Max Weber—**Bureaucracy**

"Max Weber called an ideally functioning bureaucracy the most efficient method of solving large-scale organizational tasks, but this ideal type can be approximated only where there is orderly administration under the rule of law."[1] "He saw the spread of such organizations as part of a movement toward legal and rational forms of authority and away from authority based on tradition or charisma."[2] According to Weber, three types of legitimate authority exist in forms of: legal, traditional, and charismatic. Legal authority is codified from a constitution, traditional authority is acknowledged from religious belief or divine-right monarchy, and charismatic incorporates a strong personal attractiveness that emerges during a period of crisis.

Weber identified the following characteristics of bureaucracy:

1. Fixed, official jurisdictional areas are established by rules. These rules distribute the regular activities required by the organization among these fixed positions or offices, prescribing official duties for each. The rules distribute and fix the authority to discharge the duties, and they also establish specified qualifications required for each office. Or in other words, a division of labor based on functional specialization.

2. There is a hierarchy of authority, involving supervision of lower offices by higher ones. This hierarchy is well-defined especially when establishing authority.

3. Management of the modern office is based upon written documentation, which are preserved in their original form. Records of past decisions are kept for reference to future ones.

4. Administrative positions in the bureaucracy usually require expert training and the full working capacity of the official. Since those in a bureaucracy are considered as professionals, selection and promotion are based on technical competence.

5. Management of the subunits follow relatively stable and exhaustive rules, and knowledge of these rules and procedures is the special expertise of the official. In other words, a system of rules covering the rights and duties of employment along with procedures for dealing with work situations are necessary. When a manager understands these rules, then further evidence for necessary technical competence exists.

6. The management position serves as a full-time vocation, or career for the official. Not only is competency necessary, but those in a bureaucracy should not mix official with unofficial business.

7. The personal position of the bureaucratic official enjoys a certain degree of social esteem as compared with those who are governed. This social esteem is based on salary and later a

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[1] Reinhard Bendix (1978). *Kings or People: Power and the Mandate to Rule*, 579.

[2] Hal G. Rainey (2009). *Understanding and Managing Public Organizations*, 29.

pension, "education certificates", and "consent (approval)" from those within the bureaucracy. The social esteem is lower for those in positions that do not demand a high degree of expert administration or dominance over "status conventions (leadership roles)."

Description of the bureaucratic theory can be found using terms such as order, competence, legitimacy, status, and hierarchy. The bureaucracy is not expected to be a problem solver, but is rather expected to perform a specific function or task. "Weber regarded this bureaucratic form of organization as having technical advantages compared with administrative systems in which the official regarded their service as an avocation, often gained by birthright or through the favor of a ruler; to be disagreed at the official's personal discretion."[3] By establishing a structured hierarchy with specific rules and procedures for efficiency created a limitation of the duties and authority for those with a high social esteem. The objective is to eliminate personal motives to perform tasks within the bureaucracy and instead function on notions of fairness and consistency. "With officials placed in positions on the basis of merit rather than birthright or political favoritism, constrained by rules defining their duties, and serving as career experts, bureaucracies represented the most efficient organizational form yet developed, from Weber's perspective."[4] However, bureaucracy does not exist without several weaknesses.

A significant weakness is the low capability for innovation. Bureaucracy is meant to consistently and repetitively perform a set of task(s), which may create a disunion with innovation. Perhaps this notion is reinforced because the strict hierarchical organization impedes individual freedom and input from lower levels. Further, the bureaucratic structure may suppress the spread of knowledge given the strict adherence compliance to task completion by certain steps. That is to so say, that a bureaucratic system may be intolerant to change and deviation.

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[3] ibid. 29

[4] ibid. 29.