

# Good example of essay on bureaucracy and its associated problems

[Business](#), [Organization](#)



Bureaucracy is a term often used as a detracting slogan and label for all public administration or any formal organization. It can be used to refer to modern organization, either public or private, according to the rationalized principles of modernity. This may include business and industrial corporations, as well as public service agencies. The term became an analytical concept through sociologist Max Weber, and sociologists or organizational design experts often use the bureaucracy to refer to an organizational form. Moreover, bureaucracy can refer to a group of workers such as civil service employees of the government of the United States (Olsen 2; Johnston 11). The terms bureaucrat, bureaucratic, and bureaucracy have become synonymous to or implicative of general criticism of the bureaucracy's persons, institutions, or procedures (Von Mises 1). This paper will explore on the problems associated with bureaucracy.

Bureaucracy as an organizational form has six basic principles, according to Johnston. First is a formal hierarchical structure that is the basis of centralized planning and decision making. The second principle is that rules are central to management, so that decisions made at higher levels in the hierarchy would be consistently executed by lower levels. Third is that organization is based on functional specialty--that is, people are organized into units according to the type of work they do or the skills they have. Fourth is the designation of mission as either " up-focused" or " in-focused," depending on what purpose the organizations serves. Fifth is that everything is impersonal in order to be impartial. And the last principle is that employment is based on technical qualifications (Johnston 12-13).

The organizational scheme of bureaucracy, as explained above, seems to be

the most common way of organizing any endeavor. This could be attributed to the benefits promised by the bureaucratic form. Here we examine the possible advantages of each principle mentioned beforehand. First, the establishment of hierarchical authority promises that control and responsibility issues are clear. This is so people would know who to hold responsible for certain issues. Second, management by rules promises both control and consistency. Third, the mission of an organization makes it clear what purpose it is designed to serve and that this purpose is indeed served. For example, an up-focused mission promises that a governmental agency would serve the legislative or executive body that formed it. In corporations, an up-focused mission would promise to serve the stockholders, as represented by its board of directors. Fourth, specialization of units promised expertise, control and accountability. Designating a task to someone adept or skilled in that field ensures that the task will be well-handled. Fifth, being impersonal promises objectivity, equality and consistency. Fairness is promised to be observed when everyone is treated equally. Lastly, technical qualifications as a basis for employment promises equal opportunity and substantial job security for qualified applicants (Johnston 14-16).

The problems currently encountered in bureaucracy lies in the fact that it evolved in a different era wherein its advantages would have been desirable to fix problems that are very different from those we have today. Prior to industrialization of most societies, hierarchy was often based on wealth, power or influence. The promises of bureaucracy such as consistency and fairness made it popular as an organizational structure. However,

bureaucracy became a term rife with negative connotations.

First, the rigidity of the bureaucratic system inhibits creativity. The rigid rules and regulation of bureaucracy discourages personal input while also restricting growth (Swanson). This means that creative or out-of-the-box solutions to various problems are not appreciated or even accommodated. This inhibition of personal growth and expression of creativity might lead to “dehumanization” of a person in a bureaucracy, in a sense that the person functions robotically. Von Mises paints an apt picture of how bureaucracy might lead to the death of a young man’s “soul” (94). He tells the story of a young man (particularly from the U. S) who knows well what is in store for him about his future. That future would be to get a “mechanical” job in one of the bureaus in the U. S. where he will be a cog in his employer’s massive machine. The routine (hence the “mechanical” adjective for the job) of the bureaucracy will ripple his mind and would tie his hands. The young man will enjoy this security, but Von Mises likens this security to the kind which convicts enjoy within their prison walls. Von Mises then goes on to say that the young man will never be free to make his own decisions or to shape his own fate. He ends with a picture of the young man shuddering at the sight of the gigantic office buildings in which the young man will bury himself (Von Mises 94). The set of rules and regulations, instead of facilitating ease of process, also sometimes becomes a hindrance to speed or efficiency. This often leads to people referring to bureaucratic rules as “red tape,” to express frustration at rules for being time-consuming, redundant, or unnecessary (Johnston 17).

Another problem is that the control promised by the bureaucratic model is

limited (Johnston 21). For example, as CEO of a company, you may exert control by stopping certain projects but it would be hard to do positive actions, due to the rigidity of the system itself. Also, the promised responsibility and accountability are often subverted with ease. A member of a bureaucratic group may elect to not do anything or take no risks. In doing so they can say that they cannot be held accountable for any problems while also shirking responsibilities. By promising that accountability can be clearly put on someone, people actually avoid responsibility to avoid being penalized (Johnston 22).

The promises of equality are not necessarily delivered and often lead to customer dissatisfaction (Johnston 22). Equal opportunity for employment is not always observed, as the hiring body still has the final decision whether an applicant will be hired or not. For example, people from minorities might still face discrimination despite being sufficiently qualified (sometimes even overqualified) for a position. Customer dissatisfaction despite “equal” treatment is largely observed. Personal circumstances vary greatly but the rules dictate that all people must be treated the same way. While people might not mind being treated equally, all people want to be equally satisfied instead. And for all people to be satisfied, treatment must vary and account for personal circumstances. For example, some employees might prefer more flexible work hours as opposed to fixed work hours from 8am to 4 pm or from 9am to 5pm. To use medicine as a metaphor, dosage is important for the success of a treatment. People sick with a certain illness are not given the same amount of a certain drug because people respond to treatment differently. Moreover, if a person is unresponsive to one treatment, they may

elect to try another treatment offered by the physician. In the bureaucratic world, customers feel like they have to either take it or leave it.

Lastly, another common problem with bureaucracy is that it limits the capabilities of its employees. Compartmentalization and specialization of bureaucratic units could be advantageous in certain cases but often limits personal growth of employees (Swanson). In completely bureaucratic workplaces, employees cannot do work outside their delegated tasks, which could also lead to decreased motivation. This specialization of units confines overall productivity of the organization because of all the wasted potential. This could also lead to inefficient cost allocation because it would cost less to have one employee to do more tasks outside of his unit than to employ another person to do just one specialized job.

With all of its shortcomings, bureaucracy seems to be an inefficient form of organization, yet it is still used in many societies all over the world. Some advocate that bureaucracy should be abolished and that market systems should be used instead. Others recognize the problems it has and seek to fix these problems to improve upon the efficacy of the system. In fact, in the United States, the Clinton administration sought to restructure the federal bureaucracy so that it “works better and costs less” (Johnson and Libecap 1). Other presidents have also voiced misgivings about their ability to direct or manage the bureaucracy in the implementation of policies. Former president Nixon stated that he felt the bureaucracy was subverting some of his programs. Also, former president Reagan repeatedly stated that big government not the solution but was indeed the problem (Johnson and Libecap 1). While the bureaucracy might be a flawed system, many

organizations have achieved success by changing one or more of its underlying principles (Johnston 31). Thus the bureaucratic form might be varied to achieve better success as an organization.

In summary, bureaucracy is negatively associated with people dissatisfaction and has seemingly more problems than advantages. The most common criticism is that it alienates its people and in a way "dehumanizes" them through its rigid and unaccommodating rules and regulations. These problems probably come from the fact that bureaucracy was conceptualized for an era that has very different circumstances than the modern world. Modifying the structure of bureaucracy to address modern needs would be one way of improving the system.

## **Works Cited**

- Johnson, R. N. and G. D. Libecap. "Chapter 1: The Problem of Bureaucracy." The Federal Civil Service System and the Problem of Bureaucracy. USA: University of Chicago Press, 1994. Print.
- Johnston K. Busting Bureaucracy: How to Conquer your Organization's Worst Enemy. Chicago, IL: R. R. Donnelley & Sons Company, 1993. Print.
- Olsen, J. P. "Maybe It Is Time to Rediscover Bureaucracy." Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory 16 (2005): 1-24. Print.
- Swanson, M. "Five Problems with Bureaucracy." WallStreetWindow. Web. 12 Oct. 2014.
- Von Mises, L. Bureaucracy. USA: Yale University Press, 1944. Print.