

Bureaucracy

Max Weber

1. Characteristics of Bureaucracy

The specific functions of modern officials are expressed in the following:

- I. There exists the principle of official duties which are established through firm rules, which are generally ordered by laws or administrative holdings.
 1. There exists a distribution of activities to be followed for the purposes of the bureaucratic ruled object which constitute official duties.
 2. In order to give commands to discharge these official duties, rules are backed by physical, sacred, or otherwise compulsive means to ensure that commands are followed.
 3. For the regular and continuing fulfillment of official duties to occur, and that they are performed accordingly, persons with generally regulated qualifications are in place.

These three elements constitute "bureaucratic authority" in public and legal government. In private economic business, they are termed "bureaucratic management". In this sense, this institution from the political and church communities has developed first in the modern state and in the private sector in highly developed forms of capitalism. Permanent official authority with fixed duties is the exception in political development; not

found even in the ancient Orient, the Germanic or Mongolian empires of conquest, and the many feudal states. In those instances, the ruler carried out the most critical tasks through personal aides, court attendants or servants, whose authorities were temporary and limited to the transaction of the action.

- II. There exists the principle of office hierarchy and levels of authority—where there is an ordered system of super- and sub-ordination with lower offices are under the supervision of higher offices—with a system which affords the highly regulated opportunity of the governed office to appeal decisions to its superior. Through the complete development of this type, office hierarchy is monocratically ordered. The principle of hierarchical authority is also found in state and church entities and also in other bureaucratic structures, for instance large party organizations and private business enterprises, regardless of whether the authority is private. But even when the principle of jurisdictional competency is fully followed, at least in public offices, it does not mean that a lower office's business can simply be taken over by a higher one. The opposite is the rule—and it is the case that once established and fulfilling its duties, an office remains in existence and will be filled by another incumbent.
- III. The modern office is based on written documents (Files) which are preserved in original or draft form, from a staff of subaltern officials and scribes of all kinds. The totality of those working in the office with the respective material equipment and the files makes up a "bureau". (In private enterprise, it is often called an "office"). The modern civil service system separates in principle the bureau from the private domicile of the individual official. It is also

Source: This translation, by the authors, is based on the 1925 Tübingen 1st edition of Max Weber *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (Economy and Society) published by J.C.B. Mohr—(Paul Siebeck)—from an authentic reproduction by the Bibliolife network. The pages translated are from Chapter VI, pp. 650–656.

a condition that official activity is separated from private sphere and that public money and materials be kept distinct from the private possession of the official. This condition is the result of long development. Though now it is as likely to be found in the private sector as well and even extends to the leading entrepreneurs. The principle is that executive office is separated from household, business from private holdings, and business assets from private fortunes. The more consistently modern business has developed—these conditions go back to the middle ages—the more these separations have been the case. It is the peculiarity of modern entrepreneurs that they describe themselves just as the first rulers of bureaucratic modern states did—as “the first servant of the state”. The picture of state bureau activities being different from private business matters is a European continental one, and would be quite contrary and foreign to an American view.

- IV. Management of the Office, at the least all specialized office management, normally presupposes complete and expert training. This also holds for the modern executive and employee of private enterprises, just as it applies to the state official.
- V. As the office nears full development, activity requires the complete working capacity of the official—regardless of whether obligatory time in the bureau is firmly delimited. This is the usual case, a product of long development, whether it is in the public sphere or a private business. Earlier, this state of affairs was reversed, official business was conducted as a secondary activity.
- VI. Management of the office generally follows rules, which are more or less stable, comprehensive, and can be learned. These rules require knowledge (involving jurisprudence, administrative, or business management) which officials learn through special technical learning.

The adherence of modern office management to rules is very much embedded in its nature. Modern public administration theory holds, for example, that the authority to order certain matters by

decree—which has been legally granted to public authorities—does not allow the bureau to regulate matters by orders for each case, but only to regulate matters abstractly. This is in extreme contrast to regulation by relationships through individual privileges and extension of favors, (as is dominant in patrimonialism) or at least as far as such relationships are not fixed by sacred tradition.

2. The Position of the Official

For the internal and external position of the official, this has all the following consequences:

- I. The office is an “Occupation”. It is expressed first after the requirement of a prescribed course of training, which entails working in a capacity for a long period of time, and generally has a prescribed special examination as a prerequisite for employment. Further, the position of the official is in the form of a “duty”. This duty determines the nature of the official’s relations for the following:

Legally office holding is not considered ownership of a source of income, to be used or exploited for rents or payments in exchange for the rendering of specific services, as was customary in the Middle Ages and even often extended to recent times.

Nor is office holding to be considered a means for the exchange of services, as the case is with free employment contracts. Entry to an office, to include private enterprise, is to be seen as accepting an oath or obligation to the purpose of the office in return for a secure holding of the position. It is essential for the concept of modern loyalty to be to the office, in a pure form, and that it does not create a relationship to a person, like the servant or disciple’s faith under feudal or patrimonial authority, but rather is impersonal and serves functional purposes. These purposes often possess an ideological halo from cultural values, such as the state, church, community, party, or enterprise, which are realized through these communities.

The political official—at least as it is in the fully developed modern state—is not a personal servant of a ruler. Just as the bishop, priest, and minister are no longer, as in early Christian times, individuals possessing purely personal charisma, who provided other worldly sacred values tied to the personal mandate of a master and in principle given only to those who were deemed worthy and asked for these values. Despite the partial continuation of old theory, they have become officials serving a functional purpose, which in the modern day Church is now impersonally and ideologically sanctified.

II. The personal position of the official is established in the following ways:

1. Whether in a private office or public bureau, modern officials always strive for and normally obtain a distinct higher social esteem compared to the governed. Social position is protected by the prescriptive rules of rank order and special protections for political officials are afforded by criminal code prohibitions against “insults” of officials and “contempt” of state and church authorities. Social position is normally highest in older civilized countries where the following conditions are found: strong demand for administration through trained experts, strong and stable social differentiation where the officials largely come from socially and economically privileged classes, whether due to social distribution of power, the high cost of required training and education, or social conventions. The holding of educational certificates ... is usually linked with occupational requirements for holding office and further enhances the status element of the official's social position. The status aspect is sometimes explicitly acknowledged—as for example acceptance of a candidate to an office career depends upon the consent (by election) of the current official members of the body. This is the case of the officer corps in the German Army. Likewise, Attempts to create a

guild—like closed service of office is typical of patrimonial and protected certification official bodies. The desire to recreate policies that create such protections for bureaucrats is in no sense infrequent, one need only think of the demands made by the proletariat and expert officials (the *trityj element*) during the Russian Revolution.

Social esteem of official is usually low in countries where the demand for expert administration is weak and social conventions not highly developed. This most often occurs in new settlements where economic opportunities are greater and social stratification still unstable; this is particularly the situation in the United States.

2. The pure type of Bureaucratic official is appointed by a superior authority. An elected official by the governed body is not really a bureaucratic figure. A formal election, of course, may mask an appointment by party chiefs. This depends, not upon legal statutes, but on how the party mechanism functions. Political parties, once firmly established, can change any formal election into a confirmation of the party's choice of candidate, or even into a contest, based on rules for electing one of two designated candidates.

Under these circumstances, the election—as a designation by party official is merely a means of modifying the rigidity of hierarchical subordination. In principle, the official elected supposedly has an autonomous position based on his position neither from above nor below his superior authority in the hierarchy, but determined by party chiefs who also control the official's career. Thus, the elected official's career is not dependent upon the administrative chief. The official is appointed by a master authority, unusually functions more with a technical orientation, because it much more likely that functional skills and qualities will determine the officials selection and career advancement

The governed, as novices, can only assess the qualifications of a candidate for office only in terms of their experience and generally only after their service has started. So, any involvement of political parties will naturally give priority weight to what services are provided party superiors, and not to technical expertise. This also applies when supposedly freely elected officials are chosen by the party chiefs who determine what the slate of candidate for office will be for an elected chief. There isn't much difference, relatively, when legitimate monarchs and their subordinates appoint officials, though partisan influences are less controllable.

In places where the demand for administration by trained experts is high, and the party followers must take into account an intellectually developed, more educated and open public opinion, the use of unqualified officials falls back on the party in power at the next election. This is especially likely to occur when the officials are appointed. The demand for trained administrators is now present in the United States, however in the case of large cities where the votes of immigrants are rounded up, there really is no open public opinion. Here, popular election of administrative chiefs and their subordinate officials actually endangers, certainly in the largest administrative bureaus which are the most difficult to manage, having expert qualified officials, effective functioning of the bureaucratic mechanisms, as well as weakening hierarchical controls. The higher qualifications and integrity of US federal judges appointed by the President is well known in comparison to elected judges, even though both types of judges are chosen along party lines. The major changes advocated by reformers for American metropolitan administrations have been largely implemented by elected mayors working with a cadre of officials they appointed.

These reforms have come about in a "Caesarist" fashion. Although technically an organized variation of domination, efficiency from Caesarism can grow out of democracy as it is based on the position of the Caesar as a free trustee of the masses, unimpeded by tradition. In this instance, the Caesar is a form of the master above the body of highly qualified corps of military officers and officials hand selected, without regard tradition or other considerations. This type of rule of personal genius, however effective, is in opposition to the formal democratic principle of a generally elected officialdom

3. It is established that the position of the official is held for life, at least in public bureaucracies and increasingly this is case for similar structures, and a rule of fact, tenure of life is assumed when notice to leave can be given or periodic reappointment happens. The idea of tenure in a private enterprise normally differentiates the official position from the worker. This form of legal or actual tenure for life is not seen however as some form of proprietary right to the office by the official as in past cases involving authority structures. Further, legal guarantees put in place that prohibit discretionary dismissal or transfer, as is the case in Germany for all judicial officials and increasingly for administrative officials, serve to reinforce the strict impersonal discharge of specific office duties.

Although within bureaucracy, "the independence" guaranteed legally through tenure does not necessarily result in increased status for the official. The reverse is often the case, especially in communities with older cultures and high degrees of differentiation. Subordination under the arbitrary rule of a master ensures the maintenance of a subservient style of conduct for the official, and the more it does this, the stricter it is. So, social esteem of officials may rise more specifically with the absence of legal guarantees for tenure,

much as it did during the Middle Ages, when the esteem of ministers rose at the expense of freemen and with the judges of the King's court at the expense of people's judges. The Military officer or the administrative officer can be terminated at any time in Germany, far more readily than legally protected independent judges, who cannot be removed or held accountable for even the grossest offence against the professional code of honor or the official corps. It is for this reason, that a judge—all things being equal—is considered less socially acceptable in societal circles than military officers and administrative officials who status is dependent more on their master. Still, the average official seeks some type of civil service legislation which will enhance old age security and protect against any arbitrary removal from office. But even this has limits. One outcome of the rise of "the right to the office" is that it makes staffing of offices for the purpose of improving technical efficiency more difficult and can limit career opportunities for more ambitious candidates. But the strongest outcome of the right to the office is the natural preference for officials to rely on their equals rather than socially inferior group being ruled under them, resulting overall in "officialdom" seldom suffering from its dependency on those higher up...

4. The official receives regular compensation—in the form of a salary, normally fixed, and a pension for old age security. Salary is not determined as a wage for actual work performed alone, but in line with status—according to type of

function (the "rank") and possibly tied to length of service. The relatively high security of the official's income, along with the social esteem tied to the position, makes the office highly desirable, especially in countries which no longer provide opportunities for colonial profit—making and where such conditions enable much lower salaries to be paid to officials.

5. The official is established within a "career" inside the hierarchical order of the public service. They are expected to progress from lower, less important, and lower paid positions to higher positions. The average official prefers, naturally, a mechanical set determination for the conditions for promotion, if not of the actual offices, but at least for salary progression. Preference is for such conditions to be tied to seniority or possibly set to grade levels determined through some examination system. Here and there, these grades create a form of indelible character of the official and have permanent effects on their careers. Tied to this is the desire to reinforce the rights to the office and to enhance status group closure and economic security. All of this creates a tendency to view the office as a "commission" for those qualified through educational certification. The necessity of taking into consideration general personal and intellectual qualifications, without concern for the subaltern character of the educational certificate, has led to the highest political offices, especially ministerial positions, to be filled as a rule without taking certification into consideration.