PURPOSE, PRACTICE AND POWER

A STUDY OF POWER IN THE WORK OF SEVEN HEADS OF FIELD OFFICES IN THE UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education
at
Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand

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2006
ABSTRACT

Interest in the power of heads of field offices in the United Nations Organization (UN) began with the researcher's appointment to such a position and with anecdotal suggestions that any explanation of the powers they held would be complex. For these reasons, this study has the research aim of explaining the power of some UN heads of field offices. The study focusses on seven heads of field offices in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

Literature searches indicated that no academic study had been made of any UN field work but the searches produced considerable literature on the UN and a wide range of theories about organizations, leadership and power, related issues of ethics and rationality and useful concepts from the work of Weber and Foucault.

The research is interpretive. A case study and an appropriate conceptual framework were designed to reflect both the literature and the three research questions that promote the aim: organizational bureaucracy, organizational capital and frontline work are the guiding concepts. Because case studies may be challenged for possible lack of rigour and for validity, a number of data collection and analysis methods were used to promote reliability: both the data sources and the analysis checks included participants, UNESCO documents and information from other international bodies. Appropriate literature is also used for theoretical analysis.

The results are presented progressively in three chapters, each chapter focussing on one framework concept and its appropriate question. The relevant data are presented and theoretical analysis, including selected concepts from Weber and Foucault, suggests answers to each question posed. The research results suggest that in the organization the participants gain power from UNESCO's intellectual and ethical purpose but are constrained in its use by processes of the bureaucracy, especially its lines of communication. The participants also have considerable power in organizational capital that includes tangible capital of qualifications, experience, skills, high level of position, the resources of the post in which they work and the intangible capital of the assumptions they hold about their work. At the frontline, although constrained by bureaucratic processes that limit their time for programme work, participants report valuable contributions to UNESCO's development and advocacy work: they gain power from proximity to the countries they serve and from their ethical motivation. They also gain some power in the freedom of distance from their headquarters, thus weakening the possible double jeopardy by being in a class-at-the-frontline and being in a group-not-in-headquarters. The final chapter brings all suggestions together and examines participants' power for sources (as rights or capacities), limitations (as control or domination) and agency (with compliance and resistance); when these perspectives are combined in a circle of power, the study suggests a Janus syndrome in which participants paradoxically are powerful/powerless agents,
sited as they are between the power provision and constraints of both their bureaucracy and the governments and other bodies with whom they work.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The inadequacies of this study are the writer's but they would have been more numerous without the generous support of a number of people.

UNESCO gave permission for the study of the power of seven field office heads and that response was very much appreciated.

Massey University provided important assistance during the preparation, conduct and completion of the research. Associate Professor Pat Nolan and his academic team gave very helpful guidance and support during and between the on-campus work that began the study. The university library staff provided invaluable efficient and prompt service at all times. Special thanks go to all these people for their valuable assistance.

The late Associate Professor Roy Nash's insightful comments and searching questions were of inestimable value and greatly improved the theoretical analyses in this report. His ongoing support and suggestions over the last five years are sincerely appreciated.

Professor Wayne Edwards prompted the interest in leadership and its processes and, consequently, this study's focus on some UN heads of field offices. His assistance with the study, and especially its report, and his particular encouragement in the latter stages of the work are all greatly appreciated.
Sincere thanks go also to Marion, Mervyn and Margaret Tait, Celia Barelle, Ada Pannett, Jill Paaka and Richard Halperin, all of whom gave encouragement and support during the years of this research.

The seven heads of UNESCO field offices who are the participants in this study are special people. The value of their work cannot be matched by any thesis but as this is the first time they have been given a research voice the hope is that their contributions are honoured in the text. Very sincere thanks go to them all for their full responses, patience, time and good humour. Special thanks go the participants for their cooperation during observation visits. It has been a privilege to work with them.

Finally, thanks and best wishes are offered to all staff in UNESCO. The dissemination of knowledge for peace and development is neither easy nor rapid, but the work remains an ethical imperative as much now as when UNESCO was established.

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ABBREVIATIONS

BFC | UNESCO’s Bureau of Field Coordination
DFID | Department for Internal Development (of the United Kingdom)
DG | Director General
D(1) D(2) | Director (level one or two)
FABS | UNESCO’s Finance and Budgeting System
FAO | UN Food and Agriculture Organization
FO | Field office
HRM | UNESCO’s Human Resources management
HQ | Headquarters
IGO | International Governmental Organization (eg EEC)
INGO | International Non-Governmental Organization (eg Oxfam)
ILO | UN International Labour Organization
IMF | UN International Monetary Fund
IOS | UNESCO’s Office for Internal Oversight
Ms/s | Member State(s)
NGO | Non-Governmental Organization (eg national community care groups)
Natcoms | UNESCO’s National Commissions
PP | UNESCO’s Participation Programme
P1, P2, P3 ... | Professional (level one, two, three ...) *
SISTER | UNESCO’s System of Information on Strategies, Tasks and the Evaluation of Results
UN | United Nations Organization
UNDP | United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA | United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR | United Nations Commission for Human Rights
UNICEF | United Nations Children’s Fund
WHO | UN World Health Organization

* Not to be confused with this report’s system of numbering research participants