

**THEORY Z + N:
THE ROLE OF ALASKA NATIVES IN ADMINISTRATION**

by

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One year, back in the early 1970's, a new principal/teacher assumed his duties in a small Tlingit village on an island in southeast Alaska. He was employed by the State-Operated School System, headquartered in Anchorage, and had taught previously in rural village schools in other areas of the state, though this was the first time he also had principal duties. He was assigned to this particular school because the community had been expressing concern about the lack of cultural sensitivity on the part of previous teachers, and he had shown some interest in the local Native culture in earlier teaching assignments, even though his own cultural roots were still down in the panhandle of Texas.

Cognizant of his superiors concern that the expectations of these politically aggressive villagers not get out of hand, the new P/T decided to take the initiative and give them what they wanted - a bit of local culture in the school curriculum. The most obvious expression of the local Tlingit culture to an outsider was the presence of totem poles at various locations in the community. What better way to show concern for the local culture than to have the students carve a totem pole as an after-school project, and he himself would take the responsibility to see that it happened, as a sign of official commitment to the communities concerns.

The project didn't move along quite as quickly as he had hoped, however, because the purchasing office in Anchorage, through which he had ordered the cedar log that was to be transformed into a totem pole, had difficulty in locating a supplier, and when they did, it took several months to have it shipped in from Seattle. It hadn't occurred to him that local residents might have been able to acquire such a log from nearby forests at little or no expense to the school. Given the late start, and sensing some uncertainty on the part of the community, he decided to move right on in to the carving, so he set aside an area in the back of his classroom, drew a design on the log with a magic marker, and put the students to work with the carving tools.

Each school day for the next six months the P/T and his students put in an hour or so after school chipping away at the log. By late spring they had completed the carving, had colorfully painted the design, and were ready to present the result of their effort to the community. The P/T decided to sponsor an official unveiling and to erect the "totem pole" in front of the school, so he put out notices inviting the villagers to participate in the festive occasion. Finally, people in the community would see that the school did appreciate their

culture, and the "totem pole" would be a prominent and permanent symbol of this recognition.

On the appointed day, the P/T assembled all of the students and the other teachers to participate in the ceremony, and they gathered in front of the school and excitedly waited for the villagers to arrive from the community below. An hour or so later, as his excitement began to turn to anxiety, there was still no sign of anyone coming up from the village to attend the ceremony. He was accustomed to community events starting on "Indian time", but this was beginning to try his patience. Finally, he spotted an old man walking by and asked him where everyone was. Why weren't people coming up to the school for the unveiling of the "totem pole"? After some hesitation, the man responded, in a slightly admonishing tone, indicating that people were not attending because they were offended by what he had done, and this was their way of showing their displeasure.

After the P/T had regained his composure, the old man proceeded to explain that totem poles were not just carvings that anyone could do at any time for any purpose. They had particular meanings and were designated for very particular occasions. The design was intended to tell a story, incorporating significant mythic and contemporary figures, the selection and sequence of which was determined by the clan affiliation of the sponsor and by the intended purpose of the pole. The presentation of a totem pole was a major event usually involving a ritual exchange between clans and accompanied by a formal potlatch with many reciprocal obligations associated with it. The principal/teacher had violated nearly all of the critical cultural ingredients that go into the transformation of a log into an authentic "totem pole". His effort at cultural sensitivity, rather than appeasing the community, had led to further alienation.

This incident illustrates several problems with the way schools have typically addressed cultural issues in Native American communities. One such problem is viewing Native culture as artifact - as just another item that can be added to the curriculum as though it were a subject of the past, rather than as a way of life and a way of knowing that exists today and has implications for all subject matter, as well as for when, where and how subject matter is taught. Another problem illustrated by this story is the tendency of educators to view themselves as the sole proprietors of useful knowledge, not recognizing that theirs is a very specialized and limited way of knowing, so they often overlook the fact that much knowledge is already present in the community that could be effectively built upon to the schools advantage. These are long-standing problems that have been treated extensively by other authors (Barnhardt, 2002; Barnhardt, 2004; Barnhardt and Kawagley, 2005; Kawagley, 2006; Scollon & Scollon, 1981), and need not be further elaborated here. There is a third problem reflected in this story, however, that has not received so much attention, and that is the more pervasive problem of using an administrative framework of Western origin to provide services to a non-Western cultural community. It is to this latter issue that this paper is addressed.

As Raymond Callahan pointed out long ago in *Education and the Cult of Efficiency* (1962), the administrative framework for American schools has grown out of an industrial model, which typically includes organizational features such as a centralized authority structure, compartmentalization of responsibilities, short term goal orientation, specialization of skills, standardization of procedures, and an emphasis on efficiency and productivity (NCLB

notwithstanding). These characteristics of administration and organization are somewhat consistent with a society that prides itself in its heterogeneity, mobility and individualism. However, not all elements of American society have bought into the McDonalds version of the American dream, including many Native American communities.

The Tlingit people on the island in southeast Alaska, for example, have maintained a distinctive lifestyle that is still very much in harmony with the surrounding environment and is based on a strong bond of kinship and sense of mutual obligation, all of which foster a sustained tribal and clan identity which serves as the primary source of cultural and psychological nurturance and support for its members. All else, including the school, is peripheral to this sense of bonded community. The principal/teacher, however, was an outsider to the tribal community and saw his primary responsibility as being to his employer in Anchorage, and he based his actions on the expectations emanating from the detached institutional perspective of the central office. Despite his good intentions to respond to the wishes of the community, he was blinded by his adherence to a monolithic administrative framework that was more likely to reward him for appeasing the restless Natives than for providing a positive educational experience. Instead of recognizing that he was just one more of a long string of well-meaning but culturally deprived educators to pass through the community, he saw the assignment as an opportunity to establish his reputation in the institutional hierarchy as an innovative and responsive educator by demonstrating his commitment to local cultural concerns. His perception of the issue was framed, therefore, by his concern for how his actions might be viewed by his superiors, rather than how he would be viewed by the community. It probably didn't even occur to him to check with the villagers before ordering the cedar log through the central office in Anchorage. While his actions may have enhanced his reputation in the eyes of the district administration, he did so at the expense of his credibility in the community.

Emergent Institutions for Native Communities

By the mid-1970's, the Native communities in rural Alaska were no longer willing to serve as proving grounds for aspiring educators. The State-Operated School System was too monolithic, detached and cumbersome to adequately respond to the disparate educational needs of the various Native groups throughout Alaska, as well as to the needs of the military bases around the state, which also came under its authority. In 1976, largely through the political efforts of Native leaders, the State-Operated System was dissolved, and in its place twenty-one new regional school districts were established in rural Alaska. By placing control of the schools in the hands of regional boards, it was hoped that the educational services would be more responsive to local community concerns.

One of the principal avenues by which this increased responsiveness has been sought has been through an increase in the presence of Native people themselves in the schools, as teachers aides, bilingual instructors, and, to a more limited extent as certificated teachers and administrators. As these new school districts evolved, with local people getting increasingly involved from the policy-making to the classroom level, the posture of their administration has slowly changed from that of a distant, all-knowing authoritarian regime to a more collaborative, adaptive and facilitative form of administration. A reflection of this shift is an increased use of local parent committees and policy-advisory boards, as well as a greater

utilization of local expertise in all facets of the school operations, including the carving of totem poles.

While there still are a few mini-fiefdoms around rural Alaska, most administrators and teachers now recognize that their employer is the community, and their longevity requires a certain degree of sensitivity to community wishes. At the same time, communities are gradually developing a sense of ownership of their schools and are taking an increased interest in what goes on in them.

Theory Z

This change in the administrative climate in the rural schools of Alaska over the past three decades has run parallel to changes in another sphere of organizational development beyond Alaska - that of national and multinational corporation management. Just as the original administrative structure of the State-Operated School System reflected many of the essential features of the old industrial management model described earlier, the new regional districts adopted administrative practices that were representative of an emerging model of corporate management that began to gain popularity in the 80's and 90's, in response to the increasing challenge of Japanese, Chinese, Indian and other foreign countries to American industrial supremacy.

One of the early proponents of this emerging model of corporate management was William Ouchi, who studied both Japanese and American versions of two contrasting styles of organization and management. He distinguished these as Type A (favored by Americans) and Type Z (favored by the Japanese). Out of his analysis of Type Z organizations, Ouchi identified a set of management practices which he called a "Theory Z" style of management (Ouchi, 1981).

Table 1: Contrasting Tendencies of Type A and Type Z Management

<u>Type A</u>	<u>Type Z</u>
Variable-reducing	Variable-generating
Centralized control	Decentralized control
Formal relationships	Informal relationships
Tight structure	Loose structure
Likeness-oriented	Difference-oriented
Vertical staff relations	Horizontal staff relations
Information flows out	Information flows in
Managing role	Facilitating role
Explicit rules	Implicit rules
Restrictive communications channels	Open communications channels
Content/product oriented	Process/direction oriented
Converging focus	Diverging focus
Resistant to change	Receptive to change
Static structure and function	Evolving structure and function
Upward-responsive	Downward-responsive
Impersonal relationships	Personal relationships

The most significant distinguishing feature of this style of management is its holistic emphasis on people and the environment in which they work. Employees are treated as integral and central elements in the organization and are given an active role in decision-making and self-governance. Employment is viewed as a long-term mutual commitment in which the organization takes responsibility for the social as well as the economic well-being of its employees. The theory behind Theory Z is that employees who develop a sense of ownership in and commitment to the organization in which they work will be more dedicated to the goals of the organization and thus will become more productive contributors. To illustrate his point, Ouchi identified Hewlett-Packard, Procter and Gamble, and Eastman Kodak as three examples of successful American corporations that use a Theory Z style of management.

Theory Z is not limited in its corporate application to the multinational arena, however. Native regional corporations in Alaska, formed to administer the land and money acquired through the 1971 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, have also adopted management principles that reflect aspects of a Theory Z type of philosophy. As corporations with an exclusively Native clientele, they have attempted to employ Native workers, to invest in local enterprises, and to keep their shareholders informed and actively involved in corporate affairs. Their actions have not always been met with enthusiastic acceptance, however, and recurring debates regarding the efficacy of the corporate structure as a vehicle for serving Native interests indicate that a management style that is in the best interest of an organization may not always be in the best interest of its clientele.

In the early years of the Native regional corporations, the Boards of Directors and the corporate executives sometimes became so preoccupied with the economic goals of the corporation that they overlooked the larger responsibility of protecting the cultural well-being of their shareholders. For example, in their pursuit of corporate objectives, some of the Native corporations established their main offices in urban centers to be near the financial and commercial markets, but in the process they distanced themselves from their primary constituency—their shareholders. As a result, there has been a backlash against some of the corporation leaders from Native people in the villages, where land and subsistence issues often overshadow concerns over making a profit in the cash economy. From the village shareholders perspective, the needs of the community are seen as over-riding the needs of the corporation, with the corporation expected to be of service to the community, rather than the other way around.

This places the managers of the Native corporations in a fundamentally different role than their counterparts in other corporations, because they must deal with multiple constituencies with sometimes competing and conflicting expectations - a role which is not readily accommodated in the theory behind Theory Z. It has not been enough for Native corporate leaders to attend only to the internal dynamics of employee relations within the corporation. They must also pay careful attention to the external relations with their Native shareholders. And just as Native corporations are seeking to redefine their *modus operandi* to be more compatible with their cultural constituencies, so too are the regional school districts having to adapt their administrative posture as Native people become more active participants in their operation, particularly as administrators.

Theory Z + N

In the context of Native controlled institutions serving Native communities, Theory Z requires a Native corollary (which I will refer to as "Theory Z + N"), which takes into account the over-riding communal responsibility of such institutions, and of those who manage them, particularly if the managers are themselves Native. Theory Z + N takes into account the essential link between the well-being of the institution and the well-being of the community in which it is situated. While it may be possible to establish a management style such that the internal environment of a Native institution is organizationally coherent, operationally efficient, and employee sensitive, all of that will be of no avail if the overall thrust of the institution itself is not perceived by its Native clientele as consistent with the needs it is intended to serve. Such perceptions are created by many subtle features in the way an institution operates, and the way an institution operates is in large part a function of the attitudes and style of its administration.

While administrators, through their own deliberate action, can influence the way an institution interacts with its clientele, there are many other ways, some obvious and some not so obvious, in which institutions can present unintended structural barriers to the accommodation of Native community concerns and perspectives. Such barriers may exist in any feature of the institution in which there is potential for different cultural beliefs and practices to influence the attitudes and behavior of institutional participants (cf. Barnhardt, 2002; Scollon and Scollon, 1981). This includes implicit behavioral routines, such as the way people are expected to communicate and interact with one another, and the way decision-making and leadership are exercised. It also includes explicit institutional routines, such as recruitment and selection procedures, the way time and space are structured, and the criteria and techniques used to judge peoples' performances. As can be seen by the experience of the principal/teacher in southeast Alaska, administrative action sometimes speaks louder than the rhetoric that often accompanies it.

It is possible to reduce some of these institutional barriers by training non-Native administrators to recognize how organizational and administrative practices favor some people over others, and encourage them to develop practices that take cultural diversity into account (Lindsey, Robins and Terrell, 2003). Such an approach does not, however, address accompanying inequities in the distribution of power in the institution, nor is it the most effective or efficient means of building cultural sensitivity into institutional practices. Native people, with appropriate training and the opportunity to bring their unique perspective and skills to bear, are generally in a better position to break down institutional barriers to Native participation, because they are more likely to have inherent within them the necessary cultural predispositions. They must also, however, have the incentive and support to take culturally appropriate initiatives in the restructuring of organizational and administrative practices, or they will simply perpetuate the inequities built into the existing system.

Bringing administrative responsibility for the delivery of services to the level of the Native community is a critical step if those services are to reflect local cultural considerations. In doing so, however, new kinds of demands are placed on the role of the administrator which require a familiarity with and sensitivity to features of the local cultural system that few people from outside the system are likely to develop. It becomes imperative, therefore, that Native people assume those administrative responsibilities and be given the latitude to

introduce their own *modus operandi* in response to the needs and conditions in the community. Efforts to achieve "cultural fit" may require changes in institutional features ranging from the simple rescheduling of daily activities to a rethinking of the very function of the institution. Persons fully immersed in the cultural community being served are in the best position to recognize and act upon the discrepancies between institutional and cultural practices that interfere with the performance of the institution.

While moving the control of services closer to the community and bringing Native people into decision-making and management roles is a critical and necessary step toward transforming Western bureaucratic institutions, such as schools, corporations or government agencies, into more culturally sensitive institutions, that step in itself is not sufficient to achieve the equity of services that is needed. In addition to possessing all of the bureaucratic and technical skills necessary to maintain a Western-style institution, the Native administrator must also understand how the institution can be made to fit into the Native world without subverting essential features of that world. When such a transformation of existing institutions is not possible without losing more cultural ground than is gained, the Native administrator must also have the skill to build new kinds of institutions that can respect and be reconciled with the cultural values that are implicit in a Theory Z + N approach to management.

Native Participation in Decision-making

To be truly responsive to Native concerns, an institution must not only reflect an awareness of Native cultural values and practices, but it must also convey an attitude of respect for those values and practices. This must be done in such a way that Native people feel a sense of ownership with regard to the institution and see it as incorporating their traditions and perpetuating their interests. So long as the institutional decision-making processes are in the hands of non-Native decision-makers (regardless of how well-intentioned), Native people are going to feel shut out as equal participants in those institutions. But it is not enough to invite a token Native representative to "bring a Native perspective" to the decision-making arena, or to hire a token Native employee to integrate the staff and appease the critics. Nor is it enough to have Native people in professional or supervisory roles using conventional bureaucratic-style criteria to perpetuate Western institutional values. Such gratuitous avenues of participation are too easily subverted by the weight of Western bureaucratic machinery and do little to counteract the cultural distance between Western-style institutions and Native people.

To develop a sense of institutional ownership, Native people must feel they are a part of the action and are a party to decision-making from top to bottom, beginning to end. They must be on the delivery end of institutional services, not just on the receiving end. If such a transformation is to take place, institutions must adopt a participatory approach to decision-making, whereby everyone that is affected by an institution, whether as producer or consumer of institutional services, has an opportunity to influence the way the institution operates. This requires multiple avenues of access to the decision-making process, so that everyone can contribute in a manner consistent with their relationship to the institution and with their style of participation and decision-making. It also involves a horizontal distribution of power, so that all of the decision-making authority is not vested in a top-down

hierarchical structure. Participatory decision-making is at the heart of any administrative process which seeks to strengthen the degree of control that people have over their lives.

Increased Native participation in institutional decision-making can be achieved through a variety of mechanisms. These range from the establishment of affirmative action and career ladder programs that strengthen Native presence in existing institutions, to the creation of new institutions, where Native people sustain their cultural community through their own system of educational and service institutions (e.g., Tribal Colleges). Other options include contracting with Native organizations to provide services to Native people; establishing Native councils or guardianships to oversee Native interests; employing Native Elders to advise in areas of Native cultural and spiritual significance; and creating Native units within existing institutions through which Native people can manage their own affairs. It is through mechanisms such as these and any others that bring Native people into the decision-making arenas, that they can begin to wield the power that is needed to shape their own destiny. It is not enough to be the beneficiaries of benevolent institutions. Native people must be full and equal participants in the shaping and operation of those institutions if they are to achieve true self-determination (Barnhardt, 1992).

Cultural Bureaucrats, Advocates and Mediators

Once inside an institution in a professional, supervisory or decision-making role, Native people often face another set of considerations that extend far beyond those of their non-Native counterpart. Personal aspirations on the part of a Native administrator can be bound to a whole range of cultural expectations and obligations that rarely enter into non-Native considerations. This is in part a function of differences in cultural traditions, but it is also a function of the history of a beneficiary relationship between Native people and the institutions of a dominant society (i.e., the institution is there to provide certain benefits and those who work in the institution are there to administer those benefits for the people). As indicated earlier, Native administrators must not only reconcile themselves to their role within the institution, they are also expected to reconcile the relationship between the institution and its clientele. This may not always be easy, because the expectations of a Native community regarding an institution do not always coincide with those of the persons responsible for maintaining the institution. Given such circumstances, the administrator-cum-leader must choose to align either with the community being served or with the institution providing the services, or attempt to establish a middle ground as a mediator between the two. Each of these options leads to a different kind of role for the administrator vis-a-vis the community and the institution and, therefore, requires different kinds of skills.

If primary allegiance is granted to the institution, the Native administrator takes on the mantle of a "bureaucrat" and is likely to pursue primarily personal career goals as a matter of survival in the institution, with little willingness to challenge any lack of institutional response to the unique concerns of the Native community. Having bought into the bureaucratic system, efforts of such a person in the community are more likely to be directed towards getting the community to understand the needs of the institution, than to initiate actions or raise issues that further complicate institutional tasks. The responsibility of the bureaucrat (Native or non-Native) is to maintain the established system as efficiently and effectively as possible by reducing the variables that the system has to deal with to the minimum necessary for survival. It is the rare bureaucrat that willingly introduces new

complicating variables to the system. If bureaucratic institutions employ Native personnel with the intent of improving relations with Native communities, yet also expect them to take on a typical bureaucratic posture, they should not be surprised if the same old issues continue to resurface. While many benefits may be gained from such an arrangement, the greater share of those benefits will go to the individual and the institution, rather than to the community. Little is likely to be gained in terms of Native self-determination.

If, on the other hand, a Native person enters a bureaucratic institution as an "advocate" for Native concerns while retaining primary allegiance to the community, a set of skills different from those of the bureaucrat come into play. The concern of the community advocate is to bring community perspectives to the attention of the institution and to mobilize community action to achieve appropriate changes in the system. To achieve community action goals, cultural, political, and legal skills are often more important than administrative or technical bureaucratic skills.

Advocates tend to prefer positions that allow them to keep in close touch with the community (e.g., field office's), so that their institutional ties are often of a somewhat tenuous nature. Faced with a choice between alienation from the community and losing one's job, the advocate is likely to choose the latter option. This can present the institution with a dilemma, because while commitment to institutional goals and procedures is expected on the one hand, the expertise of the Native community advocate can also be vital to effective implementation of those goals and procedures, on the other. The root of the dilemma is not, however, in the lack of institutional commitment by the community advocate, but rather in the cultural distance between the functioning of the institution and the needs of the community. From the community advocate point of view, change must occur by bringing institutional practices into closer alignment with the expectations of the community being served, rather than the other way around. To the extent that the community advocate adequately represents community perspectives and the institution finds ways to accommodate those perspectives, that institution becomes an instrument of empowerment and service to Native people, and thus to all of society.

A third and more difficult posture that a Native person can assume as an administrator in a non-Native-dominated institution is that of "mediator" between the non-Native and Native cultural worlds. While such a posture can lapse into little more than fence-straddling, it also has the potential for creative application of the bicultural skills embodied in Native people. To function as mediator, a person must have a firm understanding of the essential qualities that make up the two (or more) worlds represented in the mediating arena, but just as important is an ability to see beyond existing circumstances so as to be able to create new options that reconcile differences in mutually beneficial ways. Bicultural skills must, therefore, be reinforced with institution-building skills, as well as with negotiation and persuasion skills. Such a combination of administrator and cultural broker can be a valuable asset to any institution, so long as the institutional power brokers recognize that mediation and accommodation are two-way processes.

To be a successful mediator, a person must be able to establish co-membership in both the community and institutional arenas. To be recognized and supported by Native people and to have influence in Native arenas requires the ability to display one's self in ways that are characteristically Native, and the ability to articulate issues in terms that make sense to

Native people. To have credibility in the bureaucratic institutional arena requires the ability to command authority and display competence in ways that are characteristically non-Native. So to be an effective mediator as a Native administrator, one has to be able to shift readily back and forth between different authority structures, leadership styles, decision-making processes, communication patterns, and any other cultural variables that enter into the way people get things done. The task of the mediator becomes one of constantly juggling multiple sets of often conflicting expectations and trying to determine where and how to seek changes that will reconcile the differences in a mutually satisfactory manner.

Whether the task is to increase Native participation in decision-making, improve communication, or develop culturally appropriate organizational policies, practices and procedures, there is one set of skills that is paramount above all others, and that is a thorough grounding in Native cultural beliefs and practices. Without such grounding, administrators (Native or non-Native) are likely to lack the knowledge and credibility necessary to bridge the gap between existing institutions and Native people, regardless of how well-intentioned they might be. Unless they are prepared to add the "N" to Theory Z in their administrative practice, they are likely to experience the same frustration as the principal/teacher in the Tlingit community in southeast Alaska. Priority must be given, therefore, to the preparation of skilled Native administrators who can apply their talents to the development of the kind of culturally sensitive institutional structures and practices that are required if Alaska Natives are to achieve the degree of cultural and institutional independence needed to exercise Native control over Native affairs.

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