

Bureaucratic management theory

[Business](#), [Management](#)



Bureaucracy is a type of organizational structure that is found in many large-scale public and private organizations. This still exists in the majority of industrial organizations in the world, despite being around since the 18th century. German sociologist, Max Weber created the bureaucratic management theory which describes bureaucracy as technically superior to all other forms of organizations. Bureaucracies have clear and explicit rules outlining exactly how employees should perform tasks.

Ideally, bureaucracy is characterized by hierarchical authority relations, defined spheres of competence subject to impersonal rules, recruitment by competence and fixed salaries. The main aims of bureaucracy are to be rational, efficient, and professional. Bureaucracy has an implied clear-cut division of labour and a high level of specialization, as well as a clearly defined hierarchy. Despite being a very old type of organizational structure, bureaucracies continue to be a highly influential template for designing and managing organizations; yet, this system is no longer considered the most effective way to run an organization.

Bureaucracy as a system of management has many advantages and disadvantages. The advantages include each employee of the organization knowing precisely what their duties are within the organization, and therefore performing their many tasks quicker and more efficiently. The clear-cut rules set by bureaucratic systems also enable the organization to respond readily to demands that are set and make decision making easy.

Bureaucratic systems have a greater sense of direction and purpose than other types of organization structure. The clear-cut criteria of a bureaucratic system enable the organization to appoint successors when an employee

leaves without little trouble, and therefore causes as little disruption. The disadvantages that a bureaucratic system brings to the overall running and efficiency of a business and its employees include undermining the ability of employees to take initiative and be creative.

The bureaucratic practices have led to creating a mind that generally lacks curiosity and can only function within certain limits and according to prescribed rules and regulations. The bureaucratic mind, being in control, uses this authority to limit the ability of the system to reform itself. No one within such a system has enough authority to initiate change and no one has enough courage to propose drastic change and disrupt the prevailing order and peace.

However, as Max Weber himself noted, real bureaucracy will be less optimal and effective than his ideal type model. Competences can be unclear and used contrary to the spirit of the law. This means that sometimes a decision itself may be considered more important than its effect. Nepotism, corruption, political infighting and other degenerations can counter the rule of impersonality and can create a recruitment and promotion system not based on meritocracy but rather on oligarchy.

Regarding the Japanese style of management, the recruitment procedures for new employees is more rigorous in Japan than in the United Kingdom to ensure that the 'cream of the crop' are identified, utilized and cultivated. People are not allowed to use common sense, as everything must be as is written by the law. Even a non-degenerated bureaucracy can be affected by common problems of overspecialization, which is, making individual officials not aware of larger consequences of their action.

There is rigidity and inertia of procedures, making decision-making slow or even impossible when facing some unusual case, and similarly delaying change, evolution and adaptation of old procedures to new circumstances. There is a phenomenon of group thinking in terms of zealotry, loyalty and lack of thinking regarding the organization which is perfect and always correct by definition, making the organization unable to change and realize its own mistakes and limitations.

There is a disregard for dissenting opinions, even when such views suit the available data better than the opinion of the majority. As bureaucracy creates more and more rules and procedures, their complexity rises and coordination diminishes, facilitating creation of contradictory and recursive rules, as described by the saying "the bureaucracy is expanding to meet the needs of the expanding bureaucracy". Despite the many disadvantages of bureaucracy, we believe that the degree of control it gives superiors over subordinates to be more serious and possibly the most damaging outcome.

For many people, the word 'Bureaucracy' conjures up an image of a mass of media workers buried in mounds of paper and tied to a set of petty rules, the notorious 'red tape'. Red tape can be used as a weapon against programs that are not popular with the administration, for instance, by participating in a program requires you to fill out forms. The program might cease to exist if no one uses it. Bureaucracies are often the focus of popular dislike, especially because they are perceived to be inefficient and lack flexibility to meet individual requirements.

Osborne and Gaebler (1993) promoted Debureaucratization, which they summed up as decentralization, deregulation, downsizing and outsourcing. Debureaucratization is the primary way to achieving the goal of a strong, autonomous, and self-sufficient barangays. This is setting to right the excessive centralization of power, authority, responsibility and recourse by the national government. The shortcomings of bureaucracy are evident in organizations today.

Control tends to convince superiors that it is their responsibility to know all details, allow no surprises, delegate no authority and have all situations under tight control. And since no boss can obtain the knowledge he or she needs to control everything and guide everyone and influence every situation, the dominance of the bureaucratic mind has become a threat, undermining critical thinking, free speech, creativity and institutional transformation.

The enlightened bureaucrat that certain people try to promote is nothing but a fiction. As a consequence, very few people in a bureaucracy are in a position to think, take initiative and be creative. New ideas are therefore rarely and seldom encouraged. When control and subordination become the organizing principles of an organization, they undermine the organization's ability to respond to challenges, to anticipate the growing needs of its clients and to adapt in a time to the changing circumstances of its times.