person may not have been genuinely interested in this case, she became interested because she realized that this was something to be challenged." Union activists also utilize this right to challenge according to one vice-principal.

Becoming members on Boards and Committees is another contentious issue. In this case, a Church Official refers to the Administrative Committee of a particular school as one influential person reportedly desirous of "interfering" "*made sure…got on that Board* [meaning Administrative Committee]*…wanted to become Chairman…didn't make Chairman…and now…has been trying to interfere with the school.*"

The Church's Constitution, according to a Church Official, also has a role to play in control as "the Constitution was drafted in order to

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eliminate some people from the Church hierarchy…in terms of the whole administration…to restrict some people who are vocal."

Non-action, in terms of implementing a formal mechanism, has resulted in frustrating candidates as "the Board is not doing anything. The Ministry is not doing anything and I am there hanging."

A lack of clear procedures, the Staff Report, and the Synod's ability to overrule the Board's decisions are other formal mechanisms that enable the micropolitical activity on the promotion arena.

Lack of communication

Candidates claimed ignorance about the criteria used for selection by the Board. One candidate felt that "*if it is based on factors that are not known, then…it is not what we call a level playing field,*" and another pointed out that "*if some people on the inside track know these things because somebody on the Board knows them and they mention it to them, well then they have a definite advantage.*"

With regard to feedback from the Selection Interview, candidates complained that they "*heard…through the grapevine…there is no feedback mechanism.*" They had "*no way of knowing unless somebody came behind their back and told me.*" When feedback is not formal, silence breeds speculation. The Board's justification may be that the TSC makes the final decision and that final feedback is their responsibility. The silence of the Board, however, places the candidate in a position of disadvantage. There is no formal channel for protest or query. The probing candidate is made to suffer the indignity of what is perceived by some to be soliciting information illegitimately.

Dishonesty/negotiation/game-playing

The conditioned or contrived social behaviour of man allows him to accommodate to suit his needs. One influential person devised tactics to "beat the system," using someone else to voice his opinions. Even the interviewee is not without power, admitting to using his listening and interpretive skills to succeed in the interview: "*Depending on what you tell me, I can see way down the road where I feel you're going and I manipulate it. So if I feel you want to hear certain things…But I did that in the Commission interview.*"

Another candidate claimed that although he had submitted an application for a position, "*the Principal and the Administrative Committee had not forwarded my application at all to the Secondary Schools' Board….*" Eventually, a formal protest was lodged and this candidate was eventually appointed. So that according to this account, a deliberate attempt was made to sabotage this individual's chances. An

ex-Board member and ex-principal recounted his own cheating at an interview, indicating that he changed marks on the score sheet to favour his preferred candidate.

Conclusions

This research has demonstrated how micropolitics is manifested in the given context. It demonstrates how inefficiencies may occur in the promotion setting, thus providing a cautionary knowledge base to enable a change in systems that may not be functioning in the best interest of a community.

The notion of change itself cannot be divorced from micropolitics. Change is a political process. It occurs when there is a conflict of values, and we bear in mind that conflicts which may have been submerged, surface with change (Ball, 1987). In order to institute change, the inevitable micropolitical elements must be utilized in order to improve the ideas and values inherent in the desired change. Power, influence, and control have a role to play. The major point of focus in this discussion is that the motives for change and the means must be based on informed judgement, with educational goals in mind. Purpose must be apolitical.

If there is the will, there seems to be room for growth with regard to the Presbyterian Secondary Schools' Board of Education. Teachers are now in the era of performance management appraisals and have little tolerance for the informality and injustice perpetrated by micropolitical actors who shield their lack of knowledge and professionalism behind their armour of power and authority. Inappropriate influence and nefarious micropolitical activity can be curtailed when procedures ensure effective decision making in an effort to realize the chosen mission and vision of all stakeholders.

One of the main areas necessitating change is the method of assessment. Procedure must be linked to specified goals and must be precise. Although principals are at liberty to attach a letter of recommendation to the candidate's application, this is not a requirement. Since the Board's recommendation is considered to be significant, it would be useful if the Presbyterian Secondary Schools' Board of Education were to design its own new assessment form, soliciting useful, specific information and evidence from all candidates' immediate superiors, including Heads of Departments, and even from principals who have recently retired or resigned. This form should also be signed by the candidate. Portfolios are also useful as documentation of

candidates' professional track record. Submission of these should be a requirement.

These suggestions also have relevance to the TSC and their form of assessment. Assessment must seem to be fair. At least candidates ought not to be subjected to the deliberate tone and air of power assumed by some members of the TSC, according to reports by some candidates. Teaching Service Commissioners must be conscientious in their efforts to execute the nation's ideals in education. Their Mark Sheet must also include descriptors for each category so that the sum of each individual's general impression would not be the determinant of who becomes an administrator of a school.

Accountability must be seen as a necessary ingredient of democracy. All agents of authorized influence in the promotion process must be accountable. Marks, statements, and decisions must be rationalized. If micropolitical strategies dominate decision making, as the data have shown, accountability is surely an appropriate goal at this point. In order for the Presbyterian Secondary Schools' Board of Education to become more accountable, the culture of the Presbyterian Church must undergo metamorphosis. If it is to take its stewardship seriously, then it needs to overhaul its management attitudes and procedures.

Such an overhaul would underline the need for capability to be evident in the selection process. In this research context, interviewing as an assessment technique, and recruitment or selection procedures in this research context have not been regarded as areas that require specific technical or professional expertise. Instead, it is assumed that ex-principals, present principals, sometimes businessmen, and the average individual are equipped to conduct an interview for promotion. Perhaps there is need for an alternatively composed interviewing panel, which includes qualified interviewers who are removed from the promotion context—persons who have no close affiliation to the candidates or who has no affiliation to the Church or to the school in question. Persons experienced in education will advise interviewers as to discrete criteria, and will supply information to interviewers beforehand, will be present at the interview, but only as observers. The marking criteria and descriptors will be elaborated by the "qualified interviewers." Though this may be in collaboration with past and present principals, the intention is that the qualified interviewers are familiar with desirable educational practice and policies, as well as with the needs of the particular context for which they are selecting. The Presbyterian Secondary Schools' Board of Education should also avail itself of the services of "experts" in additional assessment techniques, which may

include observation on the job or situational analysis, either orally or written.

A brave, bold, and visionary step for the Church would be to organize administrative training for teachers who may be interested in promotion in Presbyterian schools in the future. This can be executed with input from present and past principals, and trained personnel in educational administration. This suggestion is being made since so many interviewers and teachers consider a good fit and insiderness to be important criteria. The Church and the Presbyterian Secondary Schools' Board of Education can then structure its own "grooming" for anyone who is interested.

Church Reports also need to be valid. It is being suggested here that all members of the Official Board and the Minister of the candidate's region sign the report, instead of only the Secretary of the Official Board and the Minister, as occurs at the present time. Failure to sign must be accompanied by an explanation. This is in an effort to eradicate the likelihood of influence tactics and of the abuse of the system by candidates who become "practising Presbyterians" overnight. The capability of Ministers to administer their Official Boards also comes into question. All members of the Official Board of the individual churches would then be held accountable and not be in a position to "pass the buck." With capability and competence as major goals at every level of the Church's involvement in education, accountability will not be elusive. Instead, it would be understood. Accountability facilitates transparency. Both may even be seen to be synonymous.

Communication needs to be open and reciprocal so that teachers and selectors understand the concerns of each other. The first step in this transparency effort would be to make available to teachers the criteria for assessment, and, secondly, to create opportunities for teachers to express their views and for misconceptions to be clarified. The human tendency to speculate, to question, and to arrive at alternative conclusions makes the diminution of micropolitical activity somewhat of a challenge. Teachers' and candidates' views and attitudes are sometimes shaped by misinformation, misconception, and mystique. They need to be formally appraised of procedures both at the Board level and at the level of the TSC. It would be useful for both entities to institute mechanisms whereby they cease to be as nebulous as they have been up to this time.

For too long, the relationship between decision makers and teachers has either been distant or non-existent. It would be no exaggeration to say that decision makers, that is, the Board and the TSC, have had what appears to be insufficient respect for teachers as professionals when it comes to promotion. The lack of attention to detail, lack of feedback, and

scant regard for professionalism in assessment are indications of the lack of esteem in which teachers are held by these authorities.

It is the social interaction of the parties involved that will determine the success or failure of innovation. What are required are attitudes that can accommodate all stages of the innovation. While there will be no escape from the politics of power, advocacy, and influence, we accept that all negotiation is political, but are comforted that the intentions would be healthy.

Education for democracy and empowerment cannot be achieved without attitudes that can accommodate it. Current attitudes to decision making, as at the level of promotion, are at the crossroads. Those accustomed to being in positions of authority may want to re-evaluate their original positions on many issues. They may seek compromise, and in the process may realize a system that is forward-thinking, enhanced, and user-friendly.

If the Church is to continue to have a say in the administration of its schools, it cannot afford to bask in the past accomplishments of standards set when there was not much competition, but must harness its many resources to set new standards other than academic.

The Presbyterian Secondary Schools' Board of Education has shown some signs of self-evaluation in that some major changes have been made along the way with regard to the Church Report, the Mark Sheet, and the handling of formal protests. The TSC has made attempts to promote transparency in its own procedures through face-to-face communication with school boards. This is certainly the beginning of the way forward.

The literature has shown how the needs of the individual are so much a reality that organizations need to consider those needs in their planning and management. Man's tendency to manoeuvre towards exploitation and success, towards individual actualization as opposed to organizational good, and towards power acquisition inevitably leads him to engage in micropolitical behaviour as he attempts to accommodate to new needs. In its aim to find out how micropolitics is manifested in the promotion context, the data have shown many instances of micropolitical strategies within the promotion context. Instances of micropolitical activity as described in this research support the theory that political behaviour is propelled more by personal stake than by situational activity (Porter et al., 1981), and that individuals' activity within organizations is inherently political (Mangham, 1979). But the theory being proposed as a consequence of this study is that micropolitical activity is also a cultural phenomenon. Micropolitics is endemic to small societies, not just to organizations. The administration of Presbyterian secondary schools falls

under the umbrella of a society—a social circle—which functions as the wider organization. Consequently, favours are usually sought, bargains are struck.

It is hoped that the findings of this research would, in the first instance, give others the courage to engage in research in areas that were before considered to be out-of-bounds. Secondly, this work could easily be complemented by related efforts by insiders who wish to initiate development by constructive critique.

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