Red Tape and Public Employees: Does Perceived Rule Dysfunction Alienate Managers?

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the relationship between organizational red tape and work alienation. While bureaucratic controls have long been considered sources of worker detachment, the relationship between red tape and managerial alienation has not been explicitly tested. When managers encounter rules, regulations, or procedures that seem pointless yet burdensome, these encounters may simultaneously trigger the key psychological ingredients of alienation—powerlessness and meaninglessness. These in turn are expected to reduce organizational commitment, job involvement, and job satisfaction, alienation indicators used in this study. To test these expectations, the study uses data from the National Administrative Studies Project (NASP-II). NASP-II surveyed managers in state health and human service agencies, producing a response rate of approximately 53 percent. Statistical analyses indicate that perceived personnel red tape is a consistently negative and statistically significant influence in all alienation models. Perceived organizational red tape is statistically significant and negative in all but the job involvement model. Other bureaucratic control mechanisms included in the models also appear to be sources of alienation, including centralization and technology routineness. However, formalization appears to be a mitigating, not exacerbating, influence on alienation. Considered together, these results suggest that red tape and other forms of bureaucratic control have adverse effects on the psychological attachment felt by public managers to their workplace.

Recent studies have associated red tape with a variety of organizational attributes, including a reduction in benefits provided to clients (Scott and Pandey 2000), a more risk-averse decision culture (Bozeman and Kingsley 1998), and higher technological innovation (Moon and Bretschneider 2002; Pandey and Bretschneider 1997). One

organizational attribute not explored fully is the extent to which red tape—defined here as managers' perceptions that rules and procedures have a negative effect on organizational performance—leads to higher work alienation.[1]

Bureaucratic control has long been suspected of fostering work detachment by distancing employees from formal authority, reducing individual work freedom (Blauner 1964), and engendering feelings of powerlessness (Gouldner 1952). As Albrow (1970) has pointed out, a number of these studies (e.g., Gouldner 1952; Merton 1952; Selznick 1949) were rejoinders to Weber's ideal type concept of bureaucracy and were successful in highlighting unanticipated and undesirable consequences of the bureaucratic form of organization. Subsequent empirical studies, however, provide mixed support for the linkage between organizational control and work alienation. Highly centralized and highly formalized structures have been shown to have both significant (Aiken and Hage 1966; Zeffane and Macdonald 1993) and insignificant effects (Sarros et al. 2002) on work alienation. Formalization has been associated with both lower work alienation (Michaels et al. 1988; Organ and Greene 1981; Podsakoff, Williams, and Todor 1986) and higher work alienation (Aiken and Hage 1966; Bonjean and Grimes 1970).

While studies linking Weberian characteristics of bureaucracies and work alienation have shown mixed results, we expect a clearer and nonambiguous relationship between red tape, a more direct measure of the negative aspects of bureaucratic formalism, and work alienation. When employees encounter rules, regulations, or procedures that reduce their discretion and seem pointless yet burdensome, these encounters may simultaneously trigger the key psychological determinants of alienation: feelings of powerlessness and meaninglessness. These feelings, in turn, are expected to reduce organization commitment, job involvement, and job satisfaction, indicators of work alienation used in this and other studies (Lefkowitz and Brigando 1980; Miller 1967; Pandey and Kingsley 2000; Zeffane and Macdonald 1993).

To test this expectation, we use data collected from the recently completed National Administrative Studies Project (NASP-II). In this study, a questionnaire was administered to managers in state health and human service agencies nationwide. The study was conducted in fall 2002 and winter 2003, yielding a response rate of 53 percent. Multiple linear regression modeling is applied to these data to explain variance in alienation using measures of red tape, as well as organizational attributes such as centralization, formalization, and technology routineness.

THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

Workplace alienation is conceptualized as a general cognitive state of psychological disconnection from work (Kanungo 1979). The components of this disconnection include powerlessness, where one's own behavior cannot determine outcomes; normlessness, a high expectancy that socially unapproved behaviors are required to meet goals; and self-estrangement, or the absence of intrinsically meaningful activity (Seeman 1959). The notion

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1   It should be noted that claims about the direction of causality in studies employing cross-sectional data are based on appeals to an underlying theoretical model. While this article develops the argument that red tape, just like other dimensions of organizational structure, causes alienation, alternate cases about the direction of causality have been made as well. Pandey and Kingsley (2000), for instance, make the case that alienation causes red tape. However, they acknowledge concerns about this direction of causality, and later work (Pandey and Welch 2003) proposes a bidirectional causal relationship between alienation and red tape.

of workplace alienation dates back to Marx's arguments that industrialization would damage the psyche of workers by, among other things, requiring them to adapt to work processes beyond their control (Erikson 1986). Although rooted in Marx's work, current notions of work alienation are quite different. While Marx conceptualized alienation at a group level (collective experience of the working class), this study uses the alienation concept in a social psychological sense, defining alienation at the level of the individual (Kanungo 1982).

Some have asserted that bureaucratic controls have as much potential to alienate workers as any assembly-line process (Braverman 1974). From this perspective, controls that seek to reduce worker discretion, such as close supervision or clearly and minutely specified procedures, become a type of automation that is machinelike. Reduced discretion, in turn, may separate the worker from organizational goals by removing participation in production and reducing the meaningfulness of work (Gross 1953). Such alienation may be particularly pronounced in organizations employing professionals, whose expectations of autonomy and participation contradict notions of bureaucratic control (Greene 1978; Miller 1967).

Extensive empirical evidence supports the notion that centralized decision making, one form of organization control, alienates workers (Aiken and Hage 1966; Blauner 1964; Miller 1967; Zeffane 1994). Industries characterized by low levels of worker discretion (auto, textiles, manufacturing) have been shown to experience higher worker alienation than those featuring higher levels of worker discretion (Blauner 1964). Scientists and engineers in less controlled private sector research and development laboratories have been shown to be less alienated than those in more controlled laboratories, where control is defined as supervisory style, research choice, professional climate, and company encouragement of autonomy (Miller 1967). Centralization has been also linked to higher alienation in a study of public and private welfare agencies (Aiken and Hage 1966) and public sector telecommunication workers (Zeffane and Macdonald 1993). These results lead us to expect that

H_1 Public managers in more centralized organizations will experience higher alienation than those in less centralized organizations.

The hypothesis assumes that reduced workplace autonomy is expected to increase feelings of powerlessness and reduce work's inherent meaningfulness, key components of alienation (Seeman 1959).

Formalization, defined as an emphasis on written rules, regulations, and procedures, has also been the focus of alienation studies. High levels of formalization imply that superiors prescribe work routines rather than allow workers to decide how things are done (Agarwal 1993). Such prescription, in turn, is expected to aggravate feelings of powerlessness and work's meaninglessness. Formalization has been linked to higher alienation among engineers (Greene 1978), welfare agency workers (Aiken and Hage 1966), and public and private sector employees (Zeffane 1994). Accordingly, we expect that

H_2 Public managers in more formalized organizations will experience higher alienation than those in less formalized organizations.

There exists, however, a contradictory strand in the literature suggesting that bureaucratic control, through formalization, *reduces* alienation by providing needed

guidance, clarifying job responsibility and relieving role stress (Adler and Borys 1996). This literature focuses on formalization and its theoretical role in reducing role conflict and role ambiguity, thereby relieving role stress (Jackson and Schuler 1985). These assertions are supported in studies of salespeople (Michaels et al. 1988), technical professionals (Organ and Greene 1981), and professionals and nonprofessionals (Podsakoff, Williams, and Todor 1986). A third theoretical perspective contends that the relationship between formalization and alienation depends on a range of factors that are typically not controlled for in studies. Specifically, the type of formalization makes a difference, whether it is enabling or coercive (Adler and Borys 1996) or process versus outcome oriented (Agarwal 1999). For example, enabling bureaucracy, which helps employees to master tasks, may reinforce organization commitment, while coercive bureaucracy, which forces employee effort, may supplant commitment with compliance.

Technology routineness is an indirect form of organization control potentially alienating to public managers. While not a function of rules or procedures, technology routineness makes it possible to devise rules and regulations that produce predictable outcomes with respect to different tasks, thus making higher levels of formalization possible (Burton and Obel 1998; Hall 1991). Thus, as with centralization and formalization, we expect that

H$_3$ Public managers in organizations with higher technology routineness will experience higher alienation than public managers in organizations with lower technology routineness.

Although not strictly bureaucratic in nature, the effects of technology routineness are potentially similar: situations devoid of challenge and a place for individual initiative, requiring individuals to behave in a uniform manner, will become quickly alienating (Shepard 1977).

Red tape, defined here as ineffective procedure that reduces organizational performance, may inhibit self-expression and the ability to positively effect clientele (Argyris 1957) and suppress natural desires for self-expression, responsibility, growth, and achievement (Baldwin 1990). These negative effects may trigger feelings of powerlessness and meaninglessness, outcomes that might also reasonably be expected from centralization, formalization, and technology routineness. However, red tape may also induce feelings of normlessness, which are not a logical consequence of these other structural forms. This dimension of alienation involves the expectation that socially unapproved behaviors are required to achieve goals. Specifically the requirement to comply with red tape may lead public managers to feel obligated to participate in procedure that is perceived to consume public resources but produce no benefit. A public manager's sensitivity to perceived waste in rules may be heightened by public perceptions that the government is the leading purveyor of red tape (Bozeman 2000). This leads to the expectation that

H$_4$ Higher organizational red tape will lead to higher alienation among public managers.

One counterargument to the hypothesis is that red tape could be a phenomenon to which public managers have become accustomed and are perhaps increasingly equipped to deal with (Lewis 1980; Riccucci 1995). In particular, public managers may have an inherent or developed toleration for red tape that is buttressed by larger motivational forces, such as the stimulation of managerial work and the need to achieve broader societal

goals (Baldwin 1990; Pandey, Kingsley, and Scott 2001; Scott and Pandey 2003). Baldwin (1990) found that perceived red tape did not alter the willingness to work hard among public or private sector managers, the explanation for which may relate to managerial understandings of the trade-offs between accountability and inefficiency inherent in red tape.

THE DATA

The data for this project were collected during Phase II of the National Administrative Studies Project (NASP-II). The sampling frame comprised managers working in information-management activities at the state level in health and human service agencies. Primary health and human service agencies were identified according to the definition used by the American Public Human Services Association (APHSA) and include agencies housing programs related to Medicaid, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, and child welfare. Information management was broadly defined to include a range of key managerial roles such as the top program administrator, managers of information system applications, managers in charge of evaluation and research, and managers dealing with public information and communication. The sampling frame was developed with the aid of the most widely used directory of human service agency managers, namely, the 2001 APHSA directory. Application of study criteria resulted in a sampling frame made of 570 managers from the fifty states and Washington, D.C. Given the small size of the sampling frame, a decision was made to administer the survey to the entire sampling frame (i.e., conduct a census).

As with most survey research projects, the survey-implementation process sought to minimize nonresponse to both the survey and specific questionnaire items. Thus the study employed Dillman's (1999) comprehensive tailored design method approach to maximizing the response rate. This approach includes (1) a questionnaire with well-designed content; (2) the survey questionnaire formatted in accordance with the latest advances in cognitive research; (3) multiple personalized contacts, each contact accompanied with a carefully crafted message to encourage the respondent to complete the survey questionnaire; and (4) the use of real stamps on return envelopes and of features such as pre-notice letter, fax message, and phone call at key points in the survey administration, as well as use of special delivery (a combination of two-day delivery by Airborne Express and the Priority Mail service of the U.S. Postal Service).

The data-collection phase of the study began in fall 2002. First, respondents were sent an alert letter informing them about the study and requesting their cooperation in completing a questionnaire to be mailed later. Approximately a week after the initial alert letter, the survey questionnaire was mailed to the respondents. The cover letter accompanying the survey questionnaire outlined the study objectives, indicated the voluntary nature of the study, requested participation, and provided contact details of the project director for further informational needs and clarifications. About ten days later a combination thank you/reminder postcard was sent to all respondents, thanking those who had responded and encouraging those who had not to respond as soon as they possibly could.

Nearly a month after the mailing of this postcard, a new cover letter and replacement survey were sent to nonrespondents. The cover letter emphasized the fact that it was important for everyone to respond (unless for some reason or other the respondent chose

not to respond). In order to make sure that the respondents were aware of the second mailing, concomitantly with the mailing we faxed the cover letter that went with the second mailing to the nonrespondents, clearly indicating that the letter and a replacement survey were in the mail. The final step in survey administration took place about two months later when nonrespondents were sent a new cover letter and a third replacement survey with a request to complete the survey. This final mailing pointed out that this was the last opportunity for the respondents to complete the survey questionnaire and used a combination of two-day delivery by an express carrier and U.S. Postal Service Priority Mail. By the time survey administration concluded in winter 2003, a total of 274 responses were received, resulting in a 53 percent response rate.[2]

ALIENATION MEASURES

We begin with a consideration of the work alienation construct. Prior research has suggested that it is best to treat work alienation as an umbrella concept that is best mapped by a range of closely related constructs (Lefkowitz and Brigando 1980; Pandey and Kingsley 2000; Rainey 1993). Pandey and Kingsley note that "job motivation and job satisfaction serve as umbrella concepts that have areas of overlap with the concept of work alienation" (2000, 790–91). They go on to note that the conceptual overlap of the work alienation concept with other motivational constructs is reflected in the fact that extant scales for measuring these different, but closely related, constructs contain similar items. In light of this, rather than measuring work alienation using a single scale, we map work alienation through three closely related constructs, namely, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and job involvement.

Organization commitment has been linked to lower alienation in several studies (Michaels et al. 1988; Podsakoff, Williams, and Todor 1986). This study's organization commitment measure (Meyer, Allen, and Smith 1993) reflects the perceived obligation to remain with one's employer. The measure used is a scale constructed by summing survey responses to the following questionnaire items (with Likert-type alternatives ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree):

This organization deserves my loyalty.

I would not leave my organization right now because I have a sense of obligation to the people in it.

I owe a great deal to my organization.

It would be very hard for me to leave my organization right now, even if I wanted to.

The Cronbach's alpha of average interitem correlation for these items indicates an acceptable 0.80.

Researchers have measured alienation using job satisfaction (Aiken and Hage 1966; Allen and LaFollette 1977; Zeffane and Macdonald 1993) and generated evidence of convergent validity between job satisfaction and alienation constructs (Lefkowitz and Brigando 1980). In this study, job satisfaction is measured as a scale of summed

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2   The response rate is based on the net sample size of 514, which reflects the exclusion of managers (from retirement, death, resignation) from the organizations in the original sample ($n = 570$).

Likert-type responses (from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) to the following questions (Cammann et al. 1979; Cook et al. 1981; Seashore et al. 1982):

> In general, I like working here.
>
> In general, I don't like my job. (Reversed)
>
> All in all, I am satisfied with my job.

These measures have a Cronbach's alpha of 0.87, indicating acceptable scale reliability.

The job involvement scale used by this study taps the extent to which one's job is a central life interest (Davis 1966; Dubin 1956; Lodahl and Kejner 1965; Saleh and Hosek 1976). Studies have employed job involvement to capture the self-estrangement component of alienation, which relates to the lack of inherent meaning in work (Lefkowtiz and Brigando 1980; Miller 1967). The measure used here sums public manager's responses on a Likert-type scale (from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree) to the following statements:

> The most important things I do are involved with my job.
>
> I enjoy my work more than anything else I do.
>
> The major satisfaction in my life comes from my job.

These measures have a Cronbach's alpha of 0.76, indicating acceptable scale reliability.

ORGANIZATION CONTROL AND RED TAPE MEASURES

Organization control is measured by three attributes: the degree of centralization, formalization, and technology routineness. Two types of red tape are measured: (1) personnel red tape and (2) organizational red tape.

Centralization is defined as an upward locus of decision-making power in the organization (Aiken and Hage 1966; Hall 1963). Aiken and Hage's (1966) measure of centralization is used, consisting of a scale generated by summing ratings of levels of agreement (from 1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree) for the following statements:

> There can be little action taken here until a supervisor approves a decision.
>
> In general, a person who wants to make his own decisions would be quickly discouraged in this agency.
>
> Even small matters have to be referred to someone higher up for a final answer.

The scale has acceptable reliability, as measured by a Cronbach's alpha of 0.77.

Formalization is defined as the extent of written rules, regulations, and procedures (Pugh et al. 1968). Higher levels of formalization are meant to limit discretion and minimize variance in outputs (Wintrobe 1982). This study borrows a 1992 NASP-I measure of formalization based on a survey question about the extent of organizational record keeping (Bozeman 2000; Pandey and Scott 2002): "Please assess the extent of

record keeping in your organization ... [(]with 0 signifying few records kept and 10 signifying a great many records kept)."

Technology routineness, defined as the level of variety in an organization's work tasks, is included as an indirect form of organizational control. This research uses a scale adopted from Aiken and Hage (1966) for technology routineness that sums public managers' Likert-type responses to the following statements (from 1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree):

> People here do the same job in the same way every day.
>
> One thing people like around here is the variety of work. (Reversed)
>
> Most jobs have something new happening every day. (Reversed)

The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the scale is 0.62.

Red tape is defined as burdensome rules or procedures that have an adverse effect on organizational performance. Two measures of red tape are used in the study. As used in NASP-I (Bozeman 2000; Pandey and Scott 2002), organizational red tape is measured by survey responses to the following question: "If red tape is defined as burdensome administrative rules and procedures that have negative effects on the organization's performance, please assess the level of red tape in your organization: (Please enter a number between 0 and 10, with 0 signifying no red tape and 10 signifying the highest level of red tape)."

The second red tape measure pertains to human resource procedures. Personnel rules have been identified as a highly distinguishable dimension of red tape (Rainey 1983) and an important source of red tape in the public sector (Pandey and Kingsley 2000; Pandey and Welch 2003; Rainey, Pandey, and Bozeman 1995). The role of public personnel rules as a pronounced source of red tape may be attributable to the great care taken to promote merit principles and affirmative action (Baldwin 1990). Human resource red tape is measured as the sum of public managers' Likert-type responses (from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) to the following questionnaire items (Pandey and Scott 2002; Rainey 1983):

> Even if a manager is a poor performer, formal rules make it hard to remove him or her from the organization.
>
> The rules governing promotion make it hard for a good manager to move up faster than a poor one.
>
> The formal pay structures and rules make it hard to reward a good manager with higher pay here.
>
> The personnel rules and procedures that govern my organization make it easy for superiors to reward subordinates for good performance. (Reversed)

The Cronbach's alpha for the scale is 0.69, indicating an acceptable level of reliability.

MODEL AND RESULTS

Six ordinary least squares regression models are performed to test the relationship among organization control, perceived red tape, and alienation. The models employ the three alienation indicators and two red tape measures (for organizational and personnel red tape).

The centralization, formalization, and technology routineness measures remain constant across the six models.

Because the model residuals displayed some heteroskedasticity, statistical tests are based on White's heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors. Slight departures from normality preclude the need to explore nonlinear modeling technologies, since OLS regression is robust against this pattern (Neter et al. 1996). Furthermore, variance inflation factor tests fail to generate evidence of multicollinearity between the model variables.[3]

In the first model (table 1), centralization and organizational red tape are associated with significantly lower organization commitment, as predicted.[4] Formalization and technology routineness are insignificant influences on organization commitment ($p > .10$). An examination of standardized regression coefficients reveals that centralization has a stronger influence on commitment than organizational red tape. The model explains 17 percent of the variation in organization commitment.

Organizational red tape and centralization are significantly correlated with lower job satisfaction ($p < .01$ and $p < .05$, respectively, table 2). Technology routineness is also associated with lower job satisfaction, but the influence is of borderline statistical significance ($p < .10$). Formalization has a statistically significant positive influence on job satisfaction that contradicts the hypothesized direction ($p < .05$). As indicated by standardized regression coefficients, centralization has the strongest influence on job satisfaction, followed by formalization and technology routineness. The model explains 18 percent of the variance in job satisfaction.

The organization control model using agency-wide red tape explains little variance in job involvement (table 3). Technology routineness, the model's only significant explanatory variable, is associated with lower job involvement ($p < .01$).

The next set of models substitute personnel red tape for organization red tape. In the model of organization commitment (table 4), centralization and personnel red tape are statistically significant negative influences (both $p < .01$). Formalization and technology routineness do not significantly effect organization commitment (both $p > .10$). Standardized regression coefficients indicate that centralization and red tape have similar influences on organization commitment. The model explains 22 percent of the variance in organization commitment.

In the model of job satisfaction (table 5), centralization and personnel red tape are statistically significant negative influences (both $p < .01$). Technology routineness is also associated with significantly lower job satisfaction ($p < .05$). Formalization remains a positive influence on job satisfaction ($p < .05$). A review of standardized regression coefficients indicates that centralization and personnel red tape are the strongest alienation influences, followed by formalization and technology routineness. The organization control and personnel red tape variables explain 21 percent of the variance in job satisfaction.

The organization control model with personnel red tape explains only 8 percent of the variance in job involvement (table 6). Personnel red tape and technology routineness are the only variables associated with significantly lower job involvement (both $p < .01$). Standardized regression coefficients indicate that both variables exert a moderate influence

3   No VIF score exceeds 1.5, well below the score of 5 that would trigger multicollinearity concerns (Berk 2003).

4   The probabilities reported in this section and tables 1–6 reflect the results of two-tailed hypotheses tests. Accordingly, we define statistical significance at $p < .10$, which translates to $p < .05$ for a one-tailed hypothesis test.

Table 1
OLS Regression of Organization Commitment on Organization Control and Red Tape

	OLS Coef.	Std. Beta	Robust Std. Err.	t	$P > |t|$
(Constant)	19.88		1.57	12.63	0.00
Centralization	−0.58	−0.32	0.14	−3.99	0.00
Formalization	0.19	0.09	0.14	1.34	0.18
Technology Routineness	−0.12	−0.05	0.13	−0.89	0.37
Organizational Red Tape	−0.23	−0.12	0.12	−1.90	0.06

$R^2 = 0.17$
$n = 269$

Table 2
OLS Regression of Job Satisfaction on Organization Control and Red Tape

	OLS Coef.	Std. Beta	Robust Std. Err.	t	$P > |t|$
(Constant)	15.27		0.07	−3.81	0.00
Centralization	−0.28	−0.27	0.09	2.20	0.03
Formalization	0.19	0.16	0.08	−2.13	0.03
Technology Routineness	−0.17	−0.14	0.06	−1.68	0.10
Organizational Red Tape	−0.10	−0.09	0.89	17.26	0.00

$R^2 = 0.18$
$n = 269$

Table 3
OLS Regression of Job Involvement on Organization Control and Red Tape

	OLS Coef.	Std. Beta	Robust Std. Err.	t	$P > |t|$
(Constant)	15.62		1.63	9.57	0.00
Centralization	−0.14	−0.07	0.16	−0.90	0.37
Formalization	0.03	0.01	0.14	0.19	0.85
Technology Routineness	−0.37	−0.16	0.15	−2.49	0.01
Organizational Red Tape	−0.07	−0.04	0.13	−0.59	0.55

$R^2 = 0.05$
$n = 268$

Table 4
OLS Regression of Organization Commitment on Organization Control and Personnel Red Tape

	OLS Coef.	Std. Beta	Robust Std. Err.	t	$P > |t|$
(Constant)	22.60		1.57	14.41	0.00
Centralization	−0.50	−0.27	0.13	−3.73	0.00
Formalization	0.20	0.10	0.13	1.58	0.12
Technology Routineness	−0.13	−0.06	0.13	−1.03	0.30
Organizational Red Tape	−0.31	−0.26	0.06	−5.05	0.00

$R^2 = 0.22$
$n = 268$

Table 5
OLS Regression of Job Satisfaction on Organization Control and Personnel Red Tape

	OLS Coef.	Std. Beta	Robust Std. Err.	t	$P > |t|$
(Constant)	16.38		0.92	17.78	0.00
Centralization	−0.25	−0.24	0.07	−3.71	0.00
Formalization	0.19	0.16	0.08	2.34	0.02
Technology Routineness	−0.17	−0.14	0.08	−2.26	0.03
Personnel Red Tape	−0.13	−0.19	0.03	−3.80	0.00
$R^2 = 0.21$					
$n = 269$					

but that personnel red tape has a relatively stronger influence than technology routineness (−0.19 and −0.16).

DISCUSSION

We began by hypothesizing that various forms of organization control would be associated with higher workplace alienation. The results yield mixed evidence for this expectation (see table 7 for a summary depiction). As hypothesized, centralization and technology routineness are associated with higher alienation in most of the models generated. However, the results fail to support the hypothesized relationship between formalization and alienation. Formalization appears to be a mitigating, not exacerbating, influence on alienation. This result is consistent with studies suggesting that formalization relieves role stress and thus serves as a connecting influence between employer and employee.

We also hypothesized that perceptions of red tape—defined as burdensome procedures that impair organizational performance—would be associated with higher managerial alienation. The results support this expectation (table 7). Perceived personnel red tape is a consistently negative and statistically significant influence in all models of alienation indicators. Perceived organizational red tape is statistically significant and negative in all but the job involvement model, in which it is an insignificant influence. These results also contradict the notion that public managers are impervious to the psychological effects of ineffective procedure because it is commonplace in their public sector context.

The results provide information on the relative "importance" of red tape's relationship to alienation, though it was not a formally tested hypothesis. A comparison of

Table 6
OLS Regression of Job Involvement on Organization Control and Personnel Red Tape

	OLS Coef.	Std. Beta	Robust Std. Err.	t	$P > |t|$
(Constant)	17.84		1.77	10.07	0.00
Centralization	−0.05	−0.03	0.15	−0.34	0.74
Formalization	0.05	0.02	0.13	0.38	0.70
Technology Routineness	−0.37	−0.16	0.15	−2.54	0.01
Personnel Red Tape	−0.23	−0.19	0.07	−3.15	0.00
$R^2 = 0.08$					
$n = 269$					

Table 7
Comparison of Explanatory Variables across Alienation Models

	Organization Commitment		Job Satisfaction		Job Involvement	
	Org. Red Tape	Pers. Red Tape	Org. Red Tape	Pers. Red Tape	Org. Red Tape	Pers. Red Tape
Centralization	−0.32***	−0.27***	−0.27**	−0.24***	−0.07[+]	−0.03[+]
Formalization	0.09*	0.10*	0.16**	0.16**	0.01[+]	0.02[+]
Technology Routineness	−0.05[+]	−0.06[+]	−0.14**	−0.14**	−0.16***	−0.16***
Red Tape	−0.12**	−0.26***	−0.09***	−0.19***	−0.04[+]	−0.19***

*$p < .10$ for one-tailed test; **$p < .05$ for one-tailed test; ***$p < .01$ for one-tailed test; [+] insignificant at $p > .10$ for one-tailed test.

standardized regression coefficients of statistically significant model variables reveals centralization to be a consistently stronger alienation influence than red tape (table 7). Thus, public managers appear to be more alienated by limitations on professional autonomy than by ineffective procedure.

As one final observation, the second set of models using personnel red tape explains more variance than the first set of models using organizational red tape in their explanatory variables. This pattern could be due to the greater relevance of personnel red tape measures for work alienation, which are more specific with regard to the sources and effects of ineffective procedure.

For several reasons, interpretation of these results should proceed with caution. First, the use of public managers focusing on information management, albeit using a relatively broad definition of information management, limits the external validity of the study. Future research should seek to expand the types of employees and the nature of agencies. Second, the research has focused on organizational structure to the exclusion of individual characteristics that may influence workplace alienation. This is a deliberate exclusion for conceptual clarity but may be the driving factor behind the low levels of explanatory variance in our regression modeling.[5] A third limitation is that the study may have mistaken the direction of causality among alienation, organization control, and red tape. Scholars have argued recently the tendency of more alienated individuals to perceive higher organizational control and red tape, a pattern difficult to detect in cross-sectional data (Anderson 1971; Bozeman and Rainey 1998; Pandey and Kingsley 2000). Because regression analysis of cross-sectional data does not determine the direction of causality, future research should apply more sophisticated modeling approaches to estimate directionality. Future research should also seek to estimate the exact psychological path from perceived organization control and perceived red tape to alienation.

CONCLUSIONS

Consistent with much research in organizational sociology and public administration, we do find that structural mechanisms for organizational control have an influence on work alienation. Centralized decision-making mechanisms, in and of themselves, reduce organizational commitment and job satisfaction. But does this necessarily mean that public organizations need to take steps to decentralize decision making? When we combine our

5   As Berk (2003) notes, one should not expect to explain significant amounts of variance when focusing on a single aspect of a social phenomenon.

findings on centralization with the positive effects of formalization on job satisfaction, decentralized decision making does sound like an idea that has potential. Although decentralization may sound like a reasonable proposition in the abstract, the extent and the manner of decentralization can have significant consequences for the legitimacy and effectiveness of public organizations. Indeed, there may be limits to which decentralization may be carried out if the needs for adequate management control and political control of the public service are to be satisfied.

Decentralization's limits notwithstanding, perceptions of red tape inevitably galvanize politicians, everyday citizens, and media critics about a need for reforms. The fact that public managers are subject to a multitude of rules and regulations that tie their hands in numerous ways is often overlooked. The orthodox reaction to this state of affairs from public administration theorists has combined polemics, highlighting political accountability imperatives, with self-praise for the public sector's lofty and altruistic goals (e.g., Goodsell 1994, 2000; Kaufman 1977). While there is some value in these efforts to defend and lionize the public sector, they run the risk of being labeled self-serving (Buchanan 1975).

Yet the public sector *can* do more to ameliorate the red tape that managers face. Indeed, recent research has conclusively shown that it is possible to identify red tape as a distinct structural dimension of organizations, a conceptual and measurement advance that can be used to productively target red tape (Pandey and Scott 2002; Rainey 2003). Efforts to better understand personnel red tape and other dimensions of red tape in public organizations can ultimately provide us with superior approaches to reducing work alienation (Pandey and Scott 2002). Related research on this topic is also bringing to the fore the fact that efforts to reduce red tape, in addition to specific organizational changes, need to be based on a better understanding of the cognitive processes underlying managerial assessments of red tape (Pandey, Kingsley, and Scott 2001; Scott and Pandey 2003).

We believe that this study, part of a perspective on red tape that pays careful attention to conceptual and empirical issues, has significant potential to inform and add value to both theory and practice (Bozeman 2000; Pandey and Kingsley 2000; Pandey and Scott 2002; Rainey, Pandey, and Bozeman 1995). From a theoretical perspective, we find that bureaucratic red tape joins other forms of organizational control in lowering the morale of public managers. This result has practical implications for public management, which must provide sustenance to individual motivation to remain responsive and effective. Thus, these results can contribute to helping top management and political leadership in public organizations understand what makes managers "tick."

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