Driver and Vehicle Licensing Centre processes 50 driving licence applications in an average day. If one day this worker had only 25 applications to examine, how much time would the task require? The logical answer is half a day. But Parkinson's Law suggests that if a full day is available to complete the work, a full day is how long it will take.

Because organisational employees have little personal involvement in their jobs, few are likely to seek extra work to fill their spare time. Bureaucrats do strive to *appear* busy, however, and their apparent activity often prompts organisations to take on more employees. The added time and expense required to hire, train, supervise and evaluate a larger staff make everyone busier still, setting in motion a vicious cycle that results in *bureaucratic bloat*. Ironically, the larger organisation may accomplish no more real work than it did before.

In the same light-hearted spirit as Parkinson, Laurence J. Peter (Peter and Hull, 1969) devised the Peter Principle: *Bureaucrats rise to their level of incompetence*. The logic here is simple: employees competent at one level of the organisational hierarchy are likely to earn promotion to higher positions. Eventually, however, they will reach a position where they are in over their heads; there, they perform poorly and thus are no longer eligible for promotion.

Reaching their level of incompetence dooms officials to a future of inefficiency. Adding to the problem, after years in the office they have almost certainly learned how to avoid demotion by hiding behind rules and regulations and taking credit for work actually performed by their more competent subordinates.

Weber revisited: the 'McDonaldisation' of society

Weber's discussion of organisation was written in the early part of the twentieth century. Some 80 years on, the North American sociologist George Ritzer suggested the 'bureaucratisation of society' has proceeded further and deeper. He took the case of McDonald's restaurants as his illustration, but drew much wider implications.

Consider for a moment the nature of McDonald's, introduced at the start of this chapter. Have you ever eaten in one? Chances are the answer is 'yes'. Indeed, everywhere in the world your authors have travelled, they have not been far from a McDonald's! And sometimes in the most surprising of places. While visiting Hong Kong, both of us visited the former Portuguese colony of Macau – a little nub jutting from the Chinese coast. Few people here speak English, and life on the streets seems a world apart from the urban rhythms of London, Amsterdam or Los Angeles – where you would certainly expect to find a McDonald's. But strolling the old streets, we turn the corner and stand face to face with the famous McDonald's logo! But the most amazing thing is that the food – the burger, fries and drinks – looks, smells and tastes (almost!) the same as it does thousands of miles away in Sydney!

As noted in the opening to this chapter, McDonald's has enjoyed enormous success. From a single store in the mid-1950s, McDonald's now operates 31,667 restaurants throughout much of the world, with 744 opening in 2006. There are more than 850 pairs of golden arches in Japan, for example, and the world's largest McDonald's opened for business in China's capital city of Beijing in April 1992, with some 700 seats, 29 cash registers, and 40,000 customers on its first day! (In 2006, it took a $21.6 billion revenue).

But while McDonald's may be everywhere and has become a symbol of the modern world, this is not Ritzer's point. For him, McDonaldisation suggests that the organisational principles that underlie McDonald's are steadily coming to dominate our entire society. Our culture is becoming 'McDonaldised' – a way of saying that we now model many aspects of life on the famous restaurant chain. Parents buy toys at worldwide chain stores such as Toys R Us; more vacations take the form of resort and tour packages; television presents news in the form of ten-second sound bites; sports become packaged into ever larger stadia and broadcasts; and religion is to be found in megachurches and cyberchurches. McDonaldisation has even had an impact on education: universities devise mass courses based on pre-packaged 'modules'; admissions officers size up students they have never met by glancing over their grades; lecturers assign ghost-written textbooks and evaluate students with tests mass-produced for them by publishing companies; and even sociology may start to become McDonaldised – as McSociology! (B. Smart, 1999). The list goes on and on.

McDonaldisation: four principles

What do all these developments have in common? According to George Ritzer, the 'McDonaldisation of society' involves four basic organisational principles.

1 *Efficiency*. Ray Kroc, the marketing genius behind the expansion of McDonald's, set out with the goal of serving a hamburger, French fries and a milkshake to a customer in 50 seconds. Today, one of the company's most popular items is the Egg McMuffin, an entire breakfast in a single sandwich. In the restaurant, customers clear their own trays or, better still, drive away from the pickup window taking the packaging and whatever mess they make with them.

   Efficiency is now a value virtually without critics in our society. Almost everyone believes that anything that can be done quickly is, for that reason alone, good.

2 *Calculability*. The first McDonald's operating manual declared the weight of a regular raw hamburger to be 1.6 ounces, its size to be 3.875 inches across, and its fat content to be 19 per cent. A slice of cheese weighs exactly half an ounce. Fries are cut precisely nine-thirty-seconds of an inch thick.

   Think about how many objects around the home, the workplace or the university campus are designed and mass-produced uniformly according to a calculated plan. Not just our environment but our life experiences – from travelling on motorways to sitting at home watching television – are now more deliberately planned than ever before.

3 *Uniformity and predictability*. An individual can walk into a McDonald's restaurant anywhere and receive the same sandwiches, drinks and desserts prepared in precisely the same way. Predictability, of course, is the result of a highly rational system that specifies every course of action and leaves nothing to chance.

4 *Control through automation*. The most unreliable element in the McDonald's system is human beings. People, after all, have good and bad days, sometimes let their minds wander, or simply decide to try something a different way. To eliminate, as much as possible, the unpredictable human element, McDonald's has automated its equipment to cook food at fixed temperatures for set lengths of time. Even the cash register at a McDonald's is little more than pictures of the items so as to minimise the responsibility of the human being taking the customer's order.

The scope of McDonaldisation is expanding throughout the world. Automatic banking machines are replacing banks, highly automated bakeries now produce bread with scarcely any human intervention, and chickens and eggs (or is it eggs and chickens?) emerge from automated hatcheries. In supermarkets, laser scanners are phasing out (less reliable) human checkout operators. Much shopping now occurs in large precincts, in which everything from temperature and humidity to the kinds of store and product are subject to continuous control and supervision (Ritzer, 1993; 2008). Recently the term 'Starbucksization' has been introduced to update their idea.

Can rationality be irrational?

No one would challenge the popularity or the efficiency of McDonald's and similar organisations (although there has been a lot of critical comment of late and their sales are falling in parts of the world). But there is another side to the story. Max Weber viewed the increasing rationalisation of the world with alarm, fearing that the expanding control of formal organisations would take away spontaneity and human creativity – crushing the human spirit. As he saw it, rational systems were efficient, but at the terrible cost of dehumanisation and disenchantment. Each of the four principles noted above depends on controlling human creativity, discretion and autonomy. George Ritzer contends that McDonald's food is not particularly good for people, nor is the company's extensive use of packaging good for the natural environment. Taking a broader perspective, Ritzer echoes Weber's concern, asserting that 'the ultimate irrationality of McDonaldization is that people could lose control over the system and it would come to control us' (1993: 145). In his book he therefore spends some time discussing ways in which people could resist the McDonaldisation process. This includes avoiding daily routines as much as possible, avoiding classes where tests are short answer and graded by a computer, and eating in local, non-standardised restaurants.

Changing organisational forms

After the Second World War, most formal organisations in Europe were typically conventional bureaucracies, run from the top down according to a stern chain of command. Today, especially as businesses face growing global competition, rigid structures are breaking down. One important element of this trend is the increasing use of the *self-managed work team*. Members of these small groups have the skills necessary to carry out tasks

with minimal supervision. By allowing employees to operate within autonomous groups, organisations enhance worker involvement in the job, generate a broader understanding of operations and raise employee morale. A few corporations (such as Procter & Gamble) have had autonomous work units since the 1960s. In recent years, many more are following suit.

Even though it is difficult to compare the performance of organisations with disparate goals and operations, research indicates that self-managed work teams do boost productivity while heading off some of the problems – including alienation – of the traditional bureaucratic model. In the business world, many companies have found that decentralising responsibility in this way also raises product quality and lowers rates of employee absenteeism and turnover (Yeatts, 1991, 1995; Maddox, 1995).

Living in the 21st Century

The audit culture

Management has been among the fasting growing occupations over the past century. More and more work requires more and more administration and management. Frederick William Taylor (1856–1915) heralded the growth of what was called scientific management – where, it was argued, the 'best ways' of organising work would be practised: a systematic matching of pay, abilities, tasks and rules in the work process. This 'Taylorism' established the 'time and motion' studies of work life. (It was much criticised by the Human Relations School for its lack of concern with actual work process and human experience.)

Total Quality Management (TQM) takes up where Taylorism left off. It started in Japan, was introduced in the USA in the 1970s and quickly became a major movement – by the 1980s entering most government agencies and travelling to the United Kingdom where it was widely adopted. Quality-Assurance (QA) depends upon a full-scale rationalisation of the work process; aims and objectives spelled out with targets and ways of evaluating their success. Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats should be examined. Feedback from customers should be monitored regularly and with corrective actions following. To do all this, major departments of evaluation and monitoring – the inspectorates – should be established with carefully trained and skilled assessors. This new public management has come to organise education, health and policing in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. Thus Ofsted was formed in 1992, QAA in 1996, and the Commission for Health Improvements and the Commission for Social Care Inspectorate in 2004. They have led to national Audit Commissions, Cycles of Inspections, and an elaborate new terminology: performance indicators, audits, benchmarks, methodologies, SWOTs, feedback forms, accreditation, baseline inspections, annual monitoring, best values, best practice. Such procedures are put in place to improve the performance of education, medicine and policing. TQM makes organisations work more efficiently and effectively.

Yet critics of TQM make five major observations. They argue it is:

Costly: Between 1998 and 2003, the spending on annual inspection and external review shifted from £250 million to £550 million. These costs are only direct costs: they tell little of the costings in time and skill from the professionals who have to incorporate this as part of their workload (for example, teachers get no extra money but have to devote hundreds of hours to this extra work).

Bureaucratic: All the problems that Max Weber raised about the dysfunctionality of bureaucracies, discussed in the text, come into play.

Demoralising: Those who experience this constant monitoring feel that their workload has been taken over by matters that are not connected to their professional concerns. Teachers want to teach; nurses want to nurse; police want to police: nobody wants to administer. Dejection happens because people are not doing the work they wish to be doing.

Deskilling: The experience of work now becomes rigidly ruled by 'assessments'. Practitioners in various areas complain that this robs them of their own creativity, originality and spontaneity. Lecturers, nurses and the police are required to follow rules.

Disciplining and controlling: Increasingly management gets people to write things down, making them conform to certain clear norms, and then gains access to all this self-commenting. It becomes what some have called a 'technology of government' – a way of regulating social life.

See: Strathern (2000); Travers (2007); Power (1977).

Humanising bureaucracies

Humanising bureaucracy means *fostering a more democratic organisational atmosphere that recognises and encourages the contributions of everyone.* Research by Kanter (1977, 1983, 1989; Kanter and Stein, 1980) and others (Peters and Waterman, 1982) suggests that 'humanising' bureaucracy produces both happier employees and healthier profits. Based on the discussion so far, we can identify three paths to a more humane organisational structure.

1 *Social inclusiveness.* The social composition of the organisation should, ideally, make no one feel 'out of place' because of gender, race or ethnicity. The performance of all employees will improve to the extent that no one is subject to social exclusion.

2 *Sharing of responsibilities.* When organisations ease rigid organisational structures, they spread power and responsibility more widely. Managers cannot benefit from the ideas of employees who have no channels for expressing their opinions. Knowing that superiors are open to suggestions encourages all employees to think creatively, increasing organisational effectiveness.

3 *Expanding opportunities for advancement.* Expanding opportunity reduces the number of employees stuck in routine, dead-end jobs with little motivation to perform well. The organisation should give employees at all levels a chance to share ideas and try new approaches, defining everyone's job as the start of an upward career path.

Kanter's work takes a fresh look at the concept of bureaucracy and its application to business organisations. Rigid formality may have made sense in the past, when organisations hired unschooled workers primarily to perform physical labour. But today's educated workforce can contribute a wealth of ideas to bolster organisational efficiency – if the organisation encourages and rewards innovation.

There is broad support for the idea that loosening up rigid organisations improves performance. Moreover, companies that treat employees as a resource to be developed rather than as a group to be controlled stand out as more profitable. But some critics challenge Kanter's claim that social heterogeneity necessarily yields greater productivity. In controlled comparisons, they maintain, it is homogeneous work groups that typically produce more, while heterogeneous groups are better at generating a diversity of ideas and approaches. Optimal working groups, then, appear to be those that strike a balance: team members bring to the decision-making process a variety of backgrounds and perspectives, yet are similar enough in outlook and goals to effectively coordinate their efforts (Hackman, 1988).

The Japanese situation and the drift to postmodern organisations

We have described efforts to 'humanise' formal organisations. Interestingly, however, organisations in some countries have long been more personal than those in others. For instance, organisations in Japan, a nation that has had remarkable economic success, thrive within a culture of strong collective identity and solidarity. Unlike much of Europe and the United States, where individualism is a strong tradition, the Japanese maintain traditions of cooperation.

Because of Japan's social cohesiveness, formal organisations in that society approximate to very large primary groups. William Ouchi (1981) highlighted five distinctions between formal organisations in Japan and their counterparts in industrial societies of the West. In each case, the Japanese organisation reflected that society's more collective orientation.

1 *Hiring and advancement.* Organisations in Europe hold out promotions and salary increases as prizes won through individual competition. In Japanese organisations, however, companies hire new graduates together, and all employees of a particular age cohort receive the same salary and responsibilities. Only after several years is anyone likely to be singled out for individual advancement.

2 *Lifetime security.* Employees in much of Europe expect to move from one company to another to advance their careers. Companies are also quick to lay off employees when economic setbacks strike. By contrast, most Japanese firms hire employees for life, fostering strong, mutual loyalties among members. Japanese companies avoid lay-offs by retraining expendable workers for new jobs in the organisation.

3 *Holistic involvement.* European workers tend to see the home and the workplace as distinct spheres. Japanese organisations take a different tack, playing a broad role in their employees' lives by providing home mortgages, sponsoring recreational activities and scheduling social events. Such interaction beyond the workplace strengthens collective identity and offers the respectful Japanese worker an opportunity to voice suggestions and criticisms informally.

4 *Non-specialised training.* Bureaucratic organisation in Europe is based on specialisation; many people spend their entire working life at a single task. From the outset, a Japanese organisation trains employees in all phases of its operation, again with the idea that employees will remain with the organisation for life.

5 *Collective decision-making.* In Europe, important decisions fall to key executives. Although Japanese leaders also take responsibility for their organisation's performance, they involve workers in 'quality circles' that seek employee input in any decision that affects them. A closer working relationship is also encouraged by greater economic equality between management and workers. The salary differential between executives and lower-ranking employees is much less.

These characteristics give the Japanese a strong sense of organisational loyalty. The cultural emphasis on *individual* achievement in our society finds its parallel in Japanese *groupism*. By tying their personal interests to those of their company, workers realise their ambitions through the organisation.

Stuart Clegg (1990) has taken this argument further, suggesting that Japanese firms approximate to what he calls the postmodern firm. Such organisations are much more flexible and fluid than firms of the past. Strict demarcations are weakened, and they employ the 'Just in Time' (JIT) system of production. Here, goods are produced as required – there is no mass stocking of parts. And this in turn makes the system more adaptable and flexible.

'Social networks' and the rise of the network society

Groups and organisations have proved to be very useful concepts for sociologists to develop. But as relationships change – from primary groups to secondary groups, from secondary groups to formal organisations, from formal organisations to postmodern organisations – so sociologists keep refining their language. Currently, more and more sociologists are finding the idea of 'network' an attractive one to use to understand shifts in society.

Formally, a **social network** may be seen as *a web of social ties that links people who identify with one another*. Think of a network as a 'fuzzy' group that brings people into contact without a group's sense of boundaries and belonging. If we consider a group as a 'circle of friends', then we might describe a network as a 'social web' expanding outwards, often reaching great distances and including larger numbers of people. The most basic pattern of a network – between only two people, such as two people who are merely standing in the same room – can be represented as in Figure 6.3.

Social networks go beyond ideas of groups, or even organisations. Groups and organisations usually presume some kind of boundary, often with face-to-face interactions going on within them. Networks, by contrast, envisage a field of connections and relations: a set of *nodes* (key points) and a set of *ties* (or links) that connect some or all of these nodes. The nodes could be people, or groups, or even nation states. A more complex social network is represented in Figure 6.4. Here there are some central people – John, Rob and Lydia, for example – but they have different positions and access to different people (Kadushin, 2000).

Social network analysis, then, looks at underlying patterns and links that shape such social networks. For example, we could look at the *number* of ties, the *diversity* of ties, the *frequency* and *intensities* of interactional ties, the *directions* of interactional ties, the *content* of the ties, and the *quality* of ties. We could build up maps of friendships which interconnect; see how bounded communities or families relate beyond themselves; or even locate patterns of people who have been part of the same network of sexual partners (an area of research that has been of value in studying AIDS: see Chapter 21).

Some such networks may then be seen as densely knit (most nodes are connected) and tightly bounded (most stay within the same subset of nodes). Or by contrast they may be seen as very thin and loose (Wellman, 1999). 'Contemporary Western communities rarely are tightly bounded, densely knit groups of broadly based ties. They usually are loosely bounded, sparsely knit, ramifying networks of

This could be a very basic relationship between two people – maybe both standing in the same room

Figure 6.3 A basic social network