

**THE INFLUENCE OF BUREAUCRACY ON THE
PERFORMANCE OF PUBLIC ORGANIZATIONS**

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Abstract

The use of bureaucratic structures by public organizations since the 20th century, besides being essential, has brought significant advances. However, bureaucracy came to be seen as inefficient, the opposite of what was proposed. Developed and implemented in organizations in a rational-legal form through pre-established structures of organization of the processes and actions of employees, this text presents its characteristics, advantages and disadvantages ("dysfunctions"). Analyzing the studies that relate the bureaucratic structures with the influence on the performance of public organizations, it is concluded that the problem is not bureaucracy itself, but the excesses of its use and that its proper implementation contributes to reduce performance.

Keywords: Bureaucratic model; Public Administration; Organization; Efficiency; Organizational performance

Introduction

The bureaucratic model conceived by Max Weber and seen by many with a negative connotation, as synonymous with inefficiency, slowness, obstacle to the agility of processes, barrier to growth and development of organizations, was actually thought to be a model superior to all demands, contemplating all areas and activities of organizations, whether public or private, regardless of any type of classification used. Contrary to the negative sense attributed to bureaucracy, its focus is on the agility of the processes to make them more efficient. As an ideal type, the model achieves a technical superiority that eliminates all irrational elements through rational-legal domination.

In public administration, "bureaucracy is not only the set of public functions and administrative processes, but one of the foundations of the exercise of state power and democratic government, and therefore it is necessary to understand its composition, its functioning and its relationship with elected political leaders" (Olivieri, 2011). With the emergence of the rule of law and the idea of the conceptual separation between politics and administration advocated by Woodrow Wilson in his *The Study of Administration*, the conditions that the bureaucratic model needed to be implemented in public organizations were created.

Since then, bureaucracy has been widely implemented at various levels and degrees in Western states expanding to all the most over time. It became the object of studies being related to several other areas of knowledge. Specifically to public organizations, due to the numerous complaints of citizens, users of their services, and the attribution to their "negative side", the performance assessment has gained special attention. This text seeks to analyze the influence that bureaucracy has on the performance of public organizations, considering some studies conducted both at the macro and local level, intending to identify whether bureaucratic structures are positive or negative in the current content.

The bureaucratic model

The theory of bureaucracy is attributed to the German sociologist Max Weber who was concerned with studies, among others, of the mechanisms of capitalism. Weber began to analyze the market, associations, organizations and also social relations to understand about

competitions and forms of domination. It is enough, therefore, to conclude that an essential trait of capitalism is rationalism. The author tries to understand society, the meaning of social action (action of individuals in society) and how this has stimulated the rationalization of life (Pavanelo Pivetta, Alves Pacheco de Campos, & Scherer, 2018). Quintaneiro *et.al.* state that "if we wanted to characterize, in a single idea, the distinctive mark that Weber identifies in contemporary Western societies, this would be that the world tends inexorably to rationalization in all spheres of social life" and that "one of the means through which the tendency to rationalization is updated in Western societies is through bureaucratic organizations" (Quintaneiro, Ligia De Oliveira, Márcia, Monteiro De Oliveira, & Horizonte, 2003).

For a better understanding of what is and how the bureaucratic model works it is necessary to define organization, since the model is employed in organizations, which provide the means that meet the needs of society while exercising economic, political and social development. According to Cordeiro, for

Giddens (2005, p. 284) "organization is a large grouping of people, structured in impersonal lines and established in order to achieve specific objectives" (Cordeiro, 2017). Weber saw organizations from the perspective of rational-legal domination, where they enable a way to coordinate human activities, or produced goods, in a stable way, through time and space, through hierarchy, which is fundamental in organizations. It is added that each organization has its own structural and functional form, therefore, its bureaucratic form. The State is a form of organization that through public administration is structured and organized to provide services to its citizens, taking into account the collective interests of society, which increasingly demands quality while waiting for efficiency (objective of bureaucracy) in the use of public resources.

The bureaucratic model was proposed as a way of organizing society based on rationality by adhering the means to the objectives in search of maximum efficiency. Bureaucracy represented the way a sociopolitical system (a theme of domination) was organized, differentiating itself from other types of organization, such as the forms of charismatic and patriarchic (traditional) domination, in which the exercise of power was due to the extraordinary characteristics of the leader or by tradition, having, in both, a relationship of

direct obedience. Bureaucracy comes in opposition to these forms of domination as a rational-legal form, based on power the rules, norms, laws, therefore, obedience becomes no longer to people but to the set of these legal bases (Pires, 2009), which, in a relationship of authority, delimit the means of coerção and consensus in a hierarchical formal structure. Linked to the thought of bureaucratic logic, the State, in its transition from an absolute monarchy to the so-called rule of law, brought the need to make crown officials more independent and neutral by going on to exercise their activities in the service of the State and, consequently, in the public interest (Ferraz, 2013). According to the theory, the profile of the bureaucratic official should be based on principles such as: he is personally free and appointed to his position based on his qualification for the position; he exercises authority delegated to him according to impersonal rules, and his loyalty is related to the faithful execution of his official duties; his appointment and the designation of his workplace depend on his technical qualifications; his administrative work is a full-time occupation; his work is rewarded for a regular salary and the prospect of advancement in a career throughout life (Queiroz, 2013). Quintaneiro *et.al.* (2003) complement, in relation to the ideal type of bureaucrat, that he is the one who "acts in cooperation with others, whose office is separate from his family and personal life, regulated by mandates and by the requirement of competence, knowledge and expertise and who cannot use the state's assets for his own benefit or appropriate them."

As for the structure, every organization has a format that is intended to be adequate in the pursuit of objectives, in an efficient way. This structure concerns the designs of their positions, their functions, forms of recruitment, remuneration and gratuities policies, careers and their methods of progression, internal promotions, hierarchical structure, processes and how they are defined and reviewed/updated, departmentalization and many others, just to exemplify, it is important to say that it is the way all these factors are arranged and how they relate within the organization. According to Siqueira, Robbins (2005) lists some structural elements that should be considered by managers: (i) specialization of work: aims to increase efficiency by attributing to the individual/department a part of the process, increasing productivity and enhancing the knowledge necessary for the performance of activities; (ii) departmentalization: organizational division through the grouping of related areas, and can be classified as by function, products / services, geographical allocation, customers, processing and projects; (iii) range of control: stems from the distribution of authority and responsibility;

(IV) Formalization: a standardized and regulated internal means of communication expressed through documents; (v) centralization: related to the concept of authority, it has the advantage of decision-making by people with a holistic view of the organization, but, as a disadvantage, the practical ignorance of the basic procedures; (vi) decentralization: distof the authority for decision-making reducing the distance between who decides and who performs the procedures (Siqueira, 2013).

According to Ferraz, Perrow (1972) considers that bureaucracy emerges as a model that idealizes a form of organization superior to all others already known and that is expected to be achieved in the near future. Bureaucracy, as a model for autonomizing the administration of policies, its principles and characteristics: organization based on written norms and procedures (rational, legal and exhaustive); hierarchy of authority; impersonality of relationships; formality of communications; separation of ownership and administration; merit-based recruitment (meritocracy), through public competitions; professionalization of employees; rational character and division of labor; standardized routines and procedures (Bilhim 2001; Rock 2009). It should be noted that the model was designed to fit the predictable contexts of the time, standardizing procedures and operating rules (Ferraz, 2013). These characteristics of rational-legal organization, in an accumulated way, according to Weber, lead to the control of personal inclinations and individual desires and opinions, minimizing their influences on the functioning of the organization. According to Motta, the characteristics of bureaucracy reflect three aspects considered central in its conception: formalism, impersonality and professionalism. The same author mentions that "these characteristics translate into a heterogeneous administration", with *top-down authority*, "meaning that there is no individual or social autonomy in bureaucracy with regard to participation in the administrative process. Of course, this does not mean that there is no possibility of freedom of action" (Motta, 1991), referring us, like this, to the question of the discretion of public agents.

Discretion in public organisations is seen as relative, because while there is a certain freedom in the execution of activities, it is, however, limited, due to the principle of legality that governs modern States. Pires argues that discretion is part of the dilemma between the expansion of the state's capacity for action and the control, stand last, focus of external control bodies (Pires, 2009). Oliveira, in portraying on the subject, related to the application of public

policies (elaborated by superiors/legislature), which are implemented by bureaucrats (the author refers to the especially to so-called *street level bureaucrats*), "the formal rules and procedures of the organization do not provide the reference for this judgment" (refers to the elaboration of policies with vague, dubious and contradictory objectives and meanings), "because they cannot establish or clarify the purposes of the programs, so the applicators often act at their discretion to set these objectives and, consequently, the most appropriate way to achieve them, [...]" (Oliveira, 2012).

Although the bureaucratic model has a rational characteristic for the search for efficiency, being considered superior to any other model, there were authors who criticized it, describing that there are flaws in it and that they often make it the position to which the model is objective, that is, inefficient.

Criticism of the bureaucratic model

The criticisms of the bureaucratic model are more evident in the context of contemporary administration, usually related to administrative reforms (linked to the desire of modernization) and the search for greater flexibility and agility, which the current context has been demanding. However, criticisms have existed since its conception. One of these authors, Robert King Merton, said there was no entirely rational organization and that formalism does not reach the depth described by Weber, and outlined some aspects of the bureaucratic model that he says overlap efficiency by creating what he called "bureaucratic dysfunctions." These dysfunctions, according to Merton are generated due to the internalization of the rules and the attachment to regulations

(become objective rather than means); the excess of formalism and paperwork (due to the need to document and formalize all communications); resistance to change (the employee accustomed with the stability and repetition of what he does becoming resistant to change); the depersonalization of relationships (due to the characteristic of impersonality, by emphasizing the position, it decreases the relationship between the people of the organization); the categorization as the basis of the decision-making process (due to the rigid hierarchy of authority, who makes the decision will always be the one who has the highest hierarchical category); the over conformity to routines and procedures (over time the rules and routines become sacred to employees); the display of signs of authority (use of uniforms, tables, among

others, in order to demonstrate status of hierarchical position); and the difficulty in customer service and conflicts with the public (disregard of the public's particular and personal problems due to the standardization of care). The author also lists the existence, in relation to the receiving public, of functional arrogance, especially in the public service, due to the fact that in many times public funism enjoying the monopoly situation in the provision of services. Motta considers as negative, therefore a dysfunction, the fact that, in relation to the necessary training made available to the employee, the bureaucracy rationalizes him from doing so, which ends up limiting freedom and spontaneity, also impairing the initiative, favoring the development of a limited, impersonal and individualistic personality (Motta, 1991). Therefore, dysfunctions can harm organizations that detain creativity and innovation in the performance of their functions (Secchi, 2009).

Despite the criticisms, it should be recognized that Weber did not consider that rules are originally perfect control mechanisms that make it possible to predict and organize any individual situation and behavior. According to him, the form of domination characteristic of bureaucracy does not only involve the formalization and the predefinition of the permissive forms of the social relationship, but fundamentally a gradual and incessant process of rationalization of administration and law (Pires, 2009). Therefore, situations and behaviors not foreseen or listed in formal rules, gradually and inevitably, would eventually be submitted to organizational rules as a result of a tendency towards bureaucratization and formal rationalization of all spheres of social life (Mummsen, 1989, cited by (Pires, 2009)). According to Perrow, bureaucratic dysfunctions are only consequences of the failure of the application of the bureaucracy (Queiroz, 2013).

Bearing in mind the two views of bureaucracy (positive and negative) reported by some authors, it is up to the researchers to conduct studies to analyze and verify the relationship and influence of this model on the performance of organizations.

Organizational performance in bureaucratic structures

The concept of organizational performance, under the focus on public services, is related to the results obtained by the organization, considering its strategies, objectives and goals, which are directed to meet the needs of citizens and all stakeholders (Resende Jr. and Guimarães, 2014, cited by (Cecilio, 2016)). Therefore, the perception of the quality of public services,

from the perspective of the user who receives it, seems to be directly related to the commitment of the organization. A more macro perspective considers the influence of bureaucratic public administration on the performance of the State.

Certain characteristics of bureaucracy, such as the recruitment of civil servants on merit and the impartial exercise of government authority, are empirically linked to various results at the macro level. The commitment of civil servants can be crucial to the successful implementation of policies at the national level and also to the high performance of bureaucracy. From a perspective of bureaucratic public organizations, some studies were analyzed in relation to performance, which considered as variables some of the characteristics of the Weberian bureaucratic model, based on the structures and behavior of the individuals.

Among these studies, Evans and Rauch examined "the effect on economic growth of certain structural aspects that were key elements in the original characterization of bureaucracy for Weber" (Evans & Rauch, 1999). For this, they used as a sample a total of 35 developing countries and, as variables, considered meritocratic recruitment and career development. The authors predicted that countries that incorporated Weberian aspects had more rapid economic growth between the years 1970 and 1990, than those in which the adoption was not made completely. The conclusion was "that bureaucracies characterized by meritocratic recruitment and predictable and rewarding careers are at higher growth rates." As the study was directed primarily to the main economic agencies of the 35 countries, the authors complemented the conclusion that "having Weberian structures in the strategic center of bureaucracy can be the most useful" to have positive effects on growth. The same authors (Rauch & Evans, 2000) subsequently conducted another similar study in the 35 countries, in the main economic agencies, considering another period in data collection, and added the number of variables. According to them, "we found that our bureaucratic structure measures were statistically significant determinants of three out of five private bureaucratic performance measures that other studies have found to have a positive impact on economic growth. In particular, our results indicate that meritocratic recruitment is the most important element of the bureaucratic structure to improve performance. Internal promotion and career stability are, at best, of secondary importance. It is unclear whether or not competitive salaries affect bureaucratic performance." I killed *et.al.* in a similar study, using the same variables, confirm these results (Matei, Grigoriou, Shivergueva, & Vašiček, 2012). Andrews *et.al.* were concerned with

analyzing whether a representative bureaucracy (staff that reflects the characteristics of their constituent populations), that is, whether a greater diversity of the public workforce, is linked to better organizational performance. They believed that one way to ensure that those of a bureaucracy's scums generally responded to the public would be to recruit a bureaucracy that mirrors the demographic composition of the entire population. However, they concluded that a greater ethnic diversity in relation to the surrounding population is negatively affected by the perceptions of performance by the citizen, with or without audited performance inserted as control, but justify that the source of the negative relationship may be due to racial attitudes of the public and not to the substantive achievements of local governments (Andrews, Boyne, Meier, O'Toole, & Walker, 2005).

We should keep in mind that performance is generally measured based on the use of reports, indexes or other data that are typically generated by managers themselves or under their guidance and supervision. It is known that one of the criticisms of the bureaucratic model considers that the focus is on the process but that it should be on the results, and that over time the employee begins to worry more about the recording of the activity than with the action. This conduct is confirmed by the study conducted by Siqueira, which exposes that this conduct compromises the evaluation of performance, both individual and the efficiency and functional effectiveness of the sector and the organization (Siqueira, 2013). The credibility of government disengagement information is essential for democratic governance and policy learning. Interested in analyzing reports to verify that the data submitted to stakeholders (whether internal or external) are described honestly, as they aim at measuring performance or even accountability, Yang conducted a study on this and concluded that the participation of stakeholders in the performance evaluation process directly and positively affects the generation of honest reports and performance. It identifies several factors that lead to honesty in the production of government performance reports: a favorable external environment, a harmonious internal environment, an organizational culture oriented towards innovation, and the participation of stakeholders in performance evaluation. These conditions are not easy to find in bureaucracies operating in a fragmented political system characterized by mistrust and competition, raising serious concerns about the logic of performance-based accountability (Yang, 2009).

Conclusions

Weber's bureaucratic model gained adherents in all forms of organization. According to Behn, Weber considered that experience universally tends to show that the bureaucratic type of administrative organization is, from a purely technical point of view, capable of achieving the highest degree of efficiency and, in this sense, is formally the most rational means known to carry out an imperative control over human beings. It is superior to any other form in accuracy, stability, rigidity of its discipline and reliability. It is finally superior, both in intensive efficiency and in the scope of its operations and is formally able to apply to all types of administrative tasks (Behn, 1998). The studies analyzed in this text show that, in practice, bureaucracy is related to a positive performance when applied correctly. This compromises some results, making them negative, which are often attributed to some of the characteristics of the bureaucratic model and so-called dysfunctions, may be due to the excesses committed. What one should try to combat through the movements of administrative reforms to make the state "modern" must be the excesses. Seeking to understand how, in fact, bureaucracy works or how it should work, abstaining from pre-judgments, will direct the Public Administration to efficiency in the provision of public services and, therefore, to better performance. Queiroz reminds us that the structures adopted in public organizations are still currently derived from bureaucratic theory, which was conceived to make the organization efficient and effective "ensuring speed, rationality, homogeneity of interpretation of norms, reduction of frictions and discriminations, standardization of leadership (equal decisions in equal situations) and the achievement of objectives" (Queiroz, 2013). According to the author, studies show that the inefficiency of public administration is not caused by bureaucracy itself, but by the public agent, in its performance, when it disregards the principles of efficiency, reasonableness and proportionality and is even the useless rigors and not foreseen in the theory, which reinforces the idea of the problem being related to excesses.

The model, although theoretically reflecting superiority over any other, also suffered several criticisms. The criticisms, usually linked to so-called bureaucratic dysfunctions, seek to reflect on the modernization of the administration through administrative reforms. Souza recalls that, even though there is a vast production on the theme of modernization, it was never sufficiently clear what are the criteria that classify an organization as modern. According to

the author, modernization is associated with an idea of progress and disruption with what is identified as unsatisfactory and hinders the development of the economy, society and the State (Souza, 2017). The reforms, which emerged over everything from the 1980s, had as one of its objectives the reduction of the degree of bureaucracy, and in line with the development of information technology, sought to reduce the amount of bureaucratic processes and procedures and roles. However, the reforms did not reduce the size of administrative procedures (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2002) and information technology also led to the creation of new activities and new demands on the State (Medeiros and Guimarães, 2004, cited by (Olivieri, 2011)). The reforms in public administration have been contained to date, not aimed at eliminating bureaucracy, but reducing its degree of use. This demonstrates the importance, essentiality, and superiority that the bureaucratic model has and that makes it necessary to achieve the objectives of public organizations in an efficient, effective, responsible and democratic way.

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