

## RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION \*

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There are several disclaimers that I am inclined to make at the beginning of this paper on research administration. The first is that when I began my work as an administrator I knew almost nothing about administration and I was a moderately untrained researcher. Essentially I was a clinician and had, as I subsequently discovered, some skills as a counselor. I never intended to be an administrator and had some difficulty admitting to myself that I was one. Joe Spradlin was the first colleague who forced me to sit, look him in the eye and say, "I am an administrator." Sy Rosenberg, the first director of the Parsons project, was the first to point out the discrepancy between my verbiage—my disclaimers—and my behavior. He said, "You say you know nothing about administration but you don't act that way!"

Perhaps this reluctance and my still apparent tendency to issue disclaimers, says something but I have never quite decided what that something is. (Perhaps this is the best place for my first "aside" comment, Whatever you are, idiosyncrasy and all, is what you must use in your own career development. They are just a bit more apparent if you are an administrator.) More important, perhaps, is the obvious fact that I have enjoyed the past 32 years and have a sizable army of competent helpers, supporters, advocates, and volunteer trouble-shooters to prove that administration is, after all, not that difficult. Also, I have learned that there is honesty in humbleness and validity in extending credit to those you have gained credibility from. I have always been poignantly aware that at all times I was only one among many, and that often in critical situations I was not necessarily the most significant *one*.

In this presentation I shall try to present:

- 1) A philosophy of administration;
- 2) Some guiding principles;
- 3) Some specific orientations to the Kansas scene; and
- 4) Some suggestions (not necessarily in that order).

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## **Administrative Philosophy**

A few years ago I had an enjoyable lunch with the retiring (forced out) executive director of a national, professional organization. He explained in considerable detail why he thought he had lasted so long and why his opponents had not been able to oust him until now. He said he had been successful because he had kept a tight surveillance on everyone and because he had not been soft with the application of regulations. He also explained that employees tend to “goof off” (his term) unless there are strict accounting of their use of time and their daily or weekly productivity.

This concept of employee deception and adverse motivation, I must say, is directly counter to my own view of administrative procedure. I found myself listening to a lecture on administrative structure designed to prevent what the administrator regarded as the natural tendencies of intelligent, carefully selected colleagues to act like immature deceivers.

In my opinion there are positive consequences in positive expectations. Also, I have found policing and managerial surveillance to be counter-productive. I advocate support rather than control, encouragement rather than structured demands, and positive as compared to negative consequences. The generic term I use is *functional* rather than *structural* administration.

The danger of a tight assignment of administrative controls is that it requires a hierarchy of administrative responsibilities. This leads sometimes to less able or less creative or, perhaps, less understanding appointees supervising or sanctioning more gifted peers. The inevitable frustration of having to report to and gain permission from someone that you do not respect far outweighs the possible advantages of having supervisory overviewing of the entire operation. So, I advocate a lateral rather than a hierarchical model of administration. I favor a model where anyone is free to contact anyone else if there is a reason to do it. For instance, if in developing a plan, a design or a paper the author should ideally have access to the best consultant available in the setting. I find that if this practice can be maintained, the entire operation tends to function at the level of its most able members. Able people, of course, must guard their time and protect their schedules, but if they are relatively open to discussions about research, they too gain from the traffic of ideas.

It is likely that all of us or any of us may become or already are research administrators.

Wherever there are two or more people working on a given project there must be some “administrative agreements” about procedure and outcome. To a degree, at least, the agreements must be sought on the basis of intellectual equality. Both should be enthusiastic about the prospective plan. In larger arrangements of people the same requisites should apply. Work styles cannot be easily monitored but productivity can be judged and, more importantly, can be used as the rationale for idiosyncratic as well as

standard work routines. The leadership in large research groups is seldom unidimensional but is, more often, multiple in design. That is, different people encourage and help each other. Nevertheless, there is an essential link to the director's office that must exist for various people in the research operation. This link must provide for an understanding about status and concomitant support. I have at times described this as a covenant—an agreement in principle that is characterized as an open “contract” which is refined through ongoing experience. The essential basis of such a living agreement is honesty. Deception can destroy the basis of such an agreement system. I accept the premise that intelligent negotiators cannot successfully lie to each other. Truth or validity is multidimensional and so are the detection systems of its participants. Probably one is, at first, alerted by deception and becomes more attentive in subsequent encounters leading finally to confirmation. Such a conclusion by either participant leads to an impaired working relationship.

In similar respects, a research administrator should disclose information fully to colleagues. When one's working colleagues know or believe they know all the relevant information relative to their status or their arrangement they are likely to be more open to and supportive of the system. Again, deception is a poor strategy of research administration.

### **Guiding Principles**

From the beginning of the experimental analysis of behavior movement I observed a rather striking tendency for researchers to apply behavior principles correctly and effectively in direct management of research projects. They were especially precise in arranging the contingencies that they were outside of. So long as a stimulus/response system could be managed by the experimenter as the recording observer, the paradigm was clearly perceived and applied. However, when one was involved in the “experiment” directly, it was a vastly different paradigm. Researchers do not generally respond to casual social contingencies or informal professional exchanges with the same firmness of functional responding that they arrange for in their experiments.

This brief statement reflects the preferred locus of control for applied behavior analysts as well. However, there was a perceptible shift to a larger range of functional control during the 60's and early 70's where the experimenter became a teacher, a group home manager or a youth center director. Here we had the first efforts to create functional conditions within an arranged system, that could be replicated, refined and, in some instances, successfully disseminated.

In these projects the experimenters, who might also be considered the project administrators, used their own behavior as a functional part of the experiment. Such measurable features as attention, praise, or positive checklists were used contingently. These efforts were often elaborately formalized or might be left to “incidental” designing, but the group effect could be determined by outcome measures that were sufficiently precise that they could serve as a guide for further refining of the environmental arrangement (that included the experimenter).

More recently, Steve Fawcett and colleagues have designed approaches to community development research. They attempt to gain information from community members to determine their priorities and thus to consider the variables that should have priority in their research planning. They are, of course, in a position to negotiate about possible community projects and eventually to help in the development of such projects.

This responsive process probably comes the closest to the functions of research administration.

Research administration is a constant developmental process that involves mutually chosen priorities, group decisions, group initiatives, shared risks and shared benefits. It cannot be said that the group works for the administrator any more than the administrator works for the group. Sometimes it is even difficult to determine who is the administrator and who is the group. What is apparent is that there is a group of consenting adults working toward selected and defined objectives. This recurrent scene of group enterprise characterizes a successfully administered research organization. A condition of group behavior within a successful organization that most clearly determines effectiveness is that good decisions are made consistently. How do you know a good decision from a bad one? By its outcome effects and by the enthusiasm of the group during the interim before the outcome is known.

A good research group is open, engages in free exchange and enjoys a positive climate of agreement and dissent. A good administrator is open to input, exposes self fully to decision-making and the risk-taking requisites of the group, and seeks expert opinions and competencies that often transcends those that he or she brings to the tasks.

In the ongoing enterprise, the delayed outcome is faced with a positive style and the not infrequent crises are used as challenges to improve the efforts of the participants. I noticed repeatedly in the early-high-risk years of the Bureau that I could trace most lines of progress back to some crisis context where we gave something close to a maximum effort. I also find that in more prosperous times we may sow the seeds of subsequent failure.

I understand that there is a strong issue in the management field that we could call crisis theory. Having never studied the management literature or having talked at length to experts in that field I can only speculate as to why crises are indeed times of opportunity. I have observed that when a research team nears a deadline, they work harder. When a project application fails, they seek guiding feedback and engage in stringent repairs. They even place a moratorium on personal feuds until the crisis phase is over.

As an administrator I notice that during crisis periods I have a more attentive group, a more resilient set of colleagues, and a higher rate effort throughout the contextual arrangement. People do not like fear but they do work more intensively under its influence. Perhaps that is why researchers should consider their development efforts,

both group and individually oriented, to be a *challenge* rather than as a set of prerogatives. Prerogatives dissolve under conditions of crises but if construed as challenges could lead to further achievement at precisely the same time.

It is functional to be optimistic. One builds on positive plans and enlarges through repeated, or persistently confident efforts.

So, may I list a few guiding principles of research administration.

**1) A research administrator should give the greatest effort to securing favorable outcomes for colleagues.**

(If one's scientific goals are specifically defined as self-oriented achievements, that person probably should not be an administrator. However, I sometimes wonder how that person can expect to achieve those goals without giving something substantial to the career goals of colleagues).

**2) A research administrator's greatest obligations are to be informed, committed and persistent in pursuit of consensus goals and objectives.**

(Many of the most important outcomes derive from deep involvement and intense caring about colleagues and clients. If they do not matter a great deal you shouldn't undertake to be a leader).

**3) A research administrator should strive to balance the functions of change, efficiency and good will.**

(Change is necessary to organizational health and growth; efficiency is required because you are in an achievement oriented field; and goodwill is the oasis that you all draw on in time of crisis and famine).

**4) Through intense efforts to be supportive, nutritive, and attentive to others the administrator is the one who derives the most benefits.**

(I judge that if you truly think that the time you give to others is counter productive you will want to make short shrift of administrative chores. If you think otherwise, perhaps you might grow to become the kind of person that others reinforce in order to keep you doing it.)