

Theory of Bureaucracy--Weber

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Max Weber (1947) describes bureaucracy as an ideal type, that is, as an abstraction meant to underscore the most significant and important features of a construct. Schools, like most organizations of any size, are bureaucracies; that is, they are characterized by a division of labor and specialization, an impersonal orientation, a hierarchy of authority, rules and regulations, and a career orientation. In Weber's analysis, there are other attributes of bureaucracy, but these are the chief elements and are organized to produce the most efficient structure possible.

Division of Labor and Specialization

Division of labor is "the regular activities required for the purposes of the bureaucratically governed structure are distributed in a fixed way as official duties" (Gerth and Mills, 1946: 196). In most organizations, tasks are too complex to be performed by a single individual; thus, the labor is divided among positions and individuals. In schools, for example, division of labor is used for instructional purposes. For example, subspecialties are based on level—elementary and secondary—and subject—language, math, science, and other specialties. Efficiency increases because division of labor produces specialization, which in turn leads to employees who become knowledgeable and expert at performing their prescribed duties. Moreover, individuals are hired on the basis of their specializations and technical qualifications. Hence, division of labor and specialization produce expertise in school personnel.

Impersonal Orientation

Weber (1947, p. 331) argued that the working atmosphere of a bureaucracy should provide an impersonal orientation, "the dominance of a spirit of formalistic impersonality, 'sine ira et studio,' without hatred or passion, and hence without affection or enthusiasm." Employees are expected to make decisions based on facts, not simply feelings. Impersonality on the part of administrators and teachers assures equality of treatment and facilitates rationality. Thus, impersonality promotes rationality.

Hierarchy of Authority

Offices are arranged vertically in bureaucracies; that is, "each lower office is under the control and supervision of a higher one" (Weber, 1947, p. 330); consequently, a hierarchy of authority is produced based upon legitimate control. For example, the organizational chart shows the superintendent at the top and assistants, directors, principals, teachers, and students at successively lower levels in the hierarchy. Almost without exception, large organizations of any kind develop a well-established system of superordination and subordination, which attempts to assure disciplined compliance to directives from superiors. In brief, hierarchy of authority promotes disciplined compliance and coordinated effort.

Rules and Regulations

Weber (1947, p. 330) maintains that every bureaucracy has a system of rules and regulations, a consistent system of abstract procedures that have been intentionally established for administration of the organization. Administrators

are responsible to manage the system of rules and regulations, which helps coordinate activities in the hierarchy. Rules and regulations also promote uniformity and stability of employee action. In sum, the formal system of rules and regulations ensures uniformity, stability, and coordination.

Career Orientation

To create loyalty and foster a career perspective, Weber (1947, p. 334) states, “there is a system of promotion according to seniority, achievement, or both. Promotion is dependent on the judgment of superiors.” Employees are guarded from arbitrary dismissal, denial of promotion as well as further protected in the sense that administrators are supposed to make dispassionate decisions. In short, career orientation promotes loyalty and provides motivation for employees to exert extra effort.

Efficiency

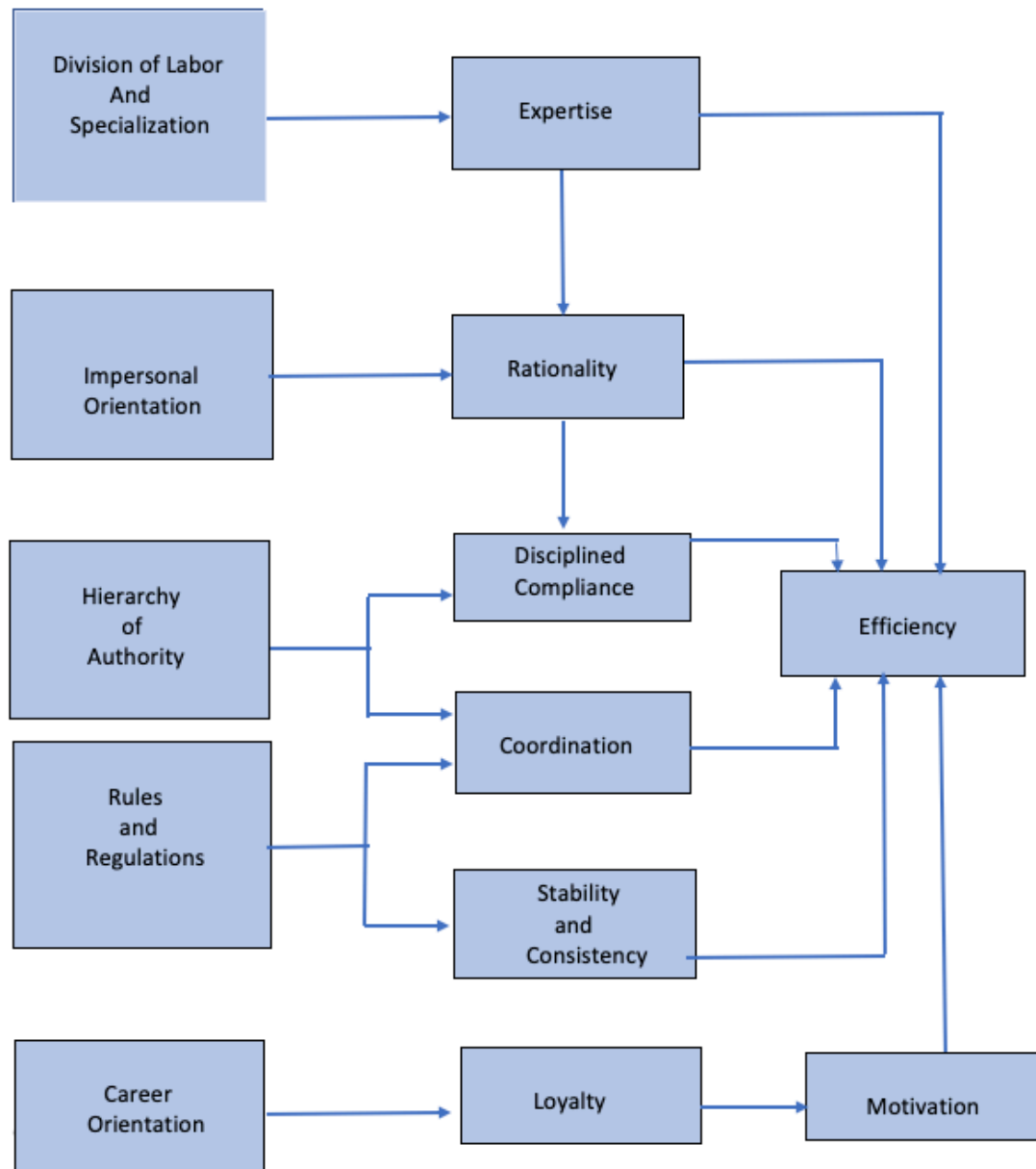
Structure is the path to efficient organization. To Weber (1947, p. 337), bureaucracy is the structure that maximizes rational decision making and administrative efficiency. How? Division of labor promotes specialization, which in turn produces expertise. Experts with an impersonal orientation make technically correct, rational decisions based on the facts. Once rational decisions have been made, the hierarchy of authority ensures disciplined compliance to directives and together with rules and regulations, a well-coordinated system of implementation, uniformity, and stability in the operation of the organization. Finally, a career orientation provides the incentive for employees to be loyal to the organization and motivation to exert extra effort.

Ideal Type

Weber describes bureaucracy as an ideal type, that is, as an abstraction meant to underscore the most significant and important features of the construct of bureaucracy. As a conceptual tool, Weber highlights the basic tendencies of actual bureaucratic organizations:

- Division of labor (specialization)
- Impersonality
- Hierarchy of authority (centralization)
- Rules and regulations (formalization)
- Career orientation

This ideal type is useful to administrators for diagnosing functional and dysfunctional consequences of structure. It also can serve as a guide to help determine the degree of bureaucratization. Some organizations will be more bureaucratically structured than others. For example, an organization can be more bureaucratized on one characteristic and less on another. The bureaucratic model raises important questions about organizing different kinds of formal organizations. Consider the follow questions: Under what conditions are the dimensions of bureaucracy related in order to maximize efficiency? Under what conditions does bureaucracy hinder efficiency? What are the negative effects of the dimensions of bureaucracy. How can one maximize the positive consequences of bureaucracy while minimizing its negative ones? (Hoy & Miskel, 2013)



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Figure 1 A Simplified Model of Bureaucracy