

## Unit 5: Bureaucracies

In most countries, education is delivered via large-scale public-sector education bureaucracies. These bureaucracies are complex in a few different ways. First, they usually comprise multiple administrative agencies with different and sometimes overlapping functions (e.g., both the curriculum authority and the examinations board influencing what is taught), spread across different administrative levels (e.g., central, regional, district, school). Second, they exist to facilitate the delivery of education, which itself is a 'thick', complex task requiring co-creation between teachers and students across numerous and varied classroom contexts.

Given this complexity, conventional civil service bureaucracies face difficult challenges around managing and delivering quality education. A common response to these challenges is a pattern of bureaucratic administration called 'isomorphic mimicry'. These systems are characterized by top-down, standardized management that depends on 'thin', input-based indicators (e.g., how many textbooks have been distributed, how many students are enrolled) that 'look right' when in fact they are not converting inputs into the desired 'thick' outputs (e.g. how many children are learning).

An alternative administrative paradigm involves a 'thicker' approach that is centred on a bureaucracy-wide sense of shared purpose or mission. Under this approach, individual bureaucrats need to be granted the autonomy to make decisions that respond to the needs and challenges of their specific contexts (rather than being micro-managed). At the same time, they must be supported with adequate training and resources that enable them to serve the shared purpose. This is particularly the case with the 'middle tier' of bureaucrats (e.g. district education officers) who can play a key role in maintaining alignment between the central government and teachers and schools on the frontline, but who are often neglected in education reform in low- and middle-income countries.

After completing the unit, students should:

- understand the multiple levels and multiple functions of education bureaucracies
- be able to explain the limitations of conventional bureaucratic structures in implementing complex service delivery in education
- understand the importance of (a) alignment with a shared purpose, of (b) both supporting bureaucrats and trusting them with autonomy in improving the complex work of education bureaucracies

### Required Readings

Pritchett, L. (2014). The risks to education systems from design mismatch and global isomorphism: Concepts, with examples from India (WIDER Working Paper). UNU-WIDER. <https://doi.org/10.35188/UNU-WIDER/2014/760-8>

Honig, D. 2022. Managing for Motivation as Performance Improvement Strategy: Closing the Implementation Gap in Education & Far Beyond. Centre for International

Development Faculty Working Paper Series: 409.

<https://bsc.cid.harvard.edu/publications/managing-motivation-public-performance-improvement-strategy-education-far-beyond>

Aiyar, Y., Davis, V., Govindan, G., & Kapoor, T. (2021). *Rewriting the Grammar of the Education System: Delhi's Education Reform (A Tale of Creative Resistance and Creative Disruption)*. Research on Improving Systems of Education (RISE).

[https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISE-Misc\\_2021/01](https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISE-Misc_2021/01) – Chapters 4 and 6

## Further Readings

Crouch, L., & DeStefano, J. 2017. Doing Reform Differently: Combining Rigor and Practicality in Implementation and Evaluation of System Reforms. RTI International. International Development Working Paper No. 2017-01.

<https://www.rti.org/publication/doing-reform-differently>

Mangla, A. 2014. Bureaucratic Norms and State Capacity in India: Implementing Primary Education in the Himalayan Region." Harvard Business School Working Paper, No. 14-099, April 2014. (Revised October 2015.)

[https://www.hbs.edu/ris/Publication%20Files/Asian\\_Survey\\_5505\\_03\\_Mangla\\_219b4d54-2a4f-4a43-a0ab-d632628f8fae.pdf](https://www.hbs.edu/ris/Publication%20Files/Asian_Survey_5505_03_Mangla_219b4d54-2a4f-4a43-a0ab-d632628f8fae.pdf)

*On the limitations of narrowly standardized, top-down management and the value of purpose-aligned, empowered autonomy in improving education bureaucracies*

Honig, D., & Pritchett, L. (2019). "The Limits of Accounting-Based Accountability in Education (and Far Beyond): Why More Accounting Will Rarely Solve Accountability Problems." RISE Working Paper Series, 19/030. [https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISE-WP\\_2019/030](https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISE-WP_2019/030)

Bryk, A., & Schneider, B. (2002). *Trust in Schools: A Core Resource for Improvement*. Russell Sage Foundation. <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/15670/>

Aiyar, Y., & Bhattacharya, S. (2016). The Post Office Paradox. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 51(11), 61–69. <https://www.epw.in/journal/2016/11/special-articles/post-office-paradox.html>

Weick, K. E. (1976). Educational Organizations as Loosely Coupled Systems. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 21(1), 1–19. JSTOR. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2391875>

Andrews, M., Pritchett, L., & Woolcock, M. (2017). *Building state capability: Evidence, analysis, action*. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oopen.org/search?identifier=624551> – especially Chapter 2: "Looking like a state: The seduction of isomorphic mimicry"

*Further examples of the shortcomings of isomorphic mimicry in reform:*

Muralidharan, K., & Singh, A. (2020). "Improving Public Sector Management at Scale? Experimental Evidence on School Governance in India." RISE Working Paper Series, 20/056. [https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISE-WP\\_2020/056](https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISE-WP_2020/056)

Naviwala, N. (2016). Pakistan's Education Crisis: The Real Story. In Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED570671>

Bano, M. 2022. International Push for SBMCs and the Problem of Isomorphic Mimicry: Evidence from Nigeria. RISE Working Paper Series. 22/102.

[https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISE-WP\\_2022/102](https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISE-WP_2022/102)

Mansoor, Zahra, Dana Qarout, Kate Anderson, Celeste Carano, Liah Yecalotele, Veronika Dvorakova and Martin J. Williams. (2021, July). "A Global Mapping of Delivery Approaches." DeliverEd Initiative Working Paper. Education Commission and Blavatnik School of Government. <https://www.bsg.ox.ac.uk/research/publications/delivered-report-global-mapping-delivery-approaches>

Mansoor, Z. 2019. Punjab, Pakistan: A case study for using a systems approach for identifying constraints to education service delivery. Pathways for Prosperity Commission Background Paper Series; no. 30. Oxford. United Kingdom.

[https://pathwayscommission.bsg.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2020-01/punjab\\_pakistan\\_a\\_case\\_study.pdf](https://pathwayscommission.bsg.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2020-01/punjab_pakistan_a_case_study.pdf)

*On different levels within the bureaucracy*

Hwa, Y.-Y., & Leaver, C. (2021). Management in education systems. *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, 37(2), 367–391. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxrep/grab004> – especially Section III

Iyer, P. & Rossiter, J. (2018). Coherent for Equitable Learning? Understanding the Ethiopian Education System. RISE Insight. [https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISE-RI\\_2018/005](https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISE-RI_2018/005)

*The middle tier: district officials, circuit supervisors, school inspectors, et al.*

Childress, D., Chimier, C., Jones, C., Page, E., & Tournier, B. (2020). *Change agents: Emerging evidence on instructional leadership at the middle tier*. UNESCO IIEP; Education Development Trust; Education Commission. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000374918>

Asim, A., & Mundy, K. (forthcoming). "Of agents and agency: The missing middle in educational reform in developing countries" RISE Working Paper Series

Ehren, M.C.M., & Visscher, A.J. (2006). Towards a theory on the impact of school inspections. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 54(1), 51–72.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8527.2006.00333.x>

Cilliers, J., Dunford, E., & Habyarimana, J. (2021). “What Do Local Government Education Managers Do to Boost Learning Outcomes?” RISE Working Paper Series, 21/064. [https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISE-WP\\_2021/064](https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISE-WP_2021/064)

*Empirical evidence on the importance of school-level leaders*

Lemos, R., Muralidharan, K., & Scur, D. (2021). “Personnel Management and School Productivity: Evidence from India.” RISE Working Paper Series, 21/063.  
[https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISE-WP\\_2021/063](https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISE-WP_2021/063)

Leaver, C., Lemos, R., & Scur, D. (2019). “Measuring and Explaining Management in Schools: New Approaches Using Public Data.” RISE Working Paper Series, 19/033.  
[https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISE-WP\\_2019/033](https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISE-WP_2019/033)