

# An Overview of the Bureaucratic Theory

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## **ABSTRACT:**

A traditional management theory called bureaucratic theory is concerned with the design and operation of organisations, especially those that are vast and complex. Max Weber, a German sociologist, is credited with developing the idea, which places emphasis on the value of hierarchical authority, the division of labor, and standardized processes in attaining organizational success and efficiency. An overview of bureaucratic theory, its guiding principles, and its applicability to modern management techniques are given in this abstract. It also examines the drawbacks and limitations of the bureaucratic approach and emphasizes how management theories have evolved in response to the changing demands of organisations and the shifting dynamics of society. In general, bureaucratic theory continues to be a key idea in the study of organizational management and has an impact on managerial practices in a variety of settings.

## **KEYWORDS:**

Bureaucracy, Bureaucracy, Management, Organization, Social.

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

The early 20th century work of German sociologist Max Weber served as the foundation for the management idea known as bureaucratic theory. In order to create a methodical approach to organizational management, Weber tried to grasp the principles that govern the operation of complex organisations. The idea of bureaucracy emerged as a consequence, and it has since taken root as a fundamental management paradigm. Fundamentally, bureaucratic theory places a strong emphasis on creating a formal, logical organizational structure in order to attain efficiency and effectiveness. It promotes a hierarchical structure of authority, a distinct division of labor, uniform policies, and a merit-based system of decision-making. The main aim is to establish an organisations that functions predictably and methodically so that it can manage complicated activities and precisely accomplish its objectives[1], [2].

We shall examine the main tenets and elements of this management paradigm in this introduction to bureaucratic theory. We will examine the justification for the adoption of bureaucratic structures and procedures, as well as how they respond to the problems brought on by the expansion and complexity of organisations. We will also go through the benefits and drawbacks of bureaucratic theory as well as how it affects modern management techniques. Although it continues to have an impact, bureaucratic theory has come under fire for having the ability to lead to impersonal and inflexible organisational settings that may stifle human initiative, creativity, and flexibility. Modern management theories have therefore developed to supplement and modify bureaucratic concepts in order to better meet the changing demands of organisations in today's quick-paced and dynamic commercial environment[3], [4].

We may grasp bureaucratic theory's influence on the development of management practises and how it continues to influence how organisations are built and managed today by comprehending its fundamental ideas and historical background. This investigation will provide useful insights into the challenges of organisational management and the continuing search for the most efficient and adaptable strategies to succeed in a variety of challenging and competitive contexts. When bureaucratic theory was originally put out in the early 20th century, it marked a break from conventional management techniques that were characterised by informal decision-making and impromptu organisational

structures. The administration of increasingly complex organisations, including governmental organisations and huge enterprises, was the goal of Max Weber's notion of bureaucracy.

The idea of hierarchy is one of the core tenets of bureaucratic theory. In a bureaucratic organisation, power and decision-making are distributed across clearly defined levels, with each level in charge of certain duties and responsibilities. As a result of knowing their jobs and who they report to, people may be held accountable and develop a feeling of order thanks to this hierarchical framework. A further fundamental component of bureaucratic theory is the division of labour. Employees may concentrate on certain areas of competence by separating jobs into specialised roles, which results in enhanced efficiency and competency in their respective fields. Standardised policies and practises guarantee that activities are carried out consistently by making organisational processes more predictable and less ambiguous. The capacity of bureaucratic theory to preserve stability and continuity within organisations is one of its fundamental benefits. If policies and processes become institutionalised, they outlive specific people, ensuring that business operations remain uninterrupted even if staff members change over time [5], [6].

Though it has advantages, bureaucratic theory is not without flaws. When faced with unique and constantly changing conditions, rigorous adherence to rules and processes might cause a delayed decision-making process. Additionally, a focus on formal jobs and hierarchical structures may obstruct employee cooperation and open communication, thus inhibiting creativity and innovation. Modern management strategies have attempted to combine parts of bureaucracy with more adaptable and participative models in response to these disadvantages. By fusing stability with flexibility, this fusion strives to maintain organisations' efficiency while promoting a culture of ongoing development and employee empowerment.

By offering an organised and methodical method to deal with the difficulties of large-scale organisations, bureaucratic theory set the foundation for contemporary organisational administration. The organization's hierarchical, labor-dividend, and standardised process concepts have affected the construction and functioning of other institutions all over the world. Although the idea of bureaucracy is still useful and important in certain situations, the management environment of today asks for flexible and adaptable practises that combine the advantages of bureaucracy with more creative and people-centered strategies. The continual search for successful management principles will guarantee that the finest aspects of bureaucratic theory persist as organisations continue to change, even as new paradigms arise to suit the needs of a constantly shifting environment.

## II. DISCUSSION

A crucial tool for comprehending capitalist democracy is bureaucratic theory. Social life is today defined by the desire to behave effectively towards democratically set aims justified on the basis of scientific knowledge codified into rules and regulations, no longer constrained by the authority of monarchs, political leaders, or religious leaders. The appearance of bureaucracy "Without regard to person," or impersonal behaviour. But is it possible to balance a functional social life with the efficiency of bureaucracy? The discrepancies between goal-oriented logic and our desires for a kind and Just societies spark ongoing discussion. Talking about bureaucracies is simple since we all have personal experience with them and strong views. But analysing or theorising them is challenging. Some people interpret the word "bureaucratic" as mocking or demeaning commentary on our impotence in the face of institutionalised impersonality, which has the air of a dystopian, dehumanised society [7], [8].

Others see it as a strategy for effectively allocating limited resources in the achievement of challenging social and economic goals. The idea of bureaucracy is still a mystery to social scientists, regardless of whether they are experts in management and decision-making in the public or private sectors, in government, institutionalised religion, or elsewhere. Even if we rely on bureaucracies more than ever, we are still unaware of their essence. However, current events have made bureaucracy's advantages and disadvantages more apparent, despite the fact that many people believe Max Weber's analysis very well concluded the matter and left nothing further to be said. This essay will summarise the well-known aspects of bureaucratic theory and demonstrate that, despite the excellence of Weber's work, social

theories can never reveal an independent, objective social reality; they can only serve as tools to help us think about our own experiences and behaviours[9], [10].

## Fundamentals

Although bureaucracy is an old administrative technique, under Frederick the Great it came to dominate social and political life in 18th-century Prussia.

As Prussia's state institutions the army, national health, education, tax collecting, and so forth were rebuilt to eradicate nepotism and corruption and make effective use of "state-istics," facts acquired and analysed in the service of state efficiency, political and economic domination followed. Weber, a politically engaged historian, economist, and sociologist, examined the effects of placing bureaucracy in this prominent political position, and his work is still a shining example of what the social sciences can do. According to his summary, bureaucracy implements public or private policies based on knowledge, and is therefore characterised by the following six principles:

1. Personnel with the necessary technical skills must implement policies.
2. Holding positions that must be outlined by (a) learnable rules that provide officials specific decision-making, command, and control authority and (b) administrative and productive resources that remain the property of and fall within the jurisdiction of the office.
3. Which offices should be associated in a chain of command and via mutual contact
4. The official's decisions must be logical, impersonal, and supported by documentation and data that has been methodically obtained (statistics).
5. In the hope that the official's job will constitute a completely satisfying long-term career, pay will be made up of a regular wage and benefits that are decided by the official's career.
6. A mutual expectation that the official would be held accountable for carrying out his or her organizationally specified obligations in a "faithful and impartial" manner.

Therefore, bureaucratic theory is more than just a preference for scientifically grounded facts above human opinion. It examines the kind of social interaction that spread as rationalism gained popularity as a social and personal ideology during the neo-Enlightenment.

Economic connections primarily became rational and individualistic as a result of our conception of property and the ownership of it by people. Markets developed as long as these relationships were sanctioned by the law. However, throughout the rise of capitalism, new nonfeudal, nonreligious, and nonmarket interactions also emerged, particularly as a result of people's willingness to embrace "knowledge work" and the production-related authority of others. However, we do not anticipate that any actual government agency or business will be a "perfect" or "total" bureaucracy. Therefore, the usefulness of bureaucratic theorising may lie less in its efficiency-focused recommendations than in how it draws attention to what it does not reveal, such as the influence of rationalism on society or the personality of the employee. Bureaucratic theory is basically an effort to distinguish between aspects of human connections that can be rendered machinelike, predictable, and boring from those that cannot be thus handled but yet remain fascinating and relevant to the human work of forming social ties. Contrary to the claim that administration on the cheap

on the basis of scientific knowledge, we may use bureaucratic theory to investigate the effects of a society's, an organization's, or a person's "knowledge absences." Therefore, bureaucratic theory should not be seen as a task to strike a balance between effectiveness and efficiency, but rather as a remnant of our endeavour to influence the human condition via scientific investigation.

## Evolution

Many people reference Weber's claim that bureaucracy was "administration on the basis of knowledge," but this really obscures rather than explains. It is a common academic technique to define one unknown in terms of another since knowing is a notion that is far more problematic than people who are

referencing Weber's statement are willing to acknowledge. We assume that given our present sociological methodologies, knowledge has a cohesive truth value and is dependent on "scientific rationality" and carefully considered cause-and-effect relationships. This is a rather constrained definition of "knowledge." Weber was less constrained and argued for a variety of rationalities, each of which would serve as the foundation for a particular type of social knowledge. These rationalities included zweckrational, wertrational, affectual, and traditional, which are sometimes shortened to functional and substantive and can be translated as practical, theoretical, substantive, and formal. The notion behind Weber's "ideal types" came from his understanding of the discrepancy between the historical evidence of increasingly sophisticated forms of social reasoning and the theory that organisational connections are logically coherent. Weber was a historian who embraced a more complicated methodology, in contrast to others who claim that an ideal type is an example of social interactions that can be described as rationally decided. Without this methodology, his theory of bureaucracy cannot be fully understood.

The power of bureaucracy lies in how it enables us to bring the diverse rationalities and specialties of many role-holders to bear on the increasingly complex tasks we humans wish to engage in, such as sending a man to the moon, curing cancer, preventing the spread of nuclear weapons, and so forth. Its effectiveness comes from (a) the variety of information, both scientific and non-scientific, that may be connected to the aims selected and (b) the administrator's ability to combine these knowledges into coherent and controllable purposeful action. It is connected to the division of labour and knowledge, which are the defining traits of the modernist age. But we should also keep in mind Adam Smith's earlier justification for economic growth: role-holders' capacity to concentrate their imagination on a particular task and increase their productivity without being fully instructed by superiors. This is only possible when the superiors' rules are imprecise and underdetermining, leaving "space" for the worker's personal agency. Smith provided a theory of knowledge development based on agencies that was lacking from bureaucratic theory since it lacked a theory of learning and, thus, neither scientific nor economic progress.

Morality, as well as learning and progress, are beyond the purview of bureaucratic analysis. The contradictions between Weber's social rationalities wherein lie the subtle "knowledge absences" that real organisational administrators have to address might be the focus of those who analyse and criticise bureaucratic theory on its own terms rather than for its failure to give them a positivist and deterministic theory of administration. The difference between efficiency and effectiveness led Mannheim to claim that the flaw in bureaucratic theory was that functional rationality tended to drive or "crowd out" substantive rationality. To illustrate this with a simplification, "functional rationality" focuses on means, whereas "substantive rationality" focuses on ends. To put it another way, given the specialisations and divisions of labour inside a bureaucracy, the job occupiers' comprehension of why they were doing what they were doing was always constrained, and they would only have a partial grasp of the ultimate purpose. As a result, they would engage in counterproductive behaviour, seeking to complete the incorrect task flawlessly rather than the appropriate one even when it was incomplete, leading to what is known as "the perfect being the enemy of the good" behaviour. This behaviour is intriguing since it results from a lack of understanding. Real administrators must be able to integrate substantive and functional thinking. It is obvious that we should consider any genuine social relationship to be "mixed" or "synthesised" in the sense that any persuasive analysis must take into account Weber's various rationalities and that a "rigorous" one-dimensional explanation is neither possible nor desired. The goal of the historian is to shed light on social circumstances and our perception of what may have been or might have been. The Human actors who create or execute action in uncertain circumstances are never detachable Human conduct can never be completely "explained" by a logical or causal understanding of the circumstances around it. Giving a bureaucracy the status of an autonomous nonhuman entity, a thing-in-itself with its own identity, traits, and agency as is our modernist habit is thus a grave methodological mistake. According to Weber, the purpose of bureaucratic theorising was to investigate the effects of combining a growing scientific method with historically preexisting modalities of social order. He examined how capitalism has evolved historically, what transpired when the notion of



scientific rationality pulled economic concepts and goals into our political system, and even its dominance.

Weber's message is completely lost if one considers him an organisational theorist who advocated bureaucracy as the "one best way" of organising in a mechanical manner. Instead, his main concern was how the bureaucratic approach's strength and effectiveness would feed back into the complex multirationality of social life and transform or "disenchant" it, encouraging the amoral, ends-oriented philosophy that was widely believed to have contributed to the financial crisis of 2008. The method of setting the bureaucracy's aims is one crucial area in which Weber's understanding of bureaucratic theory was lacking. In the public domain, objectives are the results of our shared political process, and we assume that the bureaucratic agency is a neutral tool for carrying them out. The bureaucratic method reduces the degree to which individual human flaws bounded rationality and bias affect the agency's ability to achieve its collectively decided-upon goals. In the private domain, the business owner (or rather the board of directors) is given great latitude to choose the firm's goals, which are not required to be explained as logical or politically motivated.

The important information gap between a bureaucracy's goals and the method by which they are established is mirrored by a different knowledge gap between the application of its regulations. In the actual world, the rules of the bureaucracy are never adequate to meet the demands of the employee; they are never completely determined. Every circumstance has unforeseen difficulties since human understanding is limited. As a result, there is some latitude in how the rules are applied by the employee, and principal-agent problems never go away. Given that we acknowledge the legitimacy of the bureaucracy's objectives, our sense of powerlessness in the face of a bureaucratic process is more directed at the bureaucrat's refusal to use his or her discretion in our favour and find a "workaround" that enables us to achieve our aims. In order for a rule-based system to work, each person must contribute from their own agency; there has to be a "informal" that complements the "formal." As we wonder in this direction, we see that bureaucracy is essentially about social connections between boundedly rational humans. Those who mistakenly believe that it is a machine-like social organisation made up of perfectly rational relations have missed Weber's argument. In Smith's perspective, as opposed to Weber's, the agentic contribution of the individual operative is the crucial seed for the prosperity of the country and the company. The emphasis of Weber's study was on how an unthinking rationalism eventually undermines both the political goal-selection procedures and the human processes based on imagination that support economic progress.

Modernism and the historical effects of rationality on our politics, organisations, families, jobs, and personalities are the topics of bureaucratic theorising. As we become (a) more reliant on the social and economic efficiencies rationalism offers and (b) correspondingly subordinate to the goals and means we are forced to choose if we are to reach them, Weber's analysis is deeply double-edged in that it highlights the Faustian compact. As a political philosophy, a method of economic analysis, and a strategy for promoting social welfare, rationalism and rational choice liberalism are being criticised more and more often nowadays. However, bureaucratic theory is still incredibly effective, even if it is only used to highlight the actions that leaders, politicians, businesspeople, and employees must take in order to shape the goal-setting process and the ensuing agency of bureaucratic employees. Herbert Simon, a Nobel Prize laureate, contended that reason only functions after being given an appropriate set of inputs, or premises. If it is to be used for finding and selecting courses of action, those inputs must at the very least comprise a set of "shoulds," or goals to be attained, and a set of "it's," or realities of the environment in which the action is to be carried out.

### **Importance**

Weber compared "rational" bureaucratic administration with "irrational" administration based on familial ties, feudal systems, or religious authority. The growth of bureaucracy is merely one aspect of the historical trend towards modernity, which prioritises facts and the scientific mindset above "mere opinion," whether it be feudally or religiously justified. Modern capitalist society is characterised by increased rationalism. Knowing how Weber came to theorise rationality and bureaucracy is important

because his doctoral dissertation (completed in 1889) looked at the development of "private" commercial partnerships in the Middle Ages, a time when family-based administration was being supplemented by rational employment relations, which resulted in what are now known as principal-agent issues.

His arguments persuaded us that rationalism conscious rational decision-making or knowledge labour is the best method to describe human activity, and that this perspective is easily applicable to both the public and private realms. Even while this provided more information than just labelling employment as "labour," various flaws were apparent, which were eventually identified by researchers and critics as administrative issues or obstacles. The Vatican's reaction to allegations of child abuse, the Pentagon's early inability to equip Humvees in Iraq, or Euromismanagement from Brussels are all examples of the obvious "dysfunctions of bureaucracy." There is a political angle as well; many view state bureaucracies as "cancers on the body politic," an assault on individual freedom, and wholly un-American, with the growth of the U.S. government's share of GDP reaching its highest nonwar levels and approaching those of "socialist" European countries.

On the other side, it is assumed that government and commercial organisations need to improve operational efficiency. More regulation of the oil sector resulted from British Petroleum's inability to respond quickly to its Deep Horizon catastrophe. The Department of Homeland Security was created as a result of the Global War on Terror to reduce the structural "silo-ing" between agencies that possibly let the 9/11 attacks be carried out successfully. Similar challenges are faced by affluent countries when it comes to delivering and regulating health care, fostering efficiency in hospital, research, and insurance operations, and reining in wasteful impulses to overtest and overprescribe. We talk of bureaucratic governments and organisations or of bureaucratic activity, of bureaucrats as persons, and even of the bureaucratic personality, which calls attention to administrative practise at various levels.

But on a deeper level, bureaucracy is more about a mindset, a way of seeing human affairs through the prism of the deliberate pursuit of predetermined objectives. As the modernist aim has been questioned more, bureaucracy as a theory of politics, economics, corporate organisation, or work has come under closer examination. However, most of the discussion is riddled with red herrings that scholars should be aware to avoid. For example, failing to recognise the complexity of the connection between role and occupier and the dehumanising effects of being governed by impersonal facts as opposed to "real human beings"

Although the occupant of a bureaucratic post is no longer recognised as a whole human being and is instead strictly defined by the authorities and regulations defining the role, the employee is nonetheless safeguarded from the capricious and rule-defying authority of those in positions of power. Similar to this, a bureaucratic structure shields a policy from the arbitrary opinions, prejudices, and interpretations of those tasked with putting it into practise. Additionally, it establishes a comparatively objective framework for assessing their performance. For these reasons alone, a growing number of individuals and proportion of the global labour force work in settings that may be broadly categorised as bureaucratic.

We might attack bureaucracy by concentrating on its premises rather than just criticising it as cruel, robotic, or fundamentally defective. First of all, Weber's difference between power and authority which refers to the position occupant's choice acceptance of the role's rules presupposes an unquestioning "faithful" subjection of those carrying out the plan to the authority of those deciding its aims. According to Reinhard Bendix, bureaucracies rely on archaic psycho-political traits, such as the willingness of the populace to submit to authority, and they could not function without it. We only accept state bureaucracy as helpful agents of our political system because we also embrace that system. Our capitalist legal system grants entrepreneurs some kingly authority in the private sphere, but this power comes before rather than after the establishment of private enterprises.

Thus, to suggest that bureaucracies "dehumanise" is to ignore our obvious readiness to submit to components of the social and legal order outside of the organisation. within some "legitimate" bounds, we to others. Consequently, there are significant disparities between, for example, the bureaucratic

practises of China and Europe. Ronald Coase famously stated that the distinguishing feature of the Western enterprise as opposed to a market was workers' willingness to submit themselves to the powers of the entrepreneur, within certain bounds. Our armed forces, educational system, and church bureaucracy all obviously have very distinct societal foundations and very different "higher aims" that their personnel submit themselves to. The idea that a bureaucracy has a tendency to goal displacement to protect itself from change or elimination, to become more and more sclerotic over time, and other similar traits assumes that the bureaucracy has somehow separated from those who created it or are responsible for maintaining it.

Therefore, a technical question about bureaucracy, as opposed to philosophical criticism of it as a worldview or as a political comment on the growing influence of rationalism on social thought and action, is whether bureaucratic organisations can become autonomous and, like Frankenstein, come back to haunt those who thought of them as little more than tools to achieve their own goals. Other questions are raised by this one, most notably (a) how bureaucratic organisations are created and (b) how they grow to be accepted forms of social interaction. While Weber believed that bureaucracies developed as a result of the "routinization of the founders' charisma," nowadays, bureaucracy is seen as a socially acceptable method of formulating and carrying out agreed-upon social and economic policies. We believe there should be a reasonable assessment and selection of the most effective ways of attaining the goals as long as they are obvious and justified the "knowledge" articulated into the bureaucracy's division of labour and control mechanisms. Because our conceptions of performance and efficiency are linked to the logical assessment of goal-oriented activities, bureaucracy continues to be the preferred administrative system across the globe and hasn't been severely challenged by any other kind of administration.

### III. CONCLUSION

Organisational management and administration have been greatly influenced by bureaucratic theory. Through a systematic and logical approach, huge and complex organisations may attain efficiency, stability, and predictability, as shown by Max Weber's seminal work. The fundamental ideas of bureaucratic theory hierarchical power, the division of labour, standardised processes, and impersonal relationships have been extensively embraced and put into practise in a variety of industries, including businesses, nonprofits, and government institutions. Clear duties and responsibilities, as well as a defined chain of command, have been stressed, which has helped to create effective and structured organisational structures. The capacity of bureaucratic theory to provide consistency and stability in decision-making processes is one of its strengths. Bureaucracies decrease the possibility of arbitrary decision-making and favouritism by depending on established rules and processes, which might be present in more unstructured organisational structures.

However, throughout the years, bureaucratic theory has also come under fire. Critics contend that its strict adherence to rules and inflexible structure may impede creativity and innovation. Organisations may find it difficult to adapt to quickly changing surroundings as a result of the formalisation of roles and processes, which may result in a lack of flexibility. Additionally, bureaucratic systems may foster a feeling of alienation and disengagement among workers since impersonal interactions may weaken a person's sense of commitment to the organization's objectives. Modern management theories have attempted to incorporate aspects of bureaucracy with more adaptable and flexible methods in response to these concerns. The emergence of ideas like contingency theory, which promotes adapting organisational practises to the particular requirements and conditions of the scenario, brings attention to how management practises are still evolving. Bureaucratic theory has limits even if it is still a useful and prominent idea in organisational administration. When putting bureaucratic ideas into practise, organisations must carefully take into account their own settings and requirements. In today's dynamic and competitive contexts, organisations must strike a balance between efficiency and agility in order to succeed. Modern management techniques may continue to advance and build more successful and productive organisations by taking use of the positive aspects of bureaucratic theory while also being aware of its possible negative aspects.

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