

## Characteristics of Bureaucratic Organizations

Bureaucratic organizations in the U.S. share the following characteristics:

Specialization of issue areas: These organizations focus on particularly narrow fields of administration, such as labor and education. They are also divided internally in terms of decision making fields into specific programs, organizational functions such as budgeting and IR, etc. This explains both the large number of agencies, sub-agencies and departments as well as the division of issues amongst these entities. By having such as multiplicity of agencies and sections within agencies, decision making is simplified to the specific area for that entity; other decisions must be made by other entities.

Hierarchy in organizations: Decision making powers of organizations are divided up amongst staff and line in organizations, with managers having more power; this is a major part of their job description. Lower-level employees do not have this power, but also do not have the additional responsibility and can process their tasks more readily because they are simpler. Higher-level employees have to make more decisions and on a wider variety of issues.

Merit-based personnel: People working in organizations should be qualified in terms of education, experience or other essential characteristics for the job. Organizations may also recruit people who come from backgrounds that reflect the values of the organization, making their behavior more predictable. These qualities can be detected through screening processes such as exams and interviews. But unlike the previous patronage-based system, political party affiliations or views are not supposed to be part of this process.

Formalization of procedures: Bureaucracy is regulated by internal rules and procedures that formalize how tasks are accomplished. Formalization of procedures makes clear what is necessary to accomplish tasks, and what is not possible or tolerable. Applying for social service benefits, for example, may require using income level or employment status to determine eligibility for benefits, but issues such as race of recipient may not be considered as it could lead to discrimination. Formal procedures ensure equal treatment for all recipients of services from agencies and accountability for members of agencies if something goes wrong with the process.

Impersonality of Service: Members of organizations are expected to treat recipients of services impersonally, to ensure equal treatment of all people at all times. This does not mean that members of organizations are not compassionate; rather, it means that members of agencies must have a commitment to a level of service that effectively serves recipients of the agency's services without discrimination. An agency that does not care about its recipients is ineffective; its members should reflect this culture and attitude.

## How Can Bureaucracy Be Reduced? Four Methods

*Termination* is the outright elimination of agencies or their programs. While this seems like an ideal solution for removing bureaucracy, it is difficult given that executive agencies tend to build constituencies that depend on them and that often strongly object to the agency's destruction. Very few actual agencies are eliminated after they have been instituted.

*Deregulation* is the elimination of rules created by agencies, thus reducing their work. This form of "de-bureaucratization" has been common in agencies that evaluate the performance of food processing and other related production as well as agencies that deal with the financial sector. However, recent scandals regarding lessening of regulation have made this route unpopular. Regulation may actually increase in future.

*Devolution* is the shifting of implementation of programs to the state and local levels, with the intent to eliminate national agencies and to hopefully improve the programs by sending them to lower levels of the federal system. A good example of this is the transfer of most forms of welfare payment programs to the state level during the Clinton Administration. On the good side, states and localities can often innovate and improve the administration of programs, as happened in some cases with welfare. On the bad side, not all states can provide the funding or administration needed to implement the programs adequately. As noted in the texts, much of the funding is still coming from the central government, so a large federal role actually still exists.

*Privatization* is the shifting of implementation to private organizations or contractors. This was and continues to be a popular option for streamlining federal agencies because it simplifies the hierarchy and steps needed to implement projects. However, these new private agencies do not have the same degree of internal management and accountability as public agencies do creating potential problems. Private contracting in Iraq for provisions and security resulted in allegations of waste, inappropriate management, and in the case of security, abuse (Abu Ghraib, Blackwater).