

# Political theories of max weber and ralph hummel



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

When the words bureaucracy and government are mentioned in the same sentence, there is often a sour connotation that lingers. People have always complained about bureaucracy and its influence in governmental affairs that mainly serve the interest of the few and not the many. Mixing the business model with the government model has many implications that can lead to questionable programs and misdirected spending that has no clear goal - but a "bridge to nowhere". Then there is the reoccurring theme of corruption that has been played out so many times that it is now considered a given. The perception is that government is beset by gridlock, incompetence, and corruption; and that government is being run by businesses and the wealthy. In recent years, the public has become fed up with lapses in the bureaucratic structure that it has become more important to raise ethical questions. This paper will examine the political theories of Max Weber and Ralph Hummel as it pertains to bureaucracy, as well as the social and economic strain bureaucracy places on the individual and society. We will also explore corruption and the proposed mechanisms that would guard against ethical lapses and further transparency.

The basic concept of bureaucracy was developed by Max Weber. Weber's collection of key texts is found in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, these papers were written at a pivotal period in Weber's intellectual career when he was recovering from an illness after being away from the academic world for about four years. Before he became ill, Weber had conducted technical researches in economic history, economics, and jurisprudence. In part, these derived from the "historical school" of economics which stressed the need to examine economic life within the context of the historical

development of culture as a whole, and Weber remained passionate to this point of view (Jacoby, 1973). Weber is widely considered to be the first to see bureaucracy as the major problem of industrial society. He saw bureaucracy as an inevitable force in society and government but decried the fact that the participants of bureaucracy are maximizing their own interest rather than the public's interest. Weber believed that a politician ought to marry the ethic of ultimate ends and the ethic of responsibility, and must possess passion for public duty. In addition, he believed that to better serve the public, a politician should distance oneself from corruption because "only he has the calling for politics who is sure that he will not crumble when the world from his point of view is too stupid or base for what he wants to offer. Only he who in the face of all this can say In spite of all! has the calling for politics" (Weber, 1948).

Max Weber regarded himself as a "Political Economist" and believed that a command economy is doomed for failure, as history has demonstrated in the demise of the U. S. S. R. Instead, he believed in a market economy where each individual has the available resources, opportunities, and life's chances to maximize one's own quality of life - as long as it does not make another individual worse off (Weber, 1948). Weber made many contributions to the social sciences that can be applied to economics. One of his notable theories is the "Weberian Stratification" which separates class, status, and party as three distinct elements: class is based on economically determined relationship to the market; status is based on non-economic qualities like honor, prestige, and religion; lastly, party refers to affiliations in the political domain (Jacoby, 1973). Weber believed "the fate of our times is

characterized by rationalization and intellectualization and, above all, by the disenchantment of the world,” and that each individual should be allowed to make rational choices. The equilibrium of these rational choices can be imbalanced when bureaucracy puts a “ hands-on” approach in controlling or manipulating the minds of the public – doing so would cause individuals to make irrational choices.

Ralph Hummel is famous for his work *The Bureaucratic Experience: The Post-Modern Challenge*, which represents the idea that the academic and the practitioner live in different realms. In this book, Hummel accepts the challenge of a group of practitioners that he, the academician, should become practical and participate in the real-world bureaucratic experience. Hummel sees bureaucracy and public administration as two separate worlds of society because both worlds relate differently. In bureaucracy, the individual is demarcated to actions that permits for profit-maximization and that fall within the scope of jurisdiction (Hummel, 2007). On the other hand, public administration should be primarily concerned with delivering a public good to society on an equal basis – people are put first before profits (Hummel, 2007). As a result, the bureaucrat ignores behavior and signals that would have meaning in a different context but which have no meaning in the bureaucratic world because greed creates its own rules.

Hummel is very much a Weberian observer of bureaucracy, and he approaches bureaucracy in terms of its peculiar psychology and specific behaviors that separate it from society. He raises the question of ‘ How can a bureaucrat do his or her job and divorce bureaucratic behavior from personal needs and behaviors?’ Personal needs are often the reason why a client

approaches a bureaucratic organization, therefore, personal needs exist on both sides of the equation. Weber developed a conception of the norms of bureaucratic life that contrast with the traditional values of normal social life, indicating that bureaucratic life is to be seen as different, separate, and even counter to normal life (Weber, 1948). In this view, the bureaucratic life is not only antagonistic to the academic life but to “ normal” life at all levels. There is simply a different way of viewing the world in the bureaucratic experience.

Hummel states that bureaucracy deals with human beings as cases rather than human beings who are in need for social and economic services stating that “[W]hat is a case? A case is never a real person” (Hummel, 2007). If the case meets the rules and laws of bureaucracy then the case can be served. However, if the case does not meet the eligibility then the case can be neglected even if it is worthy to be served from a human discretionary point of view. Hummel announces that there is a conflict between society and bureaucracy and “ all attempts to humanize relationships between a bureaucracy and society must therefore considered as suicidal or window-dressing when they come from within bureaucracy itself, and as declaration of war when they originate in society” (Hummel, 2007). In other words, bureaucracy is blind, deaf, and dumb.

Lastly, corruption can be viewed as the bloodstream of the bureaucratic structure because the bureaucrat sees oneself as existing in a separate sphere, one with its own rules. Those whom are not in this sphere often view corruption as violating social norms, but the bureaucrat is convinced that this is not so. In Diana Henriques’ book *The Machinery of Greed: Public Authority Abuse and What do Do About it*, she notes the reasons for the

prevalence of corruption of government officials with specific reference to public authorities and bureaucratic projects. First, Henriques states that many public authorities are not governed by their state or local sunshine laws so that public scrutiny is relatively lax. Second, few public authorities are audited by their parent government but instead the parent government relies on corporate-style audits by private accounting firms that are selected by and reporting to the public authority. Third, public authorities usually operate outside the laws and regulations governing most private-sector corporations doing business in the United States. Fourth, these institutions are also not fettered by the major constraint on the private sector, the need to make a profit (Henriques, 1986).

In conclusion, bureaucracy will always be an inevitable force in the governmental structure. However, it is the ability of harnessing this force and ensuring that it has operational constraints, that it doesn't bend the rules. The betterment of the individual spirit and society should be put first before any special interest. Max Weber and Ralph Hummel have both introduced intelligent theories that distinguish bureaucracy and the individual, and their respective tradeoffs. A model of bureaucratic responsibility will have to incorporate societal norms within the bureaucratic structure to a much greater degree than is now the case. Sunshine laws help in this regard by opening the proceedings of bureaucrats to public scrutiny. In essence, what is needed is a change in the way the bureaucracy views itself, in the degree to which the bureaucracy sees itself as separate from the rest of society and as constituting its own norms. That sort of attitude in the bureaucratic system leads members to see themselves as subject to

specific rules set for their agency or department rather than as part of the whole of society, subject to the same ethical and legal constraints as everyone else.