

## Article

# Re-Imagining Leadership Roles beyond the Shadow of Bureaucracy

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**Abstract:** The aim of this conceptual paper is to revisit the relationship between leadership and bureaucracy. The dominant and unquestioned way of thinking about leadership is to equate it as an undertaking exercised by leaders, those officers who occupy hierarchical positions in organizations. For example, senior leadership and middle leadership in schools are often associated with formal hierarchical roles played by senior and middle leaders. However, it can be argued that this perspective is problematic, not only because it is leader-centric but also due to its limitations in explaining the phenomenon of leadership. In order to understand the relationship between leadership and bureaucracy and leadership outside of bureaucracy, the paper reviews some of the extant literature in the field, including a brief history of bureaucracy, its pervasiveness in educational institutions, and current neo-liberal policies and reforms that function effectively within bureaucratic structures. An important contribution of the paper is a synoptic conceptual model that brings together three worldviews or archetypes pertaining to bureaucracy. These are a hard-edged view (system first, people second), a soft-edged view (people first, system second) and a third worldview (issue first, people second, system third). The third worldview signals a departure from the first two archetypes as it is an illustration of leadership outside the confines of bureaucracy.

**Keywords:** bureaucracy; Weber; neo-liberalism; global educational reform movement; grassroots leadership; homeschooling



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## 1. Introduction

It is said in Greek history that Alexander the Great once came upon his philosopher hero Diogenes and asked him if there was anything he could do for him, to which Diogenes replied that he could stand away from blocking his sun. This apocryphal story is a near perfect metaphor for a consideration of one of the critical issues facing educational leadership in contemporary times.

Let the shadow of Alexander the Great be the bureaucracy which shades and shapes our thinking, the way we prepare educational leaders, and a host of metaphors we use in describing who a leader is and what a leader is supposed to do. In fact, the designation of senior, middle and other levels of leadership is embedded in the hierarchy of roles at the heart of bureaucratic theory [1]. These roles—senior and middle—imply bureaucratic demarcations.

The aim of this paper is to revisit and rethink the concepts of both leadership and bureaucracy, and the relationship between them. A critical approach to leadership is useful as it allows for a questioning of the dominant view of leadership, understood as “leader-centrism” [2] (p. 14). Leader-centrism sees leaders as independent persons separate and distinctive from followers and sees the leader’s skillset or persona as that which produces organizational outcomes [2]. A leader-centric view of leadership is one that fits with the notion of bureaucracy, as the leader occupies a position within the hierarchy and exercises

authority over subordinates who are situated below them in the chain of command. In contrast, a leader relational view sees leadership as dynamic, interactive, and a socially co-constructed process [3]. A relational view of leadership, then, emphasises the process or activity of leadership and moves away from the idea of it being associated with any one individual.

In order to be able to understand the relationship between leadership and bureaucracies, the article provides a short history of bureaucracies, their rise, and their ongoing impact upon organisational theory and practice. With their beginnings, thousands of years ago in Mesopotamian civilization, to the late 19th century when Weber developed his theory, to current times wherein they have been viewed as the machinery for enabling neo-liberal policies and practices in education, bureaucracies have been, and continue to be, part of the institutionalisation of education systems across the world.

Two basic worldviews or archetypes of bureaucracies are identified and discussed. The first is a hard-edged view that emphasises efficiency and control to the detriment of people, and the second is a softer edged view that takes a more humane view of people's work. The latter shows that bureaucracies are not necessarily fixed and dehumanising entities but can be modified, nuanced, and enabling. Within these worldviews, both middle and senior leaders would be seen to play different roles.

It is argued in this paper that the relationship between leadership and bureaucracy is a vexed one because of the unquestioned tendency to equate leadership with individuals who hold hierarchical positions within an organisation. This perspective is not only leader-centric in nature but highly problematic, as it is argued that leadership is not the same as role ranking just as exercising power is not the same as leadership [4]. What leadership might look like outside the confines of bureaucracy is an important question that has not been explored fully in the extant literature. Later in the paper this question is addressed via a discussion that considers grassroots leadership. Here, we argue that a grassroots leadership worldview is a third archetype. All three worldviews—hard, soft, and grassroots view—are presented in a model that is the culmination of the article.

## 2. Methods

Unlike empirical, research-based studies that involve researchers making decisions regarding research questions and appropriate methods with which to collect and analyze data that answer those questions, conceptual papers rely on an argument where information is assimilated and combined with previous concepts and writing in the field [5]. Conceptual papers “typically focus on proposing new relationships” [5] (p. 20) with the aim of developing both logical and clear arguments.

The current paper has been informed by two methodological considerations for conceptual papers taken from Jaakkola's [5] work. These are papers that utilize “theory synthesis”, the focus of which is to summarize and integrate current understanding about a concept or construct, and “theory adaptation” [5], which revises current understandings and identifies new dimensions of a construct. Sections 3–7 of this paper fit with the notion of theory synthesis as the literature selected for review reflects some current understandings about leadership and bureaucracy. For example, our brief history of bureaucracy and insights from Weber's theory of bureaucracy provide an important backdrop to the understanding of bureaucracies today, while a discussion on the impact of neo-liberalism via managerialism and corporatization on education policy and practice underscores how bureaucracy is a mechanism for the delivery of current educational reforms. The two worldviews or archetypes, hard and soft, have been used in the literature to show two ideal contrasting perspectives of bureaucracy [6,7].

It could be said that the final two sections of the paper (Sections 8 and 9) follow a theory adaptation method of writing conceptual papers, as both sections aim to problematise an existing way of thinking [5] about leadership and bureaucracy. Section 8 identifies key elements of leadership removed from a bureaucratic frame and puts forward homeschooling as an illustration of a grassroots movement that operates outside of formal

educational institutions. The inclusion of grassroots leadership and its contribution to the discussion of bureaucracy is an attempt to expand the way we think about leadership beyond bureaucracies as it “identif[ies] [a] new dimension of an established construct by introducing a new . . . lens” [5] (p. 22). Section 9 is a synthesis of the paper as it provides a summary that puts together three worldviews and what they would look like for both senior and middle leaders.

In developing the argument for the current paper, an earlier paper by the authors on grassroots leadership provided some impetus and direction [8]. That paper examined grassroots leadership as an under-researched type of leadership observed in social movements and community organisations, often among volunteers and mostly operating outside of formal bureaucratic structures. In that article, the authors depicted grassroots leadership as an activity that emerges in response to an issue/cause, is made up of committed members with shared values and is usually of a short duration [8]. In writing the current article, it was the intention of the authors to build upon the main idea within that earlier article by considering whether there is any connection between grassroots leadership and bureaucracies. As a review of the literature is an important aspect of any conceptual paper [5], a variety of current and seminal yet older literature was sourced for the purposes of this paper.

This article begins by exploring leadership before bureaucracy and then traces its origins some thousands of years ago.

### 3. Leadership before Bureaucracy

Leaders were recognized long before formal bureaucratic theory had been formulated by Weber (1946–2013a) [9]. Ancient writings such as those of Plutarch and Seutonius and later those of Machiavelli in the Renaissance period are nearly devoid of organizational descriptions. However, there is evidence of the trappings of bureaucracy in historical accounts of the Qin Dynasty under the rule of Shi Hwangti (221–210 BCE) in China, as well as in accounts of the ancient Egyptians, the Roman Principate, and the Roman Catholic Church towards the end of the thirteenth century [9]. Schott’s (2000) [10] analysis posits that Mesopotamian civilisation underwent several major transformations over the course of 2000 years, including significant shifts from farming villages to temple towns, to city states and then nation states from 4000 BCE to around 2000 BCE. With each shift there was evidence of further features of bureaucracy.

As an example, from 4000 BCE to 3600 BCE, priests managed temple towns and looked after food production, advised farmers, and controlled trade. With the expansion of trade came the need for standardized rules and procedures with which to regulate the economy. The invention of writing facilitated the keeping of written records for trade and other important transactions. From 3000–2000 BCE, city states took over from temple towns where militia were transformed into armies. During this time period, governance became secular, with Kings or “Lugals” ruling both the temples and secular life with the support of other palace officials [10]. By 2500 BCE, “Sumerian city-states had become fully developed and government administration, trade, crafts, and writing had all reached maturity” [10] (p. 69). Around 2355 BCE, the introduction of a comprehensive legal code including a court system was established, spelling out the rights and responsibilities of citizens [10]. The nation-state or third dynasty (2112–2004 BCE) saw the emergence of a highly centralized bureaucratic state, with reforms such as the establishment of a taxation system, training schools for officials, the creation of an army, the introduction of an accounting system, and a unified system of imperial administration [10].

### 4. A History of the Rise of Bureaucracy from Weber

The late 19th century and early twentieth century in Germany provided the context in which German sociologist Max Weber (1864–1920) lived and developed his theory of bureaucracy as a social form of organization. In Germany at this time there was an intense period of industrialization and the emergence of “an authoritarian, militarised, bureaucratic regime” [11] (p. 101). Weber argued that, as society becomes increasingly complex, there is

a need for a rational system of organization and a rational system is best understood as a bureaucratic structure [9].

The hallmarks of a bureaucracy are: (1) specialization as reflected in the division(s) of labour; (2) the creation of job rules, standards, and uniform procedures; (3) a clear-cut line of power and authority anchored in law and the prevailing legal system in a hierarchy of role subordination; (4) roles centred on competency; and (5) a separation of operations/administration and ownership [1].

Inherent in any understanding of bureaucracy is the notion of power or authority which is a key part of how bureaucracies function. As noted from the features above, power or authority is vested in the position (i.e., supervisor, manager) and position holders possess the rational–legal authority to ensure compliance and obedience in those who are subordinate to them.

Although Weber saw that bureaucracy was a superior system for controlling large quantities of information and the most efficient way of making decisions, he recognized that it was not without its faults [9]. For example, an over-reliance on rules could mean becoming rule bound, wherein individual freedoms might be lost when control is vested in the hands of a few bureaucrats at the top of the hierarchy and where senior bureaucrats could subvert the process by furthering their own ends and not the overarching goals of the organization [11]. Other criticisms directed towards bureaucracy include the monotony of the work, the alienation of workers, and excessive rigidity and conformity in problem solving [12]. Bureaucracy has been construed as “double-edged” according to Goullder (1954) in Pendola [13], in that its structure provides order and control but at the same time de-personalises and produces anomie in workers. A hard-edge view of bureaucracy is one that would prioritise control, conformity, and standardization and would put people and their needs second.

## 5. Educational Leadership and Bureaucracy

In the 19th and 20th centuries, mass, secular education was institutionalized in most countries in the world [14]. Education systems were administered and regulated by the state (governments). Since their inception and to this day, it could be argued that schools are bureaucracies since “organizational structure, rules, and regulations define school life for teachers, students and administrators” [15] (p. 617). The same could be said of universities and other educational institutions that have hierarchical structures with a clear chain of command, specialist roles, and a division of labour [16].

In schools, authority is based on a formal authority, with the school principal the accountable officer for the school’s operation and whose power derives from their position. Because of their location, principals operate at the interface between their school and the system. The system delegates power to principals and they in turn delegate power to other leaders, such as deputies and middle leaders who then delegate power to teachers. There is a division of responsibility where different personnel (i.e., teachers, teacher aides) play specific roles based on their level of expertise and knowledge and there are rules and procedures that stipulate required forms of rational behaviour and practice for students, teachers, and leaders.

### 5.1. Efforts to Standardize Leadership Roles

Over the last 20 years, jurisdictions across the world, including the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia, have introduced professional standards for school principals and teachers that identify a set of roles, duties, and tasks that need to be performed in order to ensure that the requirements of their professional work are met. In Australia, these standards have become mandatory for teacher registration, ongoing professional development purposes, and for performance management and review [17]. For school principals, the standards are used to develop pathways for current and aspiring principals, selection and recruitment processes, and performance review.

As an illustration, the following is from the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership professional standard for principals, pertaining to “leading the management of the school”, stating that principals will be involved in the “appropriate delegation of tasks to members of the staff and the monitoring of accountabilities. Principals ensure these accountabilities are met” [18] (p. 17). This statement is a clear example of the classic bureaucratic features, i.e., chain of command, division of responsibilities, and the legitimate, legal authority of the principal.

### 5.2. *The Problem of Charisma*

Currently, a set of draft standards for middle leaders is being trialled in Australia [19] that is expected to assist in defining the specific roles, duties, and responsibilities of middle leaders. The prevailing view is that, if a person occupies a position in the hierarchy (such as a principal or middle leader), they are assumed to be a leader by virtue of the role they carry out. Weber (1946/2013b) [20] himself argued that holding a title or executing a particular role denotes authority rather than leadership and that leadership needs to be understood in the context of charisma: “The holder of charisma seizes the task that is adequate for him [sic] and demands obedience and a following by virtue of his mission . . . His charismatic claim breaks down if his mission is not recognized by those to whom he feels he has been sent (p. 246) . . . Pure charisma does not know any ‘legitimacy’ other than that flowing from personal strength . . . which is constantly being proved (p. 248) . . . The charismatic leader gains and maintains authority solely by proving his strength in life . . . his divine mission must ‘prove’ itself in that those who faithfully surrender to him must fare well” [20] (p. 249). While Weber [20] argued that it is not impossible to hold a position of authority and to be “charismatic” at the same time, “the more bureaucratized social relations in an organization become, the less room there is for charisma to play a role” [4] (p. 38).

Weber pointed to “charisma” as the defining feature of leadership; however, other qualities and skills associated with leadership might include trustworthiness, integrity and competence. The function of a bureaucracy, then, is to create a structure in which leadership is almost unnecessary [21]. Followers are likely to follow not because they respect or trust the judgement of the role incumbent, but because the person occupying the role has legitimate power and authority to enforce obedience. When the development of an organizational structure is merged into a single intersection of leader-centrism and bureaucracy (King, Pope, Chief, General or CEO) and one becomes the other, the combination results in the chain of command.

## 6. The Impact of Neo-Liberalism and Its Manifestation in Managerialism and Corporatization

American engineer Frederick Taylor (1856–1915) and French industrialist Henry Fayol (1841–1925) were developing their scientific management approach and administrative approach to management, respectively, around the same time as Weber. Both Taylor and Fayol aimed to develop a management system that improved workers’ performance by ensuring they were closely supervised and performed their work efficiently [22]. Both approaches emphasized a clear division of authority, standardization and therefore no requirement for creativity or individuality, obedience to authority, and a clear separation between management and workers (i.e., line and staff).

Mintzberg [23] has described one dominant form of bureaucracy with the metaphor of a machine. Machines are rational apparatuses that are composed of parts that perform a specific function. The machine metaphor helps to explain bureaucracy for its focus on clear and standard procedures, work specialization, chain of command, and the goal of efficiency. Machines perform their functions in exactly the same manner. They never become discouraged, tired, or angry. There is never a morale problem with a machine, and it never needs praise, a pay increase or a pep talk.

In the twentieth century, the machine metaphor was dominant in the administration of schools where scientific approaches played out with the aim of moulding children for



their future economic role [24]. In their analysis of dominant metaphors impacting upon schooling in the US in the 20th century, Beck and Murphy [25] noted that, in the 1920s, “principles of scientific management” guided the work of administrators; in the 1930s, schools operated as “businesses” (p. 23); and in the 1960s, they followed a “technical and mechanistic” approach (p. 89).

The last two decades of the twentieth century saw profound changes to educational institutions, such as schools and universities, and the public sector, in countries such as Australia, the United Kingdom, the United States, and other contemporary capitalist societies, and these changes were shaped by a set of neo-liberal and political reforms. Neo-liberalism is an ideology that emphasizes trade liberalism, deregulation of markets, and a dismantling of the public sector through reduced government spending [26]. According to Graeber (in Hanlon) [27], bureaucracy is “an iron law of liberalism” and “bureaucracy and its rules are necessary to deliver neo-liberalism through institutions such as the state, corporation, the market, etc” (p. 185). It could be observed that educational reforms from the past three decades demonstrate a “continuation of the permeation of bureaucracy” [4] (p. 33). Some of these reforms are considered below.

#### *The Global Education Reform Movement (GERM)*

A tool of neo-liberal policies has been corporatization and managerialism wrapped in “new public management” [28] (p. 280), with its focus on management for bringing about the necessary efficiency and effectiveness required in public sector organizations such as schools and universities. The shift experienced by universities is summed up well by Shore (2008), who remarked: “What we have witnessed here is the transformation of the traditional liberal and Enlightenment idea of the university as a place of higher learning into the modern idea of the university as a corporate enterprise whose concern is with market share, servicing the needs of commerce, maximizing economic return and investment, and gain competitive advantage in the ‘Global Knowledge Economy’” [28] (p. 282).

The concept of the global educational reform movement (GERM) has been used to explain a set of inter-related educational reforms introduced into school systems across the world as part of broader neo-liberal policies and new management thinking. The assumption underpinning each of these reforms is that they will address apparent inefficiencies and deficiencies in schooling and improve quality in educational outcomes. The five key interrelated reforms identified by Sahlberg (2012) are as follows: standardization of education; a focus on core subjects in the curriculum; low risk ways to reach goals; corporate management models; and test-based accountability policies [29].

Standardization includes performance standards not only for school leaders and teachers [17,18], but also students. External testing regimes have been and continue to be used to assess how students are meeting expected outcomes. The introduction of a national curriculum has also contributed to the practice of standardization. The second feature of GERM is the emphasis on subjects such as literacy and numeracy (and, to a lesser extent, science) considered “core” [29]. In Australia, literacy and numeracy tests (i.e., the National Assessment Program for Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN)) take place for children in years 3, 5, 7, and 9 and international tests such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), Trends in International Maths and Science (TIMSS), and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) are used for international comparative reasons.

The third feature of GERM is an implication derived from the first and second features. Due to the primacy of pre-determined standards and the value placed heavily on core subjects such as literacy and numeracy, it is likely that teachers and other educators will “search for low-risk ways to reach learning goals” [29] (para 7). In other words, there is less incentive for educators to engage in experimentation and pursue different types of learning and learning content outside of the confines of the curriculum. A danger with this perspective is that teaching can become instrumental, i.e., “teaching for the test” rather than putting student learning at the centre of planning and practice.

The use of corporate management models is the fourth observable trend [29] and the one of most interest to this article as it assumes that managers are leaders. This particular feature borrows concepts and techniques from business or the private sector based on the assumption they will improve quality, lower inefficiency, and create effectiveness. Language borrowed from the business sector that has been readily applied to school and university management policies and practices includes key performance indicators, strategic plans, performance reviews, accountability, benchmarking, continuous improvement, and standards.

The final feature that forms part of GERM is test-based accountability policies where “raising student achievement is closely tied to processes of accrediting, promoting, inspecting, and ultimately, rewarding or punishing schools and teachers” [29] (para 9). Success or failure is determined via results on high stakes testing for students (for literacy and numeracy) and teacher evaluations [29]. These aforementioned five reforms help to explain the emergence of an “audit culture” [28] (p. 278) where “accounting” and numerical scores are dictating the way school and university personnel are expected to comply with organizational requirements.

Alongside the metaphor of the machine is the metaphor of “accounting” [24] which is pervasive within neo-liberal reforms and GERM. Rankings of schools (via league tables), universities, and other public sector organizations is a technique used within an audit culture. Rankings are used “both as instruments in the internal management of organizations and in the external representations of their quality, efficiency, and accountability to the wider public” [30] (p. 421).

Weber spoke of a close relationship between bureaucratic structures and the management of those structures when he said that “the bureaucratic structure goes hand in hand with the concentration of the material means of management in the hands of the master” [31] (p. 221). The “master” within a schooling context could be understood as the principal/senior leader or the middle leader who exercises managerialist means to achieve their ends. Centralized bureaucratic educational systems (i.e., governments) are responsible for putting into place top-down measures ensuring that these tight controls are implemented by school managers at different levels. The way in which senior and middle leaders that work in a school bureaucracy exercise their authority or leadership to achieve their ends is of great interest to this paper. For example, do senior and middle leaders use their position to bolster their power and authority or do they create a trusting environment that supports the professionalism of staff? It seems that these two questions reflect opposing theoretical perspectives of bureaucracy that bifurcate into a hard-edged archetype and a soft-edged archetype. A hard edge follows the characteristics of a classical bureaucratic structure with authority at the top through a chain of command with little flexibility, while a softer edged approach is more flexible, humane, and enabling. It is the hard-edge view that has given bureaucracy its bad name, while the softer edge view works within its basic framework to coordinate human effort and provide a nuanced approach to relationships with staff.

The next part of the article considers the human consequences of bureaucracy by exploring these two worldviews or archetypes. Following this is a discussion of a third worldview which considers leadership outside of bureaucracy.

## 7. Re-Imagining Senior and Middle Leadership Roles within Two Basic Worldviews

To re-imagine middle and senior roles means understanding how even the terms “middle” and “senior” implicitly reflect bureaucratic demarcations. Re-imagination necessarily involves re-contextualization either by refinement (i.e., to the hard-edge view) or reform (using a soft-edge approach). Both of these views are archetypes that have been used in the literature to compare and contrast two different approaches to bureaucracy [6].

### *7.1. The “Hard Edge” Approach: Tightening Role Functions and Relationships to Improve Organizational Control and Efficiency*

A hard-edge approach to bureaucracy is one that puts systems first, people second. The most modest and often the most popular approach to “improving” role designations following a hard-edge approach is to engage in the creation of finer and sharper distinctions separating the roles. Such distinctions ostensibly resolve issues between the division of labour, confusion over duties, and ambiguities involving accountability for role performance. In this case it does not matter what the ideology is regarding the overall purpose of the organization because whatever it is only guides how the relevant duties are defined and then separated into specific roles. In nearly all cases the intended outcome is the reduction of costs, i.e., efficiency.

Ambiguity is always the villain and variation of any kind becomes a target for identification and elimination. The major metaphor behind this approach is the “smooth operation” phrase, a distinctly machine-like benchmark by which to describe how an organization operates on a daily basis. The re-imagining of both senior and middle leadership or managerial roles is constrained and limited to “ironing out” potential or real conflicts because of role overlap, duplication of duties, or role creep. The major issue involved the engagement of such distinctions is managerial control. Control, i.e., power, must be centralized and ruthlessly and impersonally applied. De-centralization of tasks and functions is a major impediment to this approach. Chris Argyris [32] summed up this approach when discussing the human variable in theories of organization and bureaucracy when he observed that the human variable was “minimally variable and minimally human” (p. 33).

### *7.2. Towards a “Softer” Edged Bureaucracy, a More Humane Work Environment and More Diffused Centralized Control*

The impersonality of the bureaucracy, its rigidity in confronting novel issues and its emphasis on control and compliance in the pursuit of profit and cost reduction makes it unsuitable for a fast moving, information-based and technologically driven economy. The more the external environment facing an organization is fast changing and fluid, the more a bureaucratic orientation is dysfunctional. For bureaucracy to function at its best, the environment needs to be stable. A softer edged approach would focus on creating a more humane working environment to balance the production emphasis inherent in a machine bureaucracy. What follows is a discussion of some examples that fit within a soft edge approach.

#### *7.2.1. A Balanced Approach*

Beairsto [33] argues for a need to balance bureaucracy with community when he says, “schools are at one and the same time mechanical hierarchical bureaucracies and organic moral communities. Educational administrators must acknowledge and deal with both realities, providing effective management and inspirational leadership simultaneously, drawing the best from both roles while reconciling their contradictions” [33] (p. 18).

Smircich and Morgan [34] are other authors who argue for a “mediating form of leadership, bridging the gulf between the requirements of institutionalized structure and the natural inclinations of its human agents” (p. 260). They see effective leaders as those persons who are able to manage meaning by using language, stories, myths, and symbols that evoke meaning and connect to followers and, at the same time, exercise instrumental modes of management involving direction and control of followers as defined by their organizational role [34].

#### *7.2.2. Enabling Bureaucracy*

Hoy and Sweetland [35] arrived at a new way of viewing bureaucracy, which they call “enabling”. This type of bureaucracy is concerned with two dimensions: formalised procedures, such as rules and regulations, and centralization, including top-down structures for decision making. Their argument is that, given that school bureaucracies are unlikely to be replaced by other organizational structures, what becomes important “is to change the kind of hierarchy



rather than try to eliminate it” [35] (p. 529). The features of an enabling bureaucracy include structures that are “flexible, cooperative and collaborative” [35] (p. 529), rules that are flexible guidelines where “professional judgement is acceptable” [35] (p. 527) and relationships between staff are based on trust and cooperation. In this type of structure, employees and/or teams have authority to make decisions regarding their work and hierarchical relationships are not part of self-managing organizations, although managers at the very top of the organization might provide the structure of the organization.

#### 7.2.3. Matrix Management and “Ad-Hocracy”

One development which brings together the need for greater bureaucratic flexibility to focus on novel problems in the environment is that of matrix management [36]. This approach was pioneered by NASA in the U.S. in confronting the complexities of the moon landing program. The many complex and novel problems were beyond the traditional bureaucratic notions of management. Matrix management is a kind of “enabling structure” that de-emphasizes hierarchy and strict adherence to existing bureaucratic divisions of labour in exchange for the formation of temporary work groups made up of experts from across many divisions brought together temporarily to solve a problem. In this case the structure followed the designation of the problem instead of being forced fit into pre-existing bureaucratic structural sub-divisions. The work groups were organized around problems which were anything but stable. Once the problems were resolved, the work group was abandoned. This approach was described by Toffler [37] in his best-selling book *Future Shock* as the “ad-hocracy” [37], also referred to as the “throw away” organization.

#### 7.2.4. Distributed Leadership

A less radical approach than matrix management is that of distributed leadership. Brooks and Kensler [38] aver that distributed leadership is simply a guide which is situationally contextualized between leaders and followers and is a practice rather than a discrete set of behaviours, skills, or inclinations. One view of distributed leadership is that it represents a form of organizational democracy that is planned and results in adaptations to extant school structures. However, distributed leadership can fit into bureaucratic structure without destroying bureaucratic control. Once implemented it may lead to increased issues of coordination and communication, which may increase costs. However, such increases are normally justified by the increased ability of the organization to solve novel problems because it is more engaging for workers to do so. The fact is that distributed leadership remains a contested idea, with some scholars questioning its efficacy to issues of social justice [39].

#### 7.2.5. Servant Leadership

An more mild adjustment is that of “servant leadership” defined by Sendjaya [40] as “a holistic approach to leadership that engages both leaders and followers through its (1) service orientation, (2) authenticity focus, (3) relational emphasis, (4) moral courage, (5) spiritual motivation, and (6) transforming influence such that they are both transformed into what they are capable of becoming” (p.1).

Servant leadership places a secondary emphasis on so-called “bottom line” thinking that acts to “sacrifice people on the altar of profit and growth” [40] (p. 4). Instead, servant leadership places its first priority on people development, follower learning and personal growth and autonomy, in the belief that as such transformation occurs the organization will become more effective and accomplish more of its goals. Additionally, and as observed by its advocates, “... authoritative leadership is still essential in organizations” [40] (p. 7)

In these aforementioned “softer” approaches to popular methods that are used to seek the improvement of schools, it is clear that middle level leaders will have to manage greater follower autonomy, ambiguity in role performance, confusion in accountability, and adjustments in their own performance, which may be even more risky than older bureaucratic searches for a more defined role clarity. Whether such adjustments are worth the effort remains to be determined. Senior leaders would be required to establish the initial

rules, sanction the changes when they may be challenged, and enforce overall adherence to the new plans. Senior leaders may also have to be more flexible and patient when directions for changes are digested into the system. This is the true “loosely coupled systems” metaphor discussed by Weick [41].

### 8. Leadership without or Outside Bureaucracy

Not only was there leadership before bureaucracy, there is also leadership without leaders. For example, pre-European Aboriginal culture had no formal leaders, that is, there were no chiefs or kings, appointed or elected. Wonidgie, an Aboriginal spokesperson said, “We don’t vote someone in. Ours is a natural leadership. Natural born” [42] (p. 76). Rather, there were elders who more or less assumed this role. Their primary function was spiritual. They were more guides than commanders or directors. They could not compel actions; rather they offered advice about potential problems or current issues.

In this final part of the article, we consider what leadership might look like outside of the confines of bureaucracy. First and foremost, leadership would not be leader-centric, nor would it be follower-centric. Leader-centric views oversimplify leadership and ignore the other essential part of the equation—followers. A follower-centric approach from Meindl [43] refers to “the linkage between leaders and followers as constructed in the minds of followers” (p. 330). This particular follower approach privileges followers over leaders and puts followers in the heart of leadership, where their perspectives are the only ones considered [43]. A primary emphasis on followers can be understood as “reversing the lens” on how followers have been studied in previous research [44] (p. 163). Yet this perspective suffers from the same criticisms that were directed towards a leader-centric view.

Second, leadership is a socially constructed and co-created process, where leaders and followers influence each other, and where leadership is the result of their interaction [44]. This relational view underscores “process” rather than “persons” [45] and moves away from what leaders or followers do to consider influential acts that lead to change. Uhl-Bien’s [46] explanation sees relational leadership as “a social influence process through which emergent coordination (i.e., evolving social order) and change (e.g., new values, attitudes, approaches, behaviours, and ideologies) are constructed and produced” (p. 655). It is the social influence process or influential acts “that contribute to the structuring of interactions and relationships” [46] (p. 662) where negotiations and renegotiations over meaning take place within interactions and conversations that lead to a new direction or change of the social order. While Smircich and Morgan [34] do not use the term “relational leadership”, their definition of leadership is akin to notions of relational leadership, as they define leadership as a social practice that “. . . involves a complicity or process of negotiation through which certain individuals, implicitly or explicitly, surrender their power to define the nature of their experience to others. Indeed, leadership depends on the existence of individuals willing, as a result of inclination or pressure, to surrender, at least in part, the powers to shape and define their own reality” [34] (p. 258).

Implicit in their explanation is that leadership is a bestowal of recognition by others. It is a gift and a surrender. Thus, it is an act of transfer, a joining, an assent and an acceptance with subsequently common actions then centred on those things held similarly in common. It is also a forged and deliberate bonding among and within a group of people or groups of people. Leaders may have their own visions, but ultimately these have to be translated into actions others do to fulfil them. This translation, the interaction, the building of friendship and trust is the essence of leadership. It does not matter how brilliant, insightful, far reaching, or innovative an individual’s ideas may be, unless they construct networks of like-minded others, leadership never happens. Leadership is thus the essential connection among people with which to realise a common aspiration or objective. A single person may be a spark or a catalyst but can never be the sole driver of change.

Third, and finally, leadership moves away from labels such as “leader” and “follower” because, as it is an interactive and multi-directional process in which participants in pairs or groups engage, “leadership can spring from anywhere” [47] (p. 187). Thus, a relational

approach is one that “breaks away from the prevailing socially constructed notion that position in an organization is necessarily a reflection of leadership” [46] (p. 667).

#### *Grassroots Leadership: The Homeschooling Movement as an Illustration*

An example of leadership outside of bureaucracy and formal organization is what can be seen within some grassroots groups made up of volunteers who get together for the purposes of bringing about change or improvement to an issue or concern in their community [8]. In these unstructured groups, there is no designated leader; leadership arises through the various dynamics and interactions that take place amongst members. Individuals follow a person who becomes the leader because they have faith in them, trust them, and can identify with them [8]. However, because leadership is fluid, dynamic, and in a state of flux, potential followers can change their minds. They may become disenchanted or disillusioned which means they may desert the leader and the cause. Another person or persons with more compelling and persuasive arguments may emerge as the new leader/s. Deserting one’s leader is not really a viable option for individuals wishing to remain employed in formal organizations where the leader has legitimate coercive authority.

One example of a kind of non-bureaucratic educational organization would be that of the homeschooling movement. In the United States between 1999 and 2007, the two main reasons parents chose homeschooling for their children were their dissatisfaction with public schools (84%) and their desire for religious training and education (72%), which would have been prohibited by laws regarding the separation of church and state in the U.S. Constitution [48]. The National Home Education Research Institute [49] in the U.S. showed that between 2021–2022, 6% of all school-aged children (about 3.1 million) were homeschooled, reflecting an annual growth rate of slightly more than ten percent per year in the time period between 2016–2022.

The homeschooling movement in the U.S. is not led by anyone. While there are education state laws which permit it, there are no laws which require it. There are followers but no leaders. There is no home school bureaucracy to regulate it, report it, or monitor it. This is an example of extreme de-bureaucratization to the point of near erasure. Moving to a homeschooling model for the total population is not practical or feasible in its current form. However, any attempts to bring more formality to homeschooling are likely to result in the development of an initial but primitive form of bureaucracy. It seems that, unless homeschooling becomes some sort of state or government requirement for the education of children, that the state is unlikely to have any power to regulate or inspect the quality of homeschooling. This is a case where parental rights trump the responsibility of the state to provide a free public schooling system. The final part of the article brings together the discussion of leadership within and outside of bureaucracy via a synoptic conceptual model.

### **9. Towards a Synoptic Model of Leadership within Bureaucracy**

Table 1 provides a synthesis of the article as it conceptualises bureaucracy in three idealized archetypes: a hard bureaucratic archetype (that puts the system first and people second), a soft bureaucratic archetype (that puts people first and the system second), and a third archetype where it is issue- or cause-centred (people are second and where the system functions are optional). As can be seen in Table 1, two school level roles, middle leaders and senior leaders, are considered in relation to the three worldviews.

For both middle and senior leaders operating within a hard bureaucratic worldview, there would be close supervision of the work and of workers, the requirement to discipline recalcitrant behaviours of staff and students, and the use of incentives to both reward and punish others with the objective of conforming to senior directives. Earlier in the paper it was posited that considering changes to the role and responsibilities of middle level and senior educational leaders will depend upon how reformers envision such changes and the nature of how the intended outcomes are prioritized. If what is desired is to reduce educational costs in order to achieve greater efficiencies in operations, then the changes regarding role duties in a hard-edged bureaucratic worldview would include eliminating

as much variation as possible, including an approach which works to standardize not only the work tasks, but the outcomes as well.

**Table 1.** Role differentiation based on bureaucratic archetypes.

Bureaucratic Role Levels	Hard Bureaucratic Worldview (System First, People Second)	Soft Bureaucratic Worldview (People First, System Second)	Grassroots Worldview (Issue First, People Second, System Optional)
Middle level roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Conform to senior managements directives</li> <li>- Enforce violations of work rules</li> <li>- Eliminate duplication of effort and role ambiguity</li> <li>- Engage in close supervision of workers and the work</li> <li>- Use data to eliminate errors and discipline recalcitrant workers with external incentives to reward and punish</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Create climate of trust based on transparency and respect for dissent</li> <li>- Encourage workers to ask hard questions and think “outside the box”</li> <li>- Stress work/life balance</li> <li>- Use data constructively to improve heightened performance and not to punish or embarrass</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Carry out moral imperatives by translating them into actions followers can take to realize them</li> <li>- Encourage followers to persevere in the face of hardships and to “keep the faith”</li> <li>- Use internal rewards based on moral reasons in the cause</li> <li>- Maintain group solidarity and cohesion</li> </ul>
Senior level roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Install close supervision practices and “bottom line” thinking</li> <li>- Eliminate waste; refine, clarify and tighten roles and role relationships</li> <li>- Eliminate dissent and variation</li> <li>- Standardize processes and outcomes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Develop policies which create and sustain respectful dissent, high levels of transparency, and positive feedback</li> <li>- No micromanagement of middle level leaders</li> <li>- Eschew short term practices that raise productivity but lead to low morale and worker anomie</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Create the response to a pressing issue or problem, i.e., a change narrative and an action agenda which is aligned</li> <li>- Create the moral high ground for group actions</li> <li>- Sustain morale over an extended time period</li> <li>- Secure the resources to keep pushing forward</li> </ul>

In education, such outcomes invariably involve standardizing children and the continuation of the “batch processing” of groups of children by grade level or norm to be taught and then tested. Laggards are re-processed in a variety of remedial strategies that involve reworking with the idea of returning some of them to their original batch. The priority in this situation is system first, individuals second.

Table 1 shows that a soft bureaucratic worldview for middle and senior leaders would be characterised by policies and practices that encourage trust, transparency, and respectful dissent in a positive and productive working environment. Senior leaders would not micromanage middle leaders and middle leaders would in turn not micromanage teachers/others. Any role changes which accrue because the senior level of leaders desire a more humane work environment would shift the priorities to humans first, outcomes second, with the assumption that, if the workforce is treated more humanely, production will eventually increase because workers are happier. The same rationale was tried by the human relations movement based on the Hawthorne studies between 1925–1932 [22].

The final worldview is the grassroots view that describes an issue or problem-centred volunteer work group where there are few if any bureaucratic trappings and which follows an issue first, people second, and system optional approach. If middle and senior leaders in an organisation were to embrace a grassroots worldview, they would be driven by a strong moral agenda to pursue a particular issue. Interested others would join with them because they share similar values and commitment to the issue at hand. There would be no distinctive hierarchical structures of authority at play; anyone working on the issue could exercise leadership and influence. Like the senior and middle leaders following a soft bureaucratic worldview, leaders operating within a grassroots worldview would create a climate of trust, respect, and group solidarity and would sustain the morale of those involved.

It is unlikely that that designers of work duties are fully aware of their own assumptions when it comes to revisioning or reforming job duties or roles within an educational bureaucracy. Changes in job duties and reporting relationships are often undertaken on a piece-meal basis and may occur with changes in the executives at the top of the bureaucratic

pyramid; a kind of ritualistic “musical chairs” exercise as senior executives come and go. The long shadow of bureaucracy is unlikely to be totally erased. There will be, inevitably, limits to any process of de-bureaucratization as in the third worldview presented here. For all of its well documented shortcomings, it is most likely that bureaucracies in some form will still be required to bring stability, rationality, order and accountability to state funded and publicly controlled educational systems around the world.

## 10. Conclusions

In this article the aim was to rethink and re-imagine the relationship between leadership and bureaucracy and consider what leadership might look like outside of the bureaucratic apparatus. The first part of the aim was a difficult undertaking given the pervasiveness of bureaucracies in the structuring of organizational life and the well-accepted premise that officers who have authority vested in their position in a bureaucracy are often automatically designated leaders. The position taken in this article is that role ranking is not the same as leadership and that insights from a relational leadership that underscores leadership as a process of co-creation and co-construction offer much merit in the formulation of any new understanding of leadership.

A limitation of the paper is that much of it was a synthesis of current understandings about leadership and bureaucracy. The aim of our paper was not to offer a new theoretical framework that predicts relationships between constructs or identifies novel connections [5]. What we did seek to do, and what forms our contribution to the existing literature, is to present a synoptic model that brings together three archetypes, two of which reflect established bureaucratic categorisations used in the literature [6,7] and a third which is non-bureaucratic in nature. The non-bureaucratic grassroots perspective is rarely if ever discussed in relation to bureaucracy and from that point of view provided a different dimension to thinking about bureaucracy. The synoptic model also re-ordered the roles of middle and senior leaders in relation to each of the three perspectives. It is anticipated that each of these three perspectives may be useful in analyses regarding the question of how the roles of middle and upper management may differ when conceptualizing work tasks, subordinate orientation and interrelationships, and job satisfaction based on the priorities that senior management places on people and the essential work of the organization. Future empirical research might seek to explore the extent to which each of these perspectives resonates with middle and senior leaders in schools.

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