

Book Review: Bureaucracy, Collegiality, and Social Change: Redefining Organizations with Multilevel Relational Infrastructures by Emmanuel Lazega

Cindy L. Davis

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Emmanuel Lazega, *Bureaucracy, Collegiality, and Social Change: Redefining Organizations with Multilevel Relational Infrastructures*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd, 2020. xi + 326 pages, E-book, \$40.00.

This text is a continuation of Lazega's work in the field of organizations and network analyses, geared toward those with a prior knowledge base in the field including professionals and graduate students.

Essentially, we live in organizational societies. Modern organizations focused on in the text are large, complex, and engage in both routine and non-routine tasks leading them to have characteristics of both bureaucratic and collegial organizations with the bureaucratic end being more dominant. Lazega explains that the bureaucratic model and the collegial model lie at differing ends of the organization spectrum and that most organizations fall somewhere along the continuum.

Lazega takes a network analysis approach and sees organizations as having multilevel relations that combine bureaucratic rules and collegial pockets in bottom-up, top-down and inside-out forms. Connections are built based on the relations between and among the levels. The two main elements that constitute the relational infrastructures are social niches (such as executives, professionals and workers) and vertical linchpins. Actors within such organizations engage in cooperation, competition and co-competition due to the need to engage in non-routine and innovate tasks. Lazega uses the theory to ultimately critique modern organizations that continue to stifle innovation.

Lazega uses the metaphor of a tiered spinning top to explain the theoretical model. "The metaphor is a rough and initial representation of how the exogenous context meets endogenous processes of combining bureaucracy and collegiality in organizational stratigraphies" (p. 281). This metaphor is particularly useful in clarifying the model as it is complex with multiple

moving parts. While the text eventually includes a visual of the metaphor, ideally a graphic with a vivid description of its parts would aid in better understanding the theory.

The text clearly explicates elements of bureaucratic and collegial structures and so is useful in further understanding those structures in addition to the specific theoretical structure outlined in the text. As an example, Lazega uses the classic critique of professionals in bureaucracy to show how conflict arises in the organization, but explains that it is not the role of being a professional but rather the relations between the levels that creates conflict. Essentially Lazega uses an idea familiar to students of bureaucracy and organizations to explain and provide an example of the concept—connecting the new with something familiar which aids in understanding the complex notions found within the theory.

Lazega's model seems applicable to a variety of professions and their organizations, for example, a professor could see the higher education system of which they are a part as being reflected in the proffered design. The structure proposed could be used to examine a variety of organization problems for example ceilings that keep particular groups within organizations from moving forward. There is a timely focus in the text on digitalization.

Early in the text there is a lot of information and terminology which can be overwhelming, making the reader yearn for the applications and illustrations that are included later in the text. The first primary illustration is of a corporate law firm in the United States that uses rotation and niche seeking where there is the prevalence of a Montesquieu structure. While the illustrations are complex, Lazega brings the illustrations back to the main theoretical elements of the structural model presented in the text. The applications and illustrations are from private, public and nongovernmental sectors in different countries, providing the reader with multiple perspectives of the model.

Overall, the text provides a fascinating and insightful look into the complexity of organizations. This is not a text to read once or to try and read all in one sitting. It may take time to digest the content and truly understand the concepts. The metaphor of a spinning top is especially worthwhile and the theoretical model can be used to describe and examine organizations that are bureaucratic, but not wholly bureaucratic, collegial, but not wholly collegial; organizations that a variety of professionals work in. The ideal bureaucratic and collegial structures that are traditionally studied provide uncomplicated frameworks whereas Lazega provides a multifaceted framework but one that has noted applications as shown throughout the text.

Cindy L. Davis, Ph.D.
Associate Professor in Public Administration
Stephen F. Austin State University
Nacogdoches, Texas