Sociology 200

April 18, 2007

Social Groups and Organizations

Agenda

- Small and large groups
  - Subgroups
  - Structures
  - Tonnies' concepts of Gemeinshaft and Gesellshaft
- Bureaucracy
  - Weber's model
  - Reality
  - Iron Law of Oligarchy

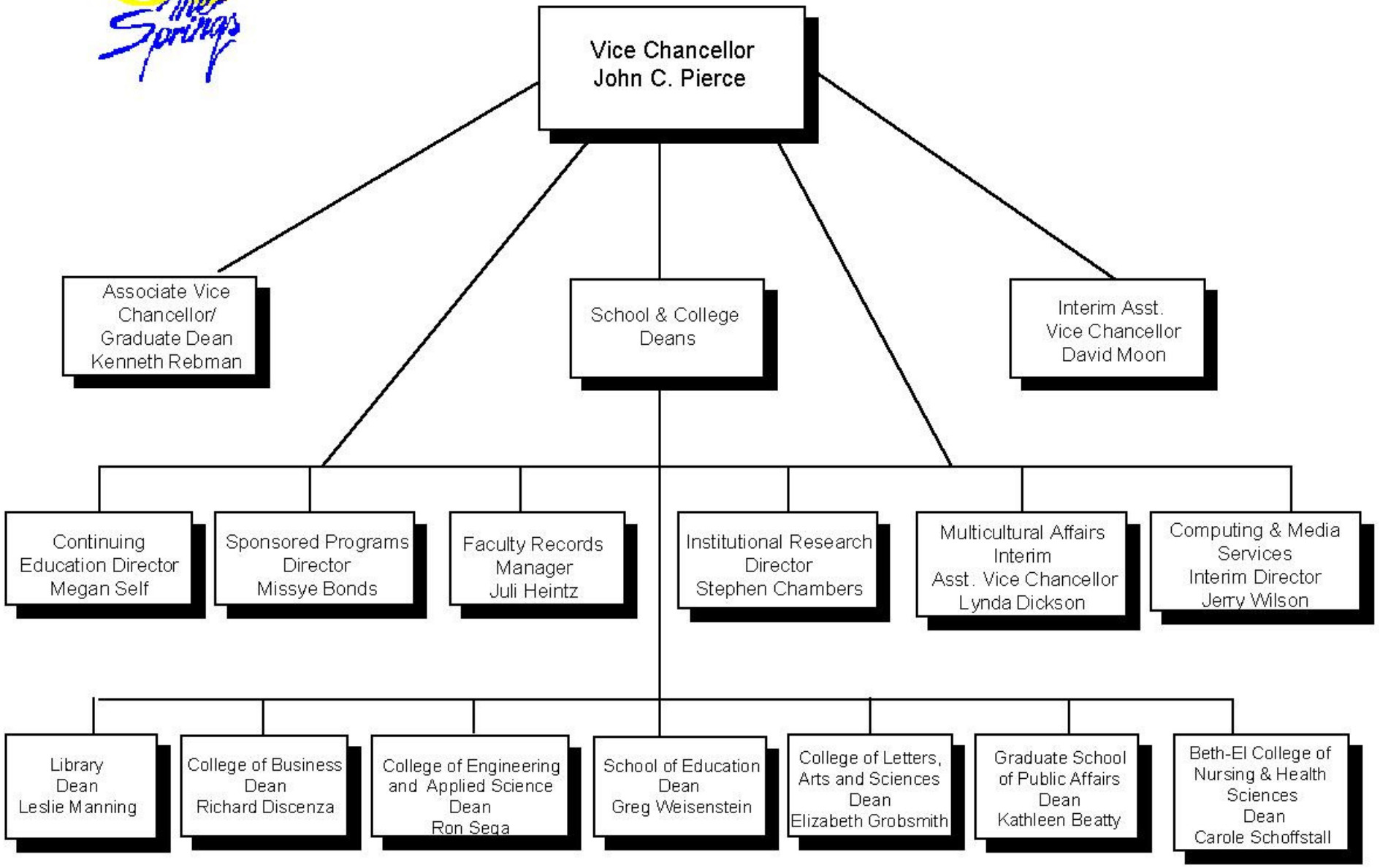
Small and large groups

- **Small groups** *actually meet together and contain few enough members that all members know one another*
  - Smallest groups are two people and are referred to as a **dyad**, e.g. pilot and co-pilot, engaged couple
  - Adding a person to create a **triad** changes dynamics, the person can create uncertainty: two against one alliances; but if one will shift alliance to the alienated, it can create more stability

- As groups grow larger, they may lead to formation of subgroups – splinter groups within the larger group
  - Example conversations breakdown with 5 to 7 members, so conversation breaks into subgroups informally, or it can be done formally
  - Small groups then tend to be less stable because addition of new members because of the potential of resistance to socialization to the group, undermining its traditions and values

- Large groups also exist
  - *Groups that were purposefully created special-interest groups that have clearly defined goals and ways of doing things* are referred to as **associations**.
    - Goals may be broad or narrow
    - Associations include organizations including government departments and agencies, schools and colleges, fraternal and service groups, hospitals and clinics, and clubs for gardening, antique collectors, etc. (fan clubs, too)
  - Formal structure
    - Needed to accomplish the work of the association
    - Has planned, highly institutionalized and clearly defined statuses and role relationships

ACADEMIC AFFAIRS



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- Informal structure
  - Not all interactions fit within the normal structures
  - Sometimes the informal structures (meeting at the water cooler and finding out about goings on in other departments) get information out faster and better than formal meetings/structures
  - Eventually relationships are formed and the informal networks become institutionalized
  - Informal networks are important in situations such as job hunting where the best sources of connections are “weak ties” (because the weak ties don’t know as much about you so they are more willing to accept you in a new position, rather than in the known job type)

Gemeinschaft and Gesellshaft

- From the work of Ferdinand Tonnies (1865-1936)
- Concept applied to rural vs urban societies by planners and urban sociologists
- Gemeinschaft
  - Community, considering small villages
  - Relationships are intimate, cooperative and personal
    - Exchange of goods based on barter, people look out for the well-being of the whole
    - Example: Amish get together to build new barn if one burns for a community member

- Gesellschaft (society)
  - Relationships are impersonal, and independent
    - goods are bought and sold, people look out for own interests, formal contracts govern economic exchange
    - These relationships are thought to occur more in cities where people don't know each other as well
    - More secondary groups (hospitals for heath care for example, as opposed to family home care) provide services
    - Provides more options, choices (jobs, spouses, places to live, etc.) so is seen as freer

- Durkheim expanded upon this idea with the idea of **collective conscience** (*system of fundamental beliefs and values)* and **social solidarity** (*which emerges from the people's commitment and conformity to the society' collective conscience)*
  - **Mechanically integrated society**
    - **Collective conscience is strong and the is a great commitment to the collective conscience**
    - **Society has common goals and values and deep involvement with the community**
    - **Example: Tasaday**
  - **Organically integrated society**
    - **Depends on the cooperation of individuals in many different positions who perform specialized tasks**
    - **Society survives only if all tasks performed, and social relations are more formal and functionally determined than are the close personal relationships of the mechanically integrated**

Bureaucracy

- Robert Merton (1969)
  - "a formal, rationally organized social structure with clearly defined patterns of activity in which, ideally, every series of actions is functionally related to the purposes of the organization."

Weber's model

- This is an **ideal type** (simplified, exaggerated model of reality used to illustrate a concept)
- This model:
  - Clear cut division of labor
  - Hierarchical delegation of power and responsibility
  - Rules and regulations
  - Impartiality
  - Employment based on technical qualifications
  - Distinction between public and private sphere

- Reality: not all the rules get adhered to
  - Rules are not impartially applied
  - Employment is based on multiple factors, not just technical qualifications
  - BUT there is a hierarchy with a more or less pyramidal structure for most bureaucracies
    - Limited numbers of management do the planning, organizing, hiring and firing while greater numbers of workers make smaller decisions limited to carrying out work assignments

Iron Law of Oligarchy

- Oligarchy – when an organization becomes dominated by a small self-serving group of people who achieved responsibility and power
- **Iron Law of Oligarchy** says that *bureaucracies inevitably leads to oligarchy (*Michels 1911) – in other words power corrupts [or democracy and bureaucracy don't mix]
- To avoid oligarchy rank and file must remain active and leaders not granted absolute control of the centralized administration