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## Battling the Bureaucracy: Building a Mormon Chapel

Excessive multiplication of bureaus results in a bureaucracy, which we may define as any administration in which the need to follow complex procedures impedes effective action. A bureaucrat usually works by fixed routine without exercising intelligent judgment and insists on rigid adherence to rules. The implication drawn from the word *bureaucrat* or the word *bureaucracy* is almost always derogatory.

Max Weber saw bureaucratization of society as both undesirable and inevitable. As society grows and production increases, increased efficiency requires specialization, resulting in assembly-line techniques. Bureaucracy is efficient because it dehumanizes production, eliminating human error.<sup>1</sup> But in an organization dedicated to human needs, the growth of bureaucracy can only be unfortunate because those needs may be disregarded in the scramble to turn out a product.

A study of Mormon history supports the view that bureaucracy was practically nonexistent in the early church, which was much less centralized. By contrast, in the twentieth century, bureaucracy has become the norm for church government. One clue is the gradual replacement of the word *doctrine* by the word *program*. At least one observer has argued that bureaucracy was not intrinsic to Mormonism and that the use of bureaucratic models for church organization was arbitrary.<sup>2</sup>

The constraints governing the building of a chapel symbolize the disadvantages of the church bureaucracy. Such construction today must be done under the supervision of the Building Division, which is housed, along with numerous other divisions, in a \$31.5 million, twenty-eight-story structure in Salt Lake City with 566,000 square feet of office space and three levels of underground parking for 1,400 cars. The Church has approximately 6,700 buildings throughout the world, including meetinghouses, temples, mission homes, visitors centers, welfare facilities, and seminary and institute buildings. In 1979, more than 660 building projects were reported in process in various parts of the world.<sup>3</sup>

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When I was called to be bishop of the Hingham, Massachusetts, Ward in 1977, I did not envision a tenure devoted to bricks and mortar. Yet ours was a growing ward with a two-phase building consisting of a chapel, offices, and classrooms, and we were overcrowded on Sunday mornings. By the end of the year, we were convinced that we needed a third phase, consisting of a classroom wing and a cultural hall. The Building Division projected the cost between \$350,000 and \$400,000. Our ward was responsible for 30 percent, while the remainder would be paid from general Church funds in Salt Lake City. I purposely over-estimated our share at \$120,000, fully expecting it to be influenced by inflation. That would soon turn out to be a naive estimate.

I proposed to the membership that we raise \$60,000 in one "year of sacrifice," with most of the money emanating from our own pockets. We would all agree to forego material pleasures so that we could acquire the first fifteen percent. The Building Division would then allow us to begin construction, and we would have three additional years to raise the second fifteen percent.<sup>4</sup>

Two months later, we received our first financial scare when the Building Division announced that the estimated cost had risen from \$400,000 to \$436,802, meaning that our starting fund would have to reach \$65,520.<sup>5</sup> In April when the cost rose to \$521,426 and the starting fund to \$78,213, we were instructed to "readjust" our fund-raising activities.<sup>6</sup> By the time we accepted bids on the building in September, inflation had ballooned the cost to \$648,546, and the starting fund to \$94,292.<sup>7</sup> In the end, the actual funds disbursed for the project were \$657,221.<sup>8</sup>

We hoped for a groundbreaking in May 1979, to allow the summer months for construction. The local architect was formally appointed 7 June 1978,<sup>9</sup> yet it was thirteen months before the plans were approved in Salt Lake City, and three months after that before construction formally began. The division seemed insensitive to our desire to expedite the matter—the local architect would send papers to Salt Lake City for approval; the Building Division would delay response for several weeks; then the architect would indulge in delay of his own before resuming productive work. It was a discouraging time, and it proved the difficulty of working with a bureaucracy. Each step of the project involved a different department and supervisor, each of whom lacked knowledge of what had previously transpired.<sup>10</sup>

A key to a bureaucracy's competence is its compartmentalization. Each compartment is competent only for its particular expertise, and thus people are often referred from one compartment to another to seek resolution to their problems. Above all, bureaucrats insist on proper procedure.<sup>11</sup> I quickly learned that the Building Division operated according to that mode, i.e., with a "cookie cutter" mentality. All requests were considered unacceptable unless unusual reasons were expertly combined with sound public relations principles.

For instance, our original building had been designed according to the specifications of a Kent plan, whereas the plan currently in use by the Church was called a Beaumont. For that reason, some changes were unavoidable. At our first planning conference with the architect, we suggested changes designed

to produce a better, more functional building. We proposed trading locations for the Relief Society and the Aaronic Priesthood rooms, adding a shower in the women's room, using a seamless resilient flooring instead of wood flooring in the cultural hall, and substituting folding wall panels for accordion-type folding doors. We believed that the wall panels were more attractive, more durable, more versatile, and sound-proof. Besides, a teacher could put charts and pictures on them with magnets.<sup>12</sup>

The Building Division approved relocating the Relief Society and Aaronic Priesthood rooms but scuttled the rest. When I asked why it was impossible to include a women's shower, the area architectural coordinator pontifically announced that "the Brethren prefer it that way."<sup>13</sup> Throughout the building process, I noted this tendency to invoke the hierarchy to support arbitrary bureaucratic decisions. Moreover, this issue was potentially explosive in this case since it could be inferred that the "Brethren" were consciously discriminating against women. Of course, it was ridiculous to assume that the General Authorities were personally involved in every detail of the Beaumont plan in the approximately 660 building projects throughout the Church. When I insisted on a logical explanation of the policy, the coordinator asserted, "Women usually go home to shower." I suggested that such a statement was discriminatory and that showering at home was an impractical alternative because most of our members lived from twenty to forty minutes from the building. Grudgingly, he replied, "All right, bishop. We'll give it to you if you *really* want it, but I don't think it's wise."

That small battle won, I progressed to the cultural hall floor. We requested Tarkett, a remarkably durable material we had observed in two schools. The coordinator was unimpressed and said that the only alternative to wood flooring was an indoor-out door carpet called PRO-VO which was guaranteed for ten years. Although our members considered a carpeted gym floor undesirable, the coordinator assured me that the "basketball bounced just as high" and that the floor produced "a more reverent atmosphere." It was difficult for me to imagine a "reverent" basketball game, but I suspected he was right about the bounce. When I inquired about ballroom dancing, he seemed surprised and proclaimed that "no one does ballroom dancing any more." I contended that New Englanders in fact did and that a floor that failed to allow for both dancing *and* basketball would be unacceptable. Although somewhat agitated, he agreed to consider the proposal.<sup>14</sup>

The following month when I visited Salt Lake City, he informed me that the committee had rejected the floor, because they "had no experience with it." Then he tried to persuade me to visit a carpeted cultural hall in Bountiful, Utah, and bounce a ball. Recognizing that the bureaucracy had won this round, I told him we would take the wood flooring. Even though he conceded some advantages in movable walls, he rejected them also on grounds of excessive cost but agreed to replace all our current folding doors, which were in serious disrepair.<sup>15</sup>

Since the Church does not routinely air-condition new buildings, I made a special request for air-conditioning in the new Relief Society room and in the

multi-purpose room in the existing building. The chapel was already air-conditioned because it was classified as an assembly room. I argued that the Relief Society and multi-purpose rooms were also assembly rooms, where relatively large groups gathered and that the heat was oppressive in summer.<sup>16</sup> I was informed that the Church's mechanical engineering department had determined that "climate conditions in the Hingham, Massachusetts area are conducive [sic] to not require air conditioning."<sup>17</sup>

Expressed more succinctly, the Church had placed Hingham, Massachusetts, in a red zone, meaning that it was not hot enough to require air conditioning. Refusing to give in that easily, I sent a record of typical temperatures and humidity for the summer months, arguing that Massachusetts was more oppressive in the summer than Utah. I recommended that the zone be reclassified and invited "the entire building division to pay us a visit in the month of July."<sup>18</sup>

There was no reply to my letter, but I decided to reissue the request at our bid opening in August. For that event, we were assigned a new member of the bureaucracy, the "construction supervisor, area five." When I explained my position to him, the supervisor instructed the architect to "give the bishop the air conditioning"; then he carefully outlined to me how difficult other changes would be to make.<sup>19</sup>

Ironically, the heating contractor made an error and installed air-conditioning in the Relief Society room and every room in the old wing *except* the multi-purpose room. The possibility of removing the system from those rooms and putting it in the multi-purpose room instead was discussed. Fortunately, logic prevailed, and the mistake was left intact while an additional unit was installed for the multi-purpose room. Miraculously, we ended up with the entire old wing air-conditioned, a minor concession turning into a coup. Applying unremitting pressure, I convinced the Building Division that new carpet should be installed throughout the existing building and the addition, something the coordinator had been initially hesitant to do.

The most important decision for us was the choice of a building contractor. We researched eleven contractors and waited for a pre-bid conference on August 8, when preliminary information would be given to each contractor to help him decide whether to bid. The Building Division considered it necessary for the construction supervisor to travel the 2,500 miles from Salt Lake City to conduct the short session.<sup>20</sup>

It was disappointing that three weeks later only three of the eleven placed bids. The contract was eventually awarded to Pasqualucci and Son, a local contractor from Quincy, Massachusetts, whose low bid was \$611,918.<sup>21</sup> Shocked at the high figure, the construction supervisor and the architect speculated about possible collusion among bidders. The architect expressed the thought that many invited parties had stayed away because they had predetermined that it was Pasqualucci's turn, which, if true, would have explained the inflated cost. Projecting an aura of wisdom, the construction supervisor disagreed but worried that the Church's committee on expenditures might still reject the bid. In any case, I signed an agreement, pledging to provide a start-

ing fund of \$94,292, and to pay off the remaining 15 percent within two years of the start of construction. I had originally been told that the ward could have three years to pay its share but Church money had since become "tight."<sup>22</sup>

To my surprise a few months later, I received what purported to be a copy of that agreement with my signature typed in and a major discrepancy in the terms — that we would pay off the balance in eighteen months instead of twenty-four. The note at the bottom said, "Bishop's signature on file." I immediately called the division, disowned the document, and reasserted my intention to pay in the originally agreed two years.<sup>23</sup>

Early in the project the bishopric and ward building committee had rejected the concept of "donated labor." The construction crews had special expertise and to delay or jeopardize the job because of unskilled donated labor to enable church members to show devotion to the work ethic seemed unwise. I explained that rationale to the construction supervisor and he agreed, much to my surprise, claiming that the savings were miniscule and the headaches enormous.<sup>24</sup>

While I never regretted this decision, I had to explain it frequently to Mormons who had been taught from childhood that donated labor was a principle of the gospel. ("My father laid all the brick on the Ensign Ward chapel," "My uncle painted the entire interior of the Grandview Ward chapel," etc.) Only later did I realize that a bureaucracy would predictably shun donated labor because it would produce exceptions and additional contracts interfering with the assembly line.

Again we faced delay while the Building Division evaluated the expensive bid. The stake president agreed with me that the bid should be accepted because seeking additional contractors might only delay long enough to boost the price higher. Accordingly, he persuaded the committee on expenditures to approve the project; one of his arguments was that the Building Division should share the blame for the inflated price because they had caused many of the delays.<sup>25</sup>

The contractor began construction on 8 October 1979, with the promise that he would complete it in 300 days. Even though construction had already begun, a pre-construction conference was held October 26, with the Field Representative of the Church, Area Five, conducting. He announced that a job meeting would be regularly held each month with the contractor, subcontractors, architect, and bishop to chart progress and correct problems.<sup>26</sup> The job meeting was potentially the most useful tool of the bureaucratic process to keep the Hingham Ward informed. Unhappily, it was held sporadically or not at all and almost never with my consultation.

Fortunately, the contractor was very experienced in church construction, although not in Mormon buildings. He had built some elaborate Catholic structures (and had been rewarded by an audience with the Pope during his Boston visit), and he was interested in maintaining smooth relations with us too. The fact that one overzealous member of our congregation regularly visited the site with refreshments and church tracts for the workers seemed not to deter the crew. Work progressed quickly and evenly from the start until the magic finish date of 4 August 1980, 300 days.

At the bid opening, it was casually mentioned that our monthly bills would total \$4,000 per month once construction started. I argued that it was unrealistic to assume that a ward could make such high payments at monthly intervals; fund raising, after all, was unpredictable.<sup>27</sup>

To aid in our fund raising, we negotiated several six-month money market certificates, which offered very high interest on sums of money over \$10,000. When the starting fund became due, some of our money was tied up in these accounts. I explained this to the Building Division and they supported the efficacy of the action, assuring me that we could pay the remainder of the starting fund when the certificates reached maturity. However, the Financial Department on one floor and the Building Division on another failed to communicate. The Financial Department began sending financial statements with alarming regularity. I explained the procedure to them as well and even offered to withdraw the money before maturity if they insisted, but they preferred that I leave it in the account. Still the bills kept coming, as well as urgent notes saying, "We need to see some money! You were short to begin with!"<sup>28</sup>

As certificates matured, we completed the starting fund, and the bills began appearing less frequently, minus the notes of warning. Almost as if in answer to the bureaucracy's problems with our ward, the Church announced late in 1980 that its savings accounts would compete in interest with that offered by commercial banks. I soon surmised that the Church, much like a business, determined to send monthly bills, whether or not payment was forthcoming. It was the psychology of the bureaucracy at work. The construction supervisor admitted when I signed the agreement that it was virtually impossible to equate it with other contractual agreements, because a bishop might be released soon after affixing his signature.<sup>29</sup>

Perhaps the biggest surprise was the plethora of phone calls announcing delivery of major items of furniture for the new building. Since the building remained unfinished, none of the items could be stored there. One day I received a call from a freighter informing me of the imminent delivery of several thousand pounds of tables and chairs for the cultural hall. They could not be stored on trays under the stage until the hall was completed. Yet they were to be delivered, and it was left to me to plan how to unload them and where to put them. The driver did not assist and he would not estimate a time of arrival, except to say between 2 and 5 p.m. The only alternative was to refuse delivery.

I complained to the Building Division, but the construction supervisor only chuckled. He conceded that they had purposely ordered the furniture far ahead to make sure that delays would not prevent their delivery by the time of completion. His rejoinder to me was, "Just be thankful, bishop, that it isn't a piano!" A few days later, two pianos arrived. We scheduled crews of church members to unload them on three different days only to have the delivery truck fail to arrive on each occasion. On the fourth day, they finally arrived. We had the smallest crew of all — and a drenching rainstorm. We were plagued with numerous other freighters saying they would either deliver the same day or the following day. All deliveries came well before the completion of the

building. The never-ending pressure to arrange impromptu work parties and temporary storehouses seemed a clear example of bureaucracy out of control.

Among the many items delivered were two couches and four overstuffed chairs for the foyer. When we opened the packages, we found that every piece of furniture was seriously damaged in shipment, with holes, rips, and scuff marks. In one sense, I was relieved, because I hated the color and style, even though I had selected it myself from a chart sent by the Furnishings Department. These items had been purchased at a cost of \$1,266.50 and then shipped from Salt Lake City to Boston with a shipping cost of \$272.66, when they could have been purchased locally with much less chance of damage.<sup>30</sup>

Verification of damage was made after extensive correspondence and numerous telephone conversations from trucker to Furnishings Department to Traffic Department. Then I had a sudden inspiration. I proposed to the Traffic Department that we offer the furniture for sale at our annual ward auction, at a reduced rate for partial recovery. They accepted my proposal and we garnered \$265.00 for the lot, approximately 20 percent of its value.<sup>31</sup>

In the meantime, the Church recovered \$513.05 from the trucking firm and reimbursed us in the amount of \$196.75, which, coupled with the money we received at the auction, represented our share of the merchandise. We were authorized by the Traffic Department to purchase additional couches and chairs locally at a cost not to exceed the original price.<sup>32</sup> In spite of the inconvenience and time lag, we considered this decision a major victory over the arbitrary procedures and taste of the bureaucracy.

The sound system was installed by a Salt Lake City-based company which sent its representatives to Massachusetts several times at considerable expense. During the initial installation, I received a call from a technician who was frustrated because United Parcel Service had failed to deliver a crucial piece of equipment. He was anxious to finish the work on time to catch a plane home and asked me to drive twenty-five miles to Boston to pick up the equipment from another firm. Although he was unfamiliar with Boston, his request was clearly prompted by the delay such a trip would cost him if he went himself. In an effort to salvage the sound system, I went, and he made a small contribution to the building fund on behalf of his company.<sup>33</sup> Moral of the story: if the local representative of a Boston firm had installed the system, he would have done so without these pressures, resulting in superior quality, not to mention considerable convenience and service to the local unit of the Church.

A long-range problem in the finished building was the sophisticated new alarm system whose buzzer blew at the slightest provocation. By the time the manufacturer finally determined how to quiet it, the members had become numbed to its possibly disastrous message. The most shocking discovery was that the system, even with its extensive control board, had not been connected to the city's system. If there were a fire or other danger in the electrical or mechanical systems, the city of Hingham would not receive an automatic call. Clearly, the expensive system was virtually worthless.

The architectural coordinator maintained that the Church actually preferred no connection. "If something goes wrong, we just want to get the



people out. That's all that matters." <sup>34</sup> After the sacrifice required to construct the building and with the building empty for several hours each day, this bureaucratic decision seemed out of touch with the people it was serving. The Church would not pay for such a connection. I asked the electrician to investigate the cost of furnishing a fire alarm master box and making the connection to the city. When I discovered that the cost would be \$1,786, paid completely by our ward, I lost interest. <sup>35</sup>

The tendency of bureaucratic procedures is to exclude those served by the bureaucracy from decision making. <sup>36</sup> Thus, all procedures become standard and human needs become less important. Because of persistence, we won a few important battles with the bureaucracy, but the cost in economic terms was staggering. Unnecessary delays imposed by bureaucratic procedures helped to balloon the cost of the building, affecting every tithe payer in the Church. Battling the bureaucracy was arduous, time-consuming, and frustrating, yet necessary to protect human needs. Although the people of Hingham, Massachusetts, were willing to sacrifice materially for this building, they were unfairly inconvenienced. When a battle was lost, I felt that quality workmanship often went with it.

It is unlikely that the bureaucracy will be dismantled soon, but some modest measures should be taken. Some of the departments in that twenty-eight-story edifice should be dispersed throughout the world where people could bring personal interest and knowledge to the work of construction. New approaches and new materials conforming to the needs of local areas should be used and the cookie cutter abandoned. A detailed evaluation of the actual advantages and costs of the standard plan is long overdue. Local people should be appointed, local services employed, and local purchases made, increasing the likelihood that a project will be completed within a reasonable time.

The bureaucratic elements of the Church, at least from my experience with its Building Department, suggest a misplaced pride and a mistaken definition of progress. Ironically the bureaucratic emphasis means that the Church has kept itself from enjoying some of the advantages of growth. Those advantages will become apparent only when it reaches out to the hinterlands and leaves parochialism behind. A church that long ago gave up gathering to Zion should be willing to tailor its buildings to the needs of real people scattered throughout the world.

#### NOTES

1. Tony Kimball, "How to Try Without Really Succeeding," 26 Nov. 1978, typescript, pp. 3-4. Kimball is especially concerned about the adverse affects of a bureaucracy on missionary work, temple work, and home teaching.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

3. "Highlights of the Mormon Church Building Program," information sheet distributed to potential bidders at Pre-Bid Conference by Construction Supervisor. Sheet prepared by the Church Building Division.

4. My personal notes of meeting with the membership of the Hingham Ward, 379 Gardner Street, Hingham, Massachusetts, 15 Jan. 1978.

5. Arza Welch, project development coordinator, Building Division, eleventh floor, Church Office Building, 50 East North Temple St., Salt Lake City, Utah, to Lythgoe, 22 March 1978.

6. Joseph Wright, architectural coordinator, area five, Building Division, to Lythgoe, 13 April 1979.

7. John S. Sloan, acting secretary, committee on expenditures of LDS Church, Financial Department, to Brent W. Lambert, President, Providence, Rhode Island, Stake, 11 Sept. 1979. Copy to bishop.

8. Local Share Payment Request, 31 Dec. 1980, Financial Department, signed by Christine Taylor.

9. Arza Welch to Coletti Brothers Architectural Firm, 10 Industrial Park Road, Hingham, Massachusetts, 7 June 1978.

10. At one point, I became so exasperated that I suggested to the architectural coordinator that the local architect, George Haight be allowed to travel to Salt Lake City when the plans were completed. Hopefully, he and the architectural department could come to a meeting of the minds which would speed up the work. Although the division would agree only to pay the cost of his plane fare, not food or lodging, we arranged for him to go on 6 July 1979. (Haight to Joseph Wright, 7 May 1979; Haight to Wright, 18 June 1979.)

Although the review went surprisingly smoothly, there was a six weeks delay until the bid opening. Only one specified person from Salt Lake, the area construction supervisor, could conduct the bid opening, and he was unable to come until August 29. (Bid Opening, 29 Aug. 1979, Hingham Ward Chapel).

11. Kimball, "How to Try," p. 5.

12. Conference Memorandum, prepared by George Haight, architect, Coletti Brothers, 13 Dec. 1978.

13. Telephone conversation with Joseph Wright, 17 Jan. 1979, also the date of the conversations on the women's shower and flooring proposals.

14. *Ibid.*, 2 Feb. 1979.

15. Personal conversation with Wright in Salt Lake City, 16 March 1979.

16. Lythgoe to Wright, 9 June 1979.

17. Wright to Lythgoe, 6 July 1979.

18. Lythgoe to Wright, 16 July 1979; 9 Aug. 1979.

19. Bid-Opening, Hingham, Massachusetts Chapel, 29 Aug. 1979. Robert L. Eardley, construction supervisor, area five, conducted the meeting.

20. Haight to Eardley, listing the contractors, 25 July 1979; Barry Coletti, Coletti Brothers, announcing the Pre-Bid Conference, to contractors, 1 Aug. 1979.

21. Minutes of Bid Opening, 29 Aug. 1979. Other bids were \$612,504 by Delfour, Inc., Hingham, Massachusetts; and \$635,000 by James Welch and Company, Salem, Massachusetts.

22. *Ibid.*, Agreement, project #500-2214, form 0278, signed by bishop and construction supervisor.

23. Telephone conversation with Eardley, Nov. 1979.

24. Eardley's instructions, Bid Opening.

25. Sloan, Committee on Expenditures, to Lambert, 11 Sept. 1979.

26. Pre-Construction Conference Memorandum, 26 Oct. 1979, Hingham Chapel; prepared by Haight.

27. Bid Opening.

28. Local Share Payment Request, 11 March 1980, from Financial Department, signed by Doug Rossborough. Another payment request (17 Dec. 1980) included a note that seemed to be in code: "Please make Semi-Haices you have 050-9175. Stk sugs 4837.61 Can we use it?" We requested an interpretation on 4 Jan. 1981 but received no reply.

29. Bid Opening.

30. Claim for loss or damage, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Traffic Department, Salt Lake City, Utah, submitted to Consolidated Freightways, 2325 South 3200 West, Salt Lake City, Utah, 21 May 1980. Total claim: \$1,539.16. Furniture itemized plus freight charges listed. Furniture manufactured by Imperial Upholstering Co., 1739 Industrial Rd., Salt Lake City. Signed by J. Wesley McNight, traffic analyst.

31. John Geigle, Traffic Department, to Lythgoe, 5 Aug. 1980.

32. Richard McGurk, traffic manager, Traffic Department, to Lythgoe, 1 Sept. 1980.

33. Sound installer was Russel A. Cahoon, representing General Communications, Inc., 612 East 3900 South, Salt Lake City, Utah. Installation date was July 3, 1980.

34. Joseph Wright as quoted by George Haight, based on his personal meeting with the Architectural Department in Salt Lake City.

35. Edward T. Clark, president, E. T. Clark Electrical Contractors, Whitman, Massachusetts, to Lythgoe, 29 Aug. 1980.

36. Kimball, "How to Try" p. 16.