

Bureaucracy is not  
diminished through  
the modern world  
business essay



Modern organisations have continuously come to exert and diffuse through human life. Therefore, these organisations need to be flexible and contemporary in order to satisfy the needs of human being. However, some organisations are far behind flexibility and most of them tend to be bureaucratic in nature. If these modern organisations manage to achieve flexibility as one of their main preoccupation, the idea of bureaucracy to certain extent is not applicable. This journal will explain the bureaucracy concept and its limitations, if any, the primary objective of organisations whether to achieve flexibility or not and assess whether this theory is applicable or not.

## **Nature of modern organisations and their bureaucratic nature**

Probably, Max Weber's most prominent work of all time is his theory of bureaucracy. Modern administration and organisation in some degree are increasingly and inevitably - bureaucratic according to him. " This is true not only in the sphere of state, but in all domains of social life" (R. Brubaker, 1984, p20). Well, what is bureaucracy at first place? Bureaucracy means the rule of officials based on rational logic (Giddens, 1997, p286). The expansion of bureaucracy is inevitable in modern societies, therefore bureaucratic authority is the only way of fulfilling the administrative requirements of large - scale social systems. In fact, bureaucracy is not only a rational type of human organizations; it has the potential to provide the setting both for constructive human relationships and for individual creative expression and satisfaction (Jaques, 1976). There is an ideal type of bureaucracy as described by Weber (1978):

There is a clear cut hierarchy of authority in an organisation which means, power tends to be concentrated on top of the hierarchical structure. Each member has a clear view what exactly they have to do, and there is job specialisation within the organisations.

There is formalism - which the organisation has a formally articulated and differentiated structure and rules are set in order to manage and regulate the whole organisation.

There is separation between the tasks of an official within the organisations and the official's life outside.

No members own and have any access to material resources, in the other words; members do not own the means of production.

Modern bureaucracy is very effective in organizing and managing large number of people. It can be implemented through the process of continuity and consistency within the members of organisation. Moreover, there is career progression opportunities based on skills and credentials of individual and rewards are based on individual's performance. These skills and credentials are the primary factor of the social mobility within the organisation.

Universities, political parties, economic enterprises, government agencies, hospitals, armies, are all subject to the inexorable advance of bureaucratization. There is a hierarchical structure on every university for example. The power of Dean tends to be concentrated on top of this structure. As a matter a fact, there is specialisation of work in which every

member from the lecturers, students and even the staffs have their own role to play. Students cannot simply become a lecturer and a dean. It also consists of rules, groupings and sanctioned systems of procedures. Students for example, must oblige certain rules set by the university or else, actions will be taken against them. Furthermore, each member do not own the material resources for example, students do not own the lecture notes and books.

Not only universities, government organisations - hospitals for example are also bureaucratic in nature. Hospitals can be regarded as one of the most influential institution in human life. They are the one who deliver us in this world, mark our progress through it and see us out of it when we die.

Hospitals like universities have their own, unique structure of organisation. Hospitals are large and gigantic organisation which needs to be managed properly and carefully. Theory of bureaucracy was empirically tested by Hall (1968) in a study of 6 general hospitals in the Netherlands. A preliminary investigation of Hall's scales for the dimensions of bureaucracy revealed that there is a hierarchy of authority, division of labour, presence of rules, procedural specifications, impersonality, and personnel standards of technical competence (Jozef, 1982) which makes up the bureaucratic nature.

Just imagine, what if the world organisations are not run based on bureaucratic principles? - Chaos! People will not be rewarded or promoted based on their performance or skills. All the works done are worthless and the syndrome of nepotism tends to grow like a riot. Apart from that, most organisations will be lack of accountability and integrity as one of the world's greatest nemesis - bribery will be practiced among all members of

<https://assignbuster.com/bureaucracy-is-not-diminished-through-the-modern-world-business-essay/>

organisations. People will do whatever it takes to get a better job, pay or even working condition and bribery is one of them. In fact, people do not have clarity of their job or task on what they suppose to do and as a result of this, level of turnover and absenteeism tends to arise. This will bring negative impacts not only to the organisation itself, but to the economic growth as well. However these impacts are arguable by some of the sociologists who critique the work of Weber.

### **The limits of bureaucracy**

As far as how great bureaucracy is concerned, there are still limitations to it and its rationality. And the best solution to these limitations is by moving towards another type of organisations through flexibility process.

Bureaucracy sometimes regard as a tedious and ridiculous process by most sociologists (Trevor, 1983). There are too many paperwork or often described as red tape within organisations and therefore, a simple problem or issues can sometimes take ages to solve it. This is because, one need to follow certain procedures for example, complete a form, make a call and arrange a meeting. Not only that, overtly bureaucratic organisations can lead to internal failures of functioning due to rigidity, inflexibility and uninvolved nature (Giddens, 1997). In fact, there will be an iron cage phenomenon where workers are dehumanized, alienated and impersonated. This is because they do not have any access to the material resources and means of production. They cannot throw any ideas or suggestions to the higher authority and their opinions are usually neglected. Furthermore, bureaucracy does not encourage any extra initiative, innovation and creativity as certain people only specialised in certain type of tasks. As a result of this, numerous

organisations are overhauling themselves to become less, rather than more hierarchical and move towards a new approach of organisational design (Reed, 1992).

## **Organisations have to be somewhere**

Modern industrial societies demand a more contemporary and flexible approach of organising a company rather than traditional, rigid approach. These organisations are trying so hard to achieve flexibility and fulfil the needs of society and community. Flexibility here means there is room for advancement and improvement with a more fluid and mobile approach. Flexibility according to Atkinson (1984) can be divided into three types. The first one is the functional flexibility, where employees are assigned to different roles required by the market demand, not only one specific role as described by Weber. Second one is the numerical flexibility which is the use of flexible contracts to allow staff fluidity responding to market needs. The last one is the financial flexibility where resourcing systems are used to allow cash flow flexibility. These three features are essential for contemporary organisations in order to satisfy the needs of its employers and employees.

Organisations in modern society heavily depend on specialisation of knowledge and transmitting of information. Business corporations for example rely on these principles in order to compete with one another in a global marketplace (Brown, 1992). There is always need for every large corporations to achieve flexibility because of the positive implications for workers in that particular corporations. There will in - depth of job design and higher degree of specialisation can be learned by the workers. In fact, there will be clarity of goals, room for promotions and higher degree of

<https://assignbuster.com/bureaucracy-is-not-diminished-through-the-modern-world-business-essay/>

accountability. There is also a room for creativity and empowerment which one can unleash their own potential and ideas taking into account that higher authority will take serious consideration about them. There will be a massive improvement in communication and interaction patterns between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat - managers and lower class workers. Lower class' opinions and ideas are important to the company and managers maintain close relationship towards them.

Anthony Giddens and Lyotard come out with an idea of Japanese model - a perfect model on how to run a business in modern world. Japanese companies such as Toyota, Mitsubishi, Honda, Sony and Canon are rapidly growing and become some of the largest companies in the world with a short span of time. These companies diverge from the Weber's theory in several ways. For example, they practice bottom - up decision - making. They do not form any type of authority as Weber portrayed but, workers are consulted about policies and top management regularly meet with them. Secondly, there is less specialization of job but increasingly rotation and diversification of job. One person can actually acquire the skills of another and this can increase the productivity level of the company, thus minimizing social silos. Thirdly, there is job security which means that pay and responsibility are geared to seniority rather than competitive struggle for promotion. This will provide fairness and equity to the workers. Not only that, there is group oriented production rather than individual positions and this can challenge the iron law of oligarchy. By merging the work with private lives, management can provide for many of their employees' needs and in return is their loyalty to the firm. Based on this particular evidence, the theory of

bureaucracy is no longer applicable because as organisations stray away towards flexibility, they become more independent, successful and less conflict arise within the organisation.

## **Bureaucracy and flexibility need each other**

Giddens quote 'are networks involving a large amount of bottom - up decision making, the path to the future, taking people completely away from Weber's more pessimistic vision?' (Giddens, 1997, p301). Well, such view needs to be revised again. Bureaucratic system nowadays in fact, is more fluid and less hierarchical forms of organisation. Organisations still need stability, control, a strategic allocation of resource and accountability at all levels in order to survive. Answering the question rose above, organisations need to be somewhere according to Foucault, but at the same time big organisations today are nowhere. This is because; some corporations remain strongly bureaucratic and centred in certain country. So, there is a milestone way to achieve flexibility and therefore the idea of bureaucracy is still applicable to certain extent.

Most presumably the ideal type of organisation is when organisation managed to achieve flexibility and at the same time maintains some of the bureaucratic features. For example the 'Horizontal Organisation' and 'Virtual Network' which is introduced by Stewart and Rahul. In this model of organising, there is a bureaucratic role incorporated in specific value - adding process. For example, job rotation and specification. Workers need to master certain skill for certain period of time before moving to other types of work. There is reward on the basis of performance without competition within age groups. Everybody has equal chance to get promoted. In fact, this <https://assignbuster.com/bureaucracy-is-not-diminished-through-the-modern-world-business-essay/>



model focused on job requirements but at the same time focused the needs of the customers. Looking at this model, there is a mix and match between bureaucracies and beyond bureaucracy and both of them tends to compensate each other's limitations.

## **Conclusion**

Well, as mentioned earlier, it is wrong to say that bureaucracy is now diminished through the modern world. Bureaucracy is now more fluid and becoming more applicable to modern sciences. Looking back at contemporary organisations, their main preoccupation is not to achieve flexibility but to find an ideal and perfect way to run an organisation. Therefore, flexibility is not the best solution to it. Professionalization with the massive use of information technology maybe leading towards a general increase in the flexibility of organisations. The impact of these changes, however, at any rate has often been exaggerated. As conclusion, most organisations are nowhere near to flexibility and therefore the idea of bureaucracy is still applicable to certain extent. Only if flexibility is achieved, the ideas maybe rejected and to certain extent because if the idea is rejected completely, the organisations will not run completely and smoothly as they would have been because, somehow, they still need the bureaucratic features in the management and corporations.