

# Critically evaluate weber's understanding of bureaucracy essay sample

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If recently asked what had been the most important event along with the industrial revolution during 18th and 19th centuries, people in the west should immediately replied; that is the emergence of bureaucracy of which Marx Weber had been known as the father. However, after the existence of his concept on bureaucracy and its central role in bringing a great impact on the way people lived and were organized; people started asking whether Weber's ideas continue to form the basis for organization and are still descriptive of all cases. From hence, an intense dispute around his model called " rational system" theory was tremendously raised by considering famous studies of sociologists following the opposite system known as " natural" or human relation school. This essay will therefore critically evaluate Weber's Understanding of Bureaucracy through the aspect of Weber's ideal types that reflect the structures of bureaucracy, the growth of bureaucracy or bureaucratization, and the effects of bureaucracy on individual and end with an application of Vietnamese bureaucracy.

What Singapore Institute of Management, University of London, Mc Donald and General Hospital Services have in common. Through an exploration on most general features to them, and by theorizing about the conditions for their efficiency, Weber's answer to that question would have been simple: they are all bureaucracies. According to Weber, bureaucracy is characterized by division of labor in which, bureaucratic organization is divided into different parts such as departments, sections, and positions; by hierarchy of authority where the higher the position, the higher authority it holds, and the chain of authority descends to the bottom; by written rules and regulations, impersonality expertise, and full-time salaried officers. These are Ideal Type,

Weber used to measure whether an organization is bureaucratic or not. Many sociologists accepted his definition of bureaucracy and Ideal Type since they could not criticize him if organizations are not bureaucratic, only for missing certain essential criteria out.

However, it is argued that in organizations informal structures may also exist and often more important than formal structure followed by Weber's ideal type. An organization built upon an informal or flat structure could be a place in which a particular group of employees or supervisor is partly influential, and therefore possess more control, is advocated, and characterized as more equal than upon a formal structure.

On the other hand, Weber also claimed that the closer an organization approximated to his model, efficiency of bureaucratic administration that accounted for its general expansion. In other words, Weber believed that the defining characteristics of bureaucracy were also necessary conditions for administrative or organizational efficiency; in effect that his definitional model served as a normative model as well. This perspective of Weber had caused many controversial debates from many theorists, especially, who support for the Human Relations School, a natural system approach that redirects the study of organization to the human dimension of organization and the informal practice within the organization. Theorists following Human Relations School believed that Weber's rationality built by rules, hierarchy, impersonality, that stipulated in his ideal type is product of interaction of members. It is in fact a social construction. Therefore, bureaucracy is not a rigid, or unchanging as reflected in Weber's typology. These perspectives

were supported by studies on the efficiency gained by informal and flat structure from Peter Blau & Alvin Gouldner.

In fact, the two studies of Blau's – an American Federal Law Enforcement Agency (FBI) and an American Employment Agency showed that informal consultations were practice as officials were reluctant to discuss problems with their superiors which might reveal their incompetence. This was a direct violation of the official rules. Both studies showed that officials who cooperated with each other informally achieved higher success rates than those who followed the rules. Officers play their role as individuals.

In addition, Gouldner criticized that Weber's ideal type said little about why organizations differed in degree of bureaucracy. Gouldner's study of Patterns of Industrial Bureaucracy and examination on the machine production of wallboard in the plant's factory led him to conclude that ' bureaucratic organization was more fully developed on the surface than in the mine'.

Many theorists accepted these studies and continued to debate the efficiency gained from Weber's Ideal Type on which bureaucratic organization built. However, Weber believed that ' once fully established, bureaucracy is among the social structures which are hardest to destroy' and used " The March of Dime" organization in the U. S. to support his idea. In that example, Weber argued that bureaucracy was developed based on a goal, whenever this goal was completed; new goal ensured that the organization would exist forever. However, Marxist criticism came by arguing

that goal is not important, it was changed because of the survival of the top and bureaucracy.

One of the most important aspects that were mostly used to criticize weber's ideal type is the aspect of inhumanity affected on individuals by bureaucracy. Zigmund Bauman's *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1989) shows that "we live in a type of society that made the Holocaust possible". The study was about Hitler's mass extermination of over 20 million people – 6 million Jews, Gypsies gays, 'impure races' etc throughout WWII. It involved the systematic huge scale of extermination of large number of people through bureaucratic means. People were 'round up', trains took them to the death camps, and there they were stripped, numbered, herded, and led finally to the gas chambers. People could do that because they were distant links to work chain, following the abstract rules that most jobs now dictate. They become dehumanized and moral standards become irrelevant to the success of the technical operation. These operations are supposedly built upon the principle of rationality.

Vietnam has made fresh commitments to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on easing money transfer regulations; however, residents have yet to benefit due to bureaucracy. The world monetary organization understands the complex issues surrounding Vietnam's foreign exchange ordinance, and has officially announced that the country operates in line with IMF regulations. Accordingly, the country is committed to reduce limits on payments and money transfers for individual international transactions. The move toward global integration in banking is good news for many in Vietnam

who need to buy or transfer foreign currency overseas to fund studies or medical treatment. Under the new ordinance, local people no longer have to seek permission from the State Bank of Vietnam or the central bank to enact transfers. However, local banks, without the necessary guidelines to implement the new ordinance, still refuse to sell foreign currency to clients until they have permission from the central bank. In other words, Vietnamese residents have yet to gain any benefit because of bureaucracy. Consequently, people go to the black market to buy foreign currency to send abroad, even though they have to accept higher exchange rates.