

# [In that bureaucracy is based, not on](https://assignbuster.com/in-that-bureaucracy-is-based-not-on/)

In1966, Bennis pronounced the imminent death of the bureaucracy. Since then, criticshave continued to suggest that bureaucracy is inherently unethical, outdatedand irrelevant (DuGay 2000, p. 1). However, the fact that it has been the leading form oforganization for over a century (cite) suggests otherwise. This essaycritically analyses bureaucracy, considering how and why it has been so centralto organizational analysis for such a long time. Firstly, it considers Weber, rationalityand provides a critique of bureaucracy. Secondly, it assesses the strengths anddysfunctions of post-bureaucracy; considering whether it is an improvement onbureaucracy. Then finally, it analyses critical approaches to bureaucracy, inorder to analyse whether there is a realistic alternative….

Bureaucracyis a model of organizations that is founded on rules, hierarchy, impersonalityand division of labour (find a cite). It has an “ up-focussed” mission; thepurpose being to serve shareholders (Weber?). Weber (year) explains thatbureaucracy is based, not on ‘ charismatic’ or ‘ traditional’ leadership (theauthority of particular individuals or established institutions).

It is, instead, based on rational-legal authority; a set of rules that are developed for rational reasons. Weberdistinguished between instrumental and substantive rationality (CITE). Actions thatare instrumentally rational are in the pursuit ofspecific goals.

The action justifies and generates the outcome. Whereas actionsthat are substantively rational are themselves rational, regardless of the efficiency of the action itself. Forexample, \_\_\_. Weber explained that bureaucracy ischaracterized by a strong emphasis on instrumental rationality. Weber’s ‘ idealtype’ of bureaucracy refers to a highly efficient formof organization.

He suggested that bureaucracy was the most technically efficient and rational form of organization. As a result of its efficiency, bureaucracy also had the advantage of producingcheap outputs which could be easily calculated. From this perspective, it maybe argued that bureaucracy is not as bad as critics suggest. Bureaucraticorganizations are often described as ‘ machines’ (cite). They have distinct partsthat are designed to perform specific tasks, which work together as a unifiedwhole. This makes them predictable, standard and efficient (cite). However, by equatingthe organization to a machine, employees are reduced to ‘ cogs’ within thatmachine (cite). This causesthree problems.

Firstlyis the problem of motivation (cite). Employeesfollow rules and have little autonomy and discretion. As a result, employeesare unlikely to feel interested in, or motivated to perform their work. As such, the quality of their work is likely to suffer. Therefore, althoughbureaucracies appear to be efficient, they may result in the production ofinferior products. EXAMPLESecondly, bureaucracy is criticised for focussing not on the customer, but on theproducer (cite). Employees that follow lots of rules, and are poorly motivated areunlikely to care much about customer service but simply follow rules blindly.

Rules cannot be altered or broken to satisfy the needs of individual customers, no matter how important it may be to that customer. Employees who break therules could be punished. For example (NHS).

This producer-focus… this can also lead to a situation where no decision ismade until it is passed up to the competent ‘ authority’, which makes decisions unnecessarily long and complicated for the customer (cite). A muchgreater problem with the inflexibility of bureaucracy is its inability to facilitateinnovation and change (cite). If everybody carries out their work according tothe rules, nothing will change or progress. For some organizations, this is nota problem (E. g.) producing large quantities of standard products thespecification s of which do not vary for long periods of time, perhaps several years.

However, these circumstances do not apply to most organizations. In industries whereadaptation to market condition is vital for survival, ‘ bureaucratic inertia'(cite) will result in organizations stagnating and failing to compete efficiently. Merton(1940) introduced the idea of goal displacement. This occurs when a marginalobjective becomes the main focus and the primary objective becomes less important. Mertonsuggested that people in bureaucracies become so preoccupied with following therules that they lose focus of the goal those rules were in place to achieve. Theycare more about ‘ doing things right’ than ‘ doing the right things’, whichDrucker (year) explains may be efficient, but is not effective. It createsunnecessary ‘ red tape’ (cite).

For example, if\_\_\_\_. Goaldisplacement has been identified in divisionalised bureaucratic organizations. Selznick(1949) explained that employees identify more closely with the aims of their divisions than the aims of the organization. As a result, they focus on satisfying the needs of their team at the expense ofthe needs of the organization.

Thus, bureaucracyinadvertently becomes bad for the overall performance of the organization. However, Selznick’s criticism does not apply to every bureaucratic organization, soshould be considered with caution. Bureaucracy may be moreefficient than other ways of organizing, even if, in particular cases, it is less than optimal. Blau’s(1955) concept for ‘ work-to-rule’ is a form of industrial action.

He explainsthat in bureaucratic organizations, workers can disrupt the efficiency ofbureaucracy by strictly adhering to all rules in the workplace. He used theexample of a US law enforcement agency; explaining that it was better for theorganization if employees ignored rules such as not working unpaid overtime andreporting attempts of bribery. Finishing at the time stated in employmentcontracts and refusing to bend the rules creates inconveniences for theorganization. Hence, bureaucracy may not be the most efficient way oforganizing. But it does not follow that, left to themselves, they would have adopted the most efficient way of working. They may haveadopted an even less efficient approach than that enshrined in the rules. If so, a post-bureaucratic way of working would be less efficient at all times, notjust in times of industrial action.

It may also be argued that theproblem here is not to be with bureaucracy, but with unhappy employees. If theorganization could satisfy employees whilst still maintaining some elements ofbureaucracy, it may become an efficient, positive working environment. The conceptof a ‘ mock bureaucracy’ was first introduced by Gouldner (1954). He explainedthat in some bureaucratic organizations, in practice, rules are ignored. Forexample, managers and employees working in an office may decide to stopimplementing rules about the clothing that employees are expected to wear towork, and go to work in more casual clothes, if they deem suits to be inconvenient.

Thesecriticisms of bureaucracy have been around for a very long time. It has longbeen suggested that the stable business environmentwithin which bureaucracy made sense no longer exists, and that morecollaborative organizational relations rendered the rigid rules of bureaucracyobsolete. However, these claims have also long been criticised. Althoughbureaucracy is not ideal for all organizations, it can provide \*\*\*\* include?