

The ideas of the classical theorists, particularly

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The ideas of the classical theorists, particularly those of bureaucracy and scientific management, are generally considered as rather old fashion and out of date, and of little relevance to work and organization today. Is this really the case? The classical theory is the earliest form of management that perceived that a set of universal principles would apply to all the organizations in all situations to achieve efficiency and organization's goals. Scientific management and bureaucratic theory were one of the several components of the classical school of organization.

Important pioneers among them are Frederick Taylor and Max Weber. The classical theories have been contested of little relevance to work and organization today simply because today's organizations have moved from industrial revolution to the information age due to the fast-paced change in technology (Toffler, 1984). Although bureaucracy has been synonymous to red tape and has negative effects such as "rigidity, alienation and low commitment" (Adler, 1999, p. 7) and dehumanizing people (Grey, 2009), the characteristics of bureaucracy such as specialization, hierarchy of authority, system of rules and impersonality (Stewart, 1986) as well as evidence of ongoing existence of this management method, bureaucracy is proved to remain noteworthy. This essay will examine the situation presented in organization today, and determine whether bureaucracy and scientific management can be considered as old fashioned, out of date and of little relevance to work and organization today.

With the broad set of powerful economic, social and technological changes – greater competition, globalization of production, rising demand for innovation, new forms of information technology and wide change in

customer preferences have concluded that the days of stable structures of bureaucratic models are over. According to Warren, he concluded that there was no longer the stable business environment which bureaucracy exists, resulting in the rigid and formal rules of bureaucracy to be obsolete (Knights and Willmott, 2006). Like dinosaurs, mechanistic organizations are doomed and the days of post-bureaucracies have arrived” (Du Gay, 2005). With an increasing growth in knowledge-intensive sectors, for example consultancy companies, law and accounting firms, advertising agencies, research-and-development and IT companies, the need for flexibility and capacities for creative action has become more important than narrow efficiency (Karreman, Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2002).

These knowledge-intensive firms are performing tasks that are more complex than before, making it more challenging to convert them into standardized work procedures and regulations, which make bureaucracy model become less relevant to work today. Supported by Mr Paul, who was the Vice-Chairman of Wipro from 1999 to 2000, “ IT service companies need a fundamental redesign. The bureaucracy is killing customer satisfaction” (Narasimhan, 2011). At the same time, it suggests employees demand for more flexibility and autonomy, rather than simply following orders and rules.

However, studies show that knowledge-intensive companies are becoming more bureaucratic in their operations. In the case of Beta Consulting Company, “ authority is seen practiced through hierarchy, work methodology is standardized and work procedures are fine-tuned towards predictability of outputs” (Karreman, Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2002). Since the 1970s, there is also an alleged shift from “ industrial” to “ post industrial” era, from

mass production of standard products to short products for the niche markets.

For example, the Apple iPhone demonstrates a shorter production run such as a new version of the iPhone is released every year (Smith, 2011). Post-bureaucracy is proposed as a new organizational model which is more appropriate to today's business environment in a sense that it is based on trust, empowerment, personal treatment and shared responsibility. A flatter and organic structure of post-bureaucracy is fundamental to allow employees to be more creative and capable of adapting themselves to the variety of new problems faced in today's competitive environment.

There is also a reduction in the level of hierarchy to allow employees to take greater responsibility, which in return increases job satisfaction (du Gay, 2005). On the contrary, greater responsibility can actually cause greater stress for employees, as they now no longer have the same level of protection that bureaucracies can provide. Nevertheless, the idea-type of post-bureaucracy also imposes problems such as loss of control, risk and unfairness (Knights and Willmott, 2006). The claims of the death of bureaucracy and the emergence of Post-Bureaucracy are further debated.

Evidence of bureaucracy model is shown in George Ritzer's McDonaldization. Ritzer defines McDonaldization as, "the process by which the principles of the fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as of the rest of the world" (Ritzer, 2009, p. 4). The fast-food industry is the paradigm of McDonaldization and reflects on the instrumental rationality that Weber identified. In this case, the success of McDonald's restaurants has been noticeable up till today and is because it

offers consumers, workers and managers “ efficiency, calculability, predictability and control” (Ritzer, 2009, p. 6). It provides convenience for the customer in today’s fast-paced environment and customers are ensured similar taste, quantity and quality to whichever restaurant they go. McDonald’s has also shown great evidence of the continuing use of Taylorism techniques for measuring, timing and evaluating work. One of the main aspects of scientific management that McDonald’s have implemented into their business is the Fordist management style where everyone works according to an assembly line. Fordism has been called “ Taylorism plus the assembly line” (Rosenberg, 1969).

During the days of Ford Motors, Henry Ford implemented the fordist model in the car-manufacturing firm, and McDonald’s have distinctly adapted this idea into their corporate culture. For example, the company has designed all of its food chain branches in such a style that employees do not have to take more than two steps to complete their task. Further evidence suggesting that Taylor’s ideas have been implemented would be for example, the importance of creating the best worker for the job, through the division of tasks and specialization among workers.

The method in which McDonald’s for example, create their hamburger is a form of deskilling and division of task, by simplification of a task; first grilling the burger, putting in other ingredients, adding sauce, placing them onto bread roll and then wrapping it up. From this, a break down of job task and having each individual to do specific steps improves efficiency. Other aspects such as cooking times, drinks dispensers and french fries machines

are used to limit the time needed to complete a task, hence showing aspects of scientific management (Jozzo1000, 2007).

Without this management style, McDonald's probably would not be in such dominant and efficient position in the market. However, the McDonaldization system has been heavily criticized. Despite the effect of Taylor's scientific management on the workplace has increased productivity while replacing skilled craftsman with unskilled workers, it reduces workers to automatons. Individuals equipped with advanced skills are limited to highly simplified tasks and hence restricting them from living up to their human potential. It also assumes workers are satisfied by money alone.

Frederick Herzberg's two-factor theory has successfully supported this view. Herzberg developed a theory that contradicted Taylor's ideas as he developed "job enrichment". Herzberg stated that there are two factors that could motivate an individual, Hygiene and Motivator. Hygiene factors once fulfilled will remove job dissatisfaction but will not motivate. In order to motivate, the motivation factors must be fulfilled. This goes against Taylor's ideas of workers are motivated primarily by salary as Herzberg's analysis proved that money is not a motivating factor (Brooks, 2009).

More criticisms such as in McDonald's, tasks are repetitive and boring and hence employees are not motivated to do their job enthusiastically. Under those circumstances, it ignores the social and psychological needs of the employees, which in fact exert powerful influences workers behaviours. However, comments drawn from employees working experiences in McDonalds stated otherwise. A crew member, Michaela said, "Doing work experience at McDonald's made a big difference to how I approached things

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outside of work as well. Working on the till I learnt to make eye contact with people and speak clearly and with confidence; invaluable skills. And it can be further argued that employees do feel motivated working at McDonald's. "Working at McDonald's changed my outlook and made me a more motivated person", said Umair, a crew trainer (McDonald's Corporation, 2011). The McDonaldized system is not only seen within the fast-food industry, but also fast growing in call centres, an indication of the relevant bureaucracy model which is also known as "customer-oriented bureaucracy" (Du Gay, 2005, p. 98). One of the features of call centres is the focus on the standardization of the service encounter.

A script is provided for call handlers to follow when talking on the phones. Supervisors regularly check on call centre staff, listen in on calls to monitor the accuracy and general performance of the call handlers which managers are in fact keeping them under control. Taylor's idea of payment method have also been successfully implemented such as call centre staffs are given a basic wage and then commission for every sale and if they meet their daily or weekly targets, they are given additional bonuses (Health; Safety Executive, 2003).

The technology offered today had in fact gradually made organizations become more bureaucratic and rationalized. For instance, Amazon had significantly shown to be a highly structured and highly rationalized organization in today's competitive world. According to Valdez, "every item is scanned and logged on computers at every stage – knows who touches what" (Barkham, 2011). Staff working in the warehouse is in point of fact

being controlled by the technology used today, which aid to the control of managers over workers.

Furthermore, the warehouse processes are simplified to prevent any human error. In short, aspects of scientific management are seen in its day-to-day warehouse operations with the aid of technology. According to Weber, bureaucracy is the most rational form of management. Despite the advantages bureaucracy offers such as efficiency and predictability, beneath the rational system lays the irrationality of rationality. People are dehumanized as they are being treated as machine like “cogs in a well-oiled machine” (Kast and Rosenzweig, 1979).

In addition, “Instead of remaining efficient, bureaucracies can become increasingly inefficient” (Ritzer, 2009, p. 29). For example the case of IKEA, in terms of efficiency, it offers one-stop furniture shopping with a wide range of products. Furniture sold is unassembled, and customers are required to reassemble the parts themselves when they get home. Yet there are a variety of irrationalities associated with the rationality of IKEA, most notably the poor quality of most of its products. Although furniture is supposedly easy to assemble, many are more likely to think of it as impossible-to-assemble” (Ritzer, 2009). Besides the issue about irrationality of rational system, the “iron cage” of rationality is drawn into further concern. Weber views bureaucracy as a cage, in a sense that people are trapped in them without their basic humanity. The fear for that bureaucracy would grow more and more rational and will dominate an increasing number of sectors of society which “society would eventually become nothing more than a

seamless web of rationalized structures; there would be no escape” (Ritzer, 2009, p. 30).

A good example will be a 30 days Europe package tour. Bus travels through only the major cities in Europe, allowing tourists to view and take pictures of sights in the time allowed and then hop on to the next city. With the rationalization of even their recreational activities, people are in fact seen to be living in the iron cage of rationality, treating themselves like machines (Ritzer, 2009). Lastly, it is argued that bureaucracy ignores the substantive rationality and do not care about ethics and moral, they are about getting the task done as quickly as possible.

The Holocaust case illustrates a good example that the bureaucratic practice made the Holocaust instrumentally rational while, not being substantively rational. Almost everyone will agree that the Holocaust practice of the massacre of a race of people is irrational, yet the fact that instrumentally rational methods could be applied to it, it exhibits the moral blindness of bureaucracy (Knights and Willmott, 2006). However, Du Gay argued otherwise. Bureaucracy do embodies an important ethic that is fairness.

Such as bureaucracy does not care about employees' gender or culture background but only cares about the basis of experience and qualifications since this is what will be most efficient. It is said to safeguard against discrimination. Given these points, bureaucracy embodies rather than ignore the moral and ethics (Du Gay, 2005). Indeed, bureaucracy like any other styles of management, inherently has both negative and positive effects, however some major aspects of bureaucracy and scientific

management are still currently being successfully implemented in work and organizations today.

Especially to those characterized by large-scale size, routine tasks and to those performance of which is essentially and vitally relies on high degree of hierarchy and formalization of bureaucratic form. Furthermore, the advancement in technology aid in the aspects of using scientific management in organizations today. Good examples will the fast-food industry and manufacturing industry. Nevertheless, in today's highly competitive business industry, organizations need to increase their level of effectiveness through innovation and motivation of its employees at all levels.

In order to handle the growing market demand for constant innovation, a reduction of management structure might be necessary. Yet the core features of bureaucracy such as formalization, hierarchy, rules, staff expertise, conformance and clear accountability remain without doubt essential for organizations to deal with increasing competition. Therefore, to conclude, the classical school has withstood the test of time as it is still relevant to work and organization today. (2200 words) References Adler, Paul S. (1999) Building Better Bureaucracies. Academy of Management Executive, 13(4), pp. 6-49. Barkham, Patrick (2011) Amazon warehouse gears up for Christmas rush on Cyber Monday. The Guardian, [online] 1 December. Available at: ; <http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2011/dec/01/amazon-warehouse-christmas-cyber-monday/> print; [Accessed 10 December 2011]. Brooks, Ian (2009) Organisational Behaviour. 4th ed. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited. du Gay, Paul (2005)

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