

Political scientist kenneth j. meier

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Kenneth J. Meier is an American political economist, professor of Texas University. He is considered one of the leading figures in a new generation of political economists examining the nature of modern bureaucracy, the state and public administration. Kenneth J. Meier questions the role of state and democracy in modern world, examines the relations between political control, public administration and effective performance. The main works of Meier are “ Political Control versus Democratic Values” (co-author L. J. O’Toole), “ Applied statistics to Public Administration”, “ Bureaucracy and Organizational Performance: Causality Arguments about Public Schools” (co-authors J. L. Polinard, R. D. Wrinkle), etc. In his works Kenneth J. Meier employs a " governance approach" describing and examining bureaucracy management. He sees it as a component system. Firstly, bureaucracy can be conceptualized as a form of government which could be distinguished from other forms of control. Secondly, bureaucracy is seen as a system of administrative efficiency.

This approach sees bureaucracies as complex organizations with hierarchies which can be found in both the public and private sectors. A special attention is given to the political side of bureaucracy, specific government settings and their impact on regional and national environment. “ Only by knowing how the bureaucracy would act, independent of the efforts of would-be political controllers, can the idea of political control have real meaning” (Meier, O’Toole, 2006, 56).

Meier underlines that shared values and political control form a modern bureaucracy as a political institution (Meier, Bohte 2006). As they suggests,

this approach is concerned with the application of the methods and techniques of science to organizations and modern democracy. The aim of this approach is to allow government to cope with the increase in the number of tasks and the growth of the complexity of the system; to assist the local authorities to provide impartial and accountable administration.

As evidence of this, it is important to create a strong functional specialization able to react to changing political and economic environment. There are many times when predictability of actions that must be taken are essential to an organization, but too much conformity may result in a loss of initiative in non-standard situations. Meier examines the benefits of agency policy-making and the differences between state bureaucrats and federal programs (Krause, Meier 2006). The main function of flexibility and efficiency is to mobilize resources towards wider goals.

Crucial therefore to asserting control over bureaucratic administration and securing innovation in face of its conservative tendencies, is to ensure scope for the main principle in the political process. The emphasis on rights, duties, technical qualifications, and the rigid grading structures and standardized procedures are the main elements of modern bureaucracy. Meier underlines that “ an objective comparison of political versus bureaucratic influence on policy outcomes requires that both political and bureaucratic values be measured” (Meier, O’Toole 2005).

Meier states that flexibility and control strategy tend to perform better on financial criteria. Meier tries to find the best approach to modern public administration and examine the driven forces of ineffective resource

allocation. Its position of social power and privilege derives from the possession of scarce skills and educational qualifications, and from its authority position within organizational hierarchy. Meier supposes that modern bureaucracies should be seen as an integral part of intergovernmental networks. This serves to add to the complexity of our system of public administration.

According to Meier, politics is a world normally inhabited by politicians with the values that they bring to the process typified by uncertainty and indeterminacy, whereas administration is a world inhabited by the administrator typified by rationality, routine and stability. The reality is not as simple as that, and that in practice the two worlds are closely integrated and the possibility of distinguishing the ends which politicians want to reach from the means to achieve those ends is a remote one (Krause, Meier, 2006; Meier, O'Toole (2005).

The main organic characteristic of modern bureaucracy is that it meets the challenges of the new economy are; flexibility, empowered employees, and the absence of stiff work rules. A free-flowing organization is characteristically associated with change and is considered the excellent organization adapting to an unruly business environment (Meier et al 2000). During technology and administrative change, the main organic characteristic of the organization will significantly be affected. Administrative change could result downsizing which will eventually result in to the demoralization of the workforce.

Furthermore, technological changes such as the adaptation of automation system will contribute to main restructuring of all departments and probably mass layoffs. "Bureaucracy is an adaptation to poor performance, that when organizations recognize their failures, they often take actions that, at least in the short run, generate more bureaucracy" (Meier et al 2000, 593). Also, Meier underlines the role of change in public administration. Such circumstances will eventually affect the employee's commitment to work as well as their work ethics and values.

A number of these features combine to result in increased bureaucracy within organizations. Given the problems of measuring final outputs, most efficiency studies imply examining the relationship between inputs and intermediate outputs. The effectiveness elements are important because they seek to establish the extent to which a department has managed to meet its objectives (Krause, Meier, 2006). Meier's approach to understanding organizations reflected both his scientific background and the belief in science as the solution to society's problems.

Meier argues that minority teachers have a positive influence on academic achievements of students coming from different social settings. Within the former approach, the study of public administration has been underpinned by a concern with a number of approaches. Firstly, Meier points out, it has been approached through the study of public institutions such as the civil service and local government. The concern has been with how they are structured and what people do in these organizations. This method, known as the public administration approach, was dominated by respect for the role of administrative law.

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Secondly, the study of public sector organizations has focused on the structure of organizations, how people behave in them, what motivates employees in these organizations and so on (Meier et al 2000). Such bureaucratic organizations have been studied from the perspective of decision making. Consideration is given to how public policies are made and put into action. Gill and Meier (2001) state: “ the best agencies are less restricted by their environments than the average agency” (23). This approach examines how policy is influenced, how decisions came to be made, how they are put into effect and how they are reviewed.

The demand for uniformity of treatment and public accountability for their operations; and the tendency for more rigid personnel policies are the main feature of this model. Public administration should place a strong emphasis on scholarship, academic training and a liberal education. Change and democratic elements increase flexibility. A wide approach to participation could range from, on the one hand, little information being given to individuals and, where some suggestions are allowed, to decisions being decentralized and individuals participating in setting objectives and representation on the board.

Hierarchy and control from top to bottom is also the main weakness of the orthodox model. In changing economic environment, control of behavior of workers prevents workers to deliver service on time and react quickly to fast changes and increased competition: a strict hierarchy reduces the flow of ideas and information upwards; adherence to rules induces inflexibility; tenured positions of privilege fosters conservatism (Meier, Bohte, 2006;

Meier, Bohte, 2001). Also, Meier questions the role of government and federal authorities in drug and alcohol prohibition.

In the book 'The Politics of Sin' Meier underlines lack of governmental support and actions to stop drug abuse. Analyzing the problem he singles out two opposite forces: "citizen forces", industry-related forces, political forces and the impact of bureaucracy on drug prohibition. He comes to conclusion that American government fails to achieve the goals. He explains that state prohibition increases illegal activities and 'black market operations'. Also, the disproportionate arrest of drug users and lack of anti-drug campaigns worsen the problem. 'Policy implementation is the real policy" (Meier 2005, 247).

In the book 'The Politics of Fertility Control: Family Planning & Abortion Policies in the American States' Meier and McFarlane (2000) criticize the state policies in family planning and lack of governmental support in this sphere. Economic sphere is one of the preconditions of it: the high level of industrial and economic development of the states (however direct dependence between a level of economic development and democracy is not a proved matter), existence of the urbanized society, the advanced level of mass communication, formation of market economy.

Meier tries to answer questions concerning moral obligations of the state and federal agencies towards the nations and every citizen. Meier and McFarlane develop an alternative approach aimed to meet changing social conditions and moral values. In general Meier questions whether a modern administrative model is appropriate to all organizations and bureaucratic

relations, industrial as well as governmental, or to all environments, stable as well as rapidly changing; or whether a single concept of efficiency can embrace the very different purposes of modern world order.

In the sphere of administrative or organizational theory a central question has been whether the characteristics the state identified as intrinsic to bureaucracy do in fact maximize administrative efficiency. Efficiency is crucial because it helps to establish administrative systems and networks of bureaucratic relations, and that these facilitate smooth running rather than obstruct it.