

## BUREAUCRACY OR LEARNING ORGANIZATION?

Keeping in mind that these two types of organizations are different in kind, not degree, use the defining features below to self-assess the extent to which your school is a bureaucracy or a learning organization. Then, share your assessments with your colleagues.

<b>BUREAUCRACY</b>	<b>LEARNING ORGANIZATION</b>
The primary purpose of the school is identified in a way that defines the student in a passive or submissive role—for example, the student as product, raw material, client, or conscript.	There is a well-articulated set of moral and aesthetic norms that clearly define the core business of school as the creation of engaging work for students.
The willingness and ability of students to comply with uniform performance standards set by various “end users”—such as the business community or colleges and universities—are usually of central concern.	
Student docility and compliance are defined as virtues.	Students are viewed as volunteers rather than conscripts, and it is assumed that for students to learn what the community wants them to learn they must be provided with work that has qualities and characteristics that respond to their own motives.
Teachers are customarily viewed as employees and as lower-level members of the adult hierarchy.	Teachers are viewed as instructional leaders and curriculum designers.
There is considerable separation between employee groups and management groups.	
The principal is usually viewed as a first-line supervisor, in the lower echelon of management.	The principal is expected to be a leader of leaders within the school as well as a member of the superintendent’s administrative team at the district level.
Routine, standardization, and predictability of response are desired end states.	
	The idea of continuous innovation is embraced as a core value, and behavior is guided by clear moral and aesthetic norms combined with a fluid set of technical norms.

**BUREAUCRACY OR LEARNING ORGANIZATION? (CONTINUED)**

<b>BUREAUCRACY</b>	<b>LEARNING ORGANIZATION</b>
Rules, procedures, and policies are elaborate and rigidly enforced.	Local conventions place emphasis on fairness, equity, excellence, loyalty, courage, persistence, constancy of purpose, and duty as values that define “the way we do business around here.”
Management by memorandum is typical.	Conversation and dialogue serve as the primary tools for building and maintaining the school culture and for ensuring the disciplined pursuit of a shared vision of the future.
Communication flows from the top down with little attention to bottom-up communication or horizontal communication.	
Coordination of effort is a management function.	Central office staff are expected to work to develop capacity of the school district and the community to support and sustain innovations that promise to increase the quality of schoolwork provided to students.
Carefully crafted job descriptions are used to delegate and assign responsibility and authority.	
Boundary disputes are common occurrences, especially between school faculties and central office personnel or among middle-level operators and semi-autonomous operating units such as departments within schools.	
The superintendent is typically viewed as a manager rather than as a leader and is expected to carry out the directives of others without significant input into the way these directives are framed.	The superintendent is expected to serve as a moral and intellectual leader for the district, to continually focus all participants on the direction in which the district and the schools are heading, and to reinforce the cultural and moral basis for the direction that has been set.
The role of the board of education is typically defined as representative of various stakeholders, particularly of the special interest groups, factions, and parties that elect or appoint them.	The school board is expected to establish a clear sense of community among themselves and to market the identity they develop to their constituencies as a means of building a community of interest around the schools and the students served by the schools.

*Unlike leaders in learning organizations, bureaucrats are seldom visionaries; they are more often functionaries. Typically they have little concern about vision or direction, for the direction of bureaucracies is generally determined by agencies external to the bureaucracy itself, for example, by a state legislature. Leaders in learning organizations spend much of their time communicating clear visions to others and inspiring others to join them in the pursuit of those visions.*

**Leading for Learning:  
How to Transform Schools into Learning Organizations  
Phillip C. Schlechty, 2009, p. 47**

Questions asked by leaders in bureaucracies	Questions asked by leaders in learning organizations
Who is in charge?	What kind of organization are we and what do we want to become?
What is he or she in charge of?	What accomplishments will make us most proud?
Who decides and how are things decided?	What will it take to satisfy those we intend to serve?
What are the standards for performance?	What are the core values and beliefs we want to ensure that new members will embrace and uphold?
What are the metrics to be used in rendering these judgments?	How do we identify, import, and develop the knowledge we need in order to engage in the kinds of continuous innovation required to survive and thrive in a constantly changing environment?