Introduction: Understanding Bureaucracy

This book is a practical guide to bureaucracy. It is practical because a group of twenty-five student interns in the New York City Urban Corps challenged an academician to be practical.

THE CHALLENGE

The challenge came in the form of an invitation. Would I, asked a voice at the other end of the telephone, come down to New York's City Hall and tell interns about to enter the city bureaucracy what to expect? No matter how down-to-earth an academician is in the classroom, there is only one reaction to such a request: stark, naked panic. After years of work in generalizations and abstractions, I was asked to give practical advice that would be tested. Not only was my own reputation at stake with the interns, who would soon enough encounter the realities of bureaucracy, but the interns themselves would be tested by seasoned bureaucrats.

The credibility of the academic world and its relevance to society had been very much on my mind. I had just become director of a small consulting firm on urban educational and administrative problems. Half the reason for the existence of that firm was my own experience that academicians had created around themselves their own little world of unreality. The other half was the remnant of an earlier faith that academicians still did have something to tell practitioners. Here was my first personal test.

What was bureaucracy all about? What could an individual expect the first day he or she walked into an office? What should he or she expect in order to survive?

What could I tell newcomers about modern bureaucracy?

THE KEY

Half a century ago, sociologist Max Weber recoiled from the bureaucratic future in horror. Like George Orwell and Aldous Huxley he saw a strange
new world in which not the brave but the dehumanized would survive. What if we started taking seriously Weber's classic characterization of bureaucracy and his condemnation of its inmates? After all, he did foresee a future populated by nonentities—“Specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart; this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilization never before achieved.”

Planted like time bombs through his famous essay on bureaucracy, temporarily defused by the neutral language of his “constructive” insights, lay the fragments of Weber's vision of a terrifying reality.

Bureaucracy* gives birth to a new species of inhuman beings. People's social relations are being converted into control relations. Their norms and beliefs concerning human ends are torn from them and replaced with skills affirming the ascendancy of technical means, whether of administration or production. Psychologically, the new personality type is that of the rationalistic expert, incapable of emotion and devoid of will. Language, once the means of bringing people into communication, becomes the secretive tool of one-way commands. Politics, especially democratic politics, fades away as the method of publicly determining society-wide goals based on human needs; it is replaced by administration.

Daily experience with bureaucracy showed this picture matched reality. The time had come, I decided, to set off the time bombs, and—as bureaucrats themselves reacted to the resulting explosions—it has become increasingly necessary to show what goes into the building of bureaucracy as the bomb that threatens humanity.

Newcomers deserve to be told they are not facing minor adjustments when they enter or deal with bureaucracy but a challenge to alter all their orientations and behaviors. Old-timers in bureaucracy deserve to be told what lurks behind the pressures that threaten to turn them not only into one of the most severely criticized category of jobholders anywhere in the world but into the most suspect of human beings.

A president may say this of bureaucrats:

You may have been told that government workers are clockwatchers; you will soon find that the vast majority of them are dedicated not to their paychecks but to the job to be done. You may have heard that government positions involve nothing but plodding routine tasks; you will see some of the most exciting, interesting work in the world being done here. You may have read that public servants are unimaginative, security-seeking, uncreative, skilled only at the techniques of empire building; you will quickly discover that we have far more than our share of lively minds, endowed with vigor and courage.

But bureaucrats themselves find it useful to draw radical distinctions

*With Max Weber, I here use the term "bureaucracy" as a shorthand for all modern organization, public or private, including business and industrial corporations as well as public service agencies organized according to the rationalized principles of modernity.
between what it takes to survive in bureaucracy and what it takes to live social life on the outside. Especially those who survive and are successful know that:

1. Life in bureaucracy is radically different from life in society.
2. Unique pressures—social, cultural, psychological, linguistic, and political—shape the bureaucrat's life and determine what he or she will become.

One way of achieving an overview of the distinctions is to visualize them in terms of misunderstandings and understandings of bureaucracy:

Misunderstandings

Socially- Bureaucrats deal with people.

Culturally- Bureaucrats care about the same things we do: justice, freedom, violence, oppression, illness, death, victory, defeat, love, hate, salvation, and damnation.

Psychologically- Bureaucrats are people like us.

Linguistically/Cognitively
Communication with bureaucrats is possible: we all speak the same language, we think the same way.

Politically- Bureaucracies are service institutions accountable to society and ruled by politics and government;

Understandings
Bureaucrats deal with cases.

Bureaucrats aim at control and efficiency.

Bureaucrats are a new personality type, headless and soulless.*

Bureaucrats shape and inform rather than communicate; they are trained to think the way computers think.

Bureaucracies are control institutions increasingly ruling society, politics, and government.

The issue is not whether there are among bureaucrats those who are dedicated to getting the job done, those who do exciting and interesting work, and those of lively mind and hearts endowed with vigor and courage. Such dedication, excitement, and interest, such hearts and minds do exist. The question is whether they exist because of or despite bureaucracy. If bureaucracy enables, what are the kind of social life, the

*The terms "headless" and "soulless" here evoked strong protests from some employees of modern organizations. It may be worthwhile to point out that these terms reflect a tendency that bureaucratic life forces on bureaucrats rather than the actual characteristics of specific individuals.
kind of values, the psyche, the kind of speaking and thinking, the kind of politics that are enabled? And what qualities of human life are disabled or destroyed? No one denies the monumental accomplishments of modern civilization, with bureaucracy-public and private-at its spearhead. But the question human beings will inevitably ask is: Who or what is being speared?

Newcomers or outsiders, in order to deal with bureaucracy, need to understand just how the bureaucratic experience differs from ordinary social life. If bureaucrats are to understand just what sacrifices this most powerful of human organizations requires of them as human beings, they themselves need to learn just what it is that bureaucratic structures around them require of them.

In sum, the bureaucratic experience that awaits us differs from the social experience behind us in five ways: socially, culturally, psychologically, linguistically/cognitively, and politically. Each of these five differences deserves exploration in depth. The rest of this introduction provides a survey; it is based on the lecture I delivered to those twenty-five interns. Chapters 1 through 5 provide the details.

**BUREAUCRACY AS A STRANGE NEW WORLD**

Anyone who has set out from familiar daily life to tangle with bureaucracy knows that bureaucracy and society are worlds apart. The distance can seem as far as that from the earth to the moon. It is not impossible to get there and back, but surviving the journey requires learning not only a new set of behaviors but a new mode of life. We must be attuned to both the home world and the new world.

**The Bureaucratic Experience**

People have difficulties with bureaucracy. This is true for the administrator who suddenly finds himself or herself in charge of and held responsible for an instrument of purported power and control that eternally squirms and wriggles to escape the grasp. It is true for newly hired workers in a bureaucracy who have to learn a new set of behaviors, norms, and speech patterns to get along and keep their jobs. And it is true for the outsider who wants to do business with a bureaucracy-get a tax refund, register a birth or death, secure a passport, license an enterprise, obtain police protection, or enter a child in school. Quite similar problems exist for the manager trying to control a corporation's sales force; the employee learning to talk, act, and think the way employees typically talk, act and think at IBM, CM, or ITT; and the customer attempting to get Macy's credit department to correct a mistake the computer made.

If we have experienced bureaucracy in any of these roles, and none
of us can long avoid such contact, we have to admit to ourselves that we have great difficulty with bureaucracy—attuning to it, communicating our needs to it, and obtaining satisfactions from it. No matter how astute we are, these difficulties exist, and we may feel that if only we could explain the reasons for such tensions we might be able to do better for ourselves in future contacts.

BUREAUCRATIC SOCIETY

The fundamental reasons for our difficulties were spelled out by Max Weber in warnings to which we seem not to have paid much attention. Perhaps to do so would result in too painful a recognition of the vastness of the chasm between social life and bureaucratic existence. Bureaucracy in its modern form, Weber concluded, constitutes the creation of a new world of human interaction. A transformation of normal human life began specifically with the development of modern organization.

In this new world of organized human interaction, it is entirely possible that a baby entrusted to welfare agencies may die of neglect even though in the words of a welfare administrator "everyone concerned did his or her job conscientiously." 12

In normal human life, Weber points out, people relate to one another through the meaning each attaches to his or her actions -- meaning to which the other responds. 13 Responsibility means acting in keeping with mutually defined meanings. The bureaucrat, on the other hand, is restricted to those actions permitted by the job rules and program requirements. These are defined systemically and from the top down. As a welfare administrator said in the case of the baby cited above—an eight-month-old who died weighing only seven (7) pounds: "There was never a complaint filed with the state's Central Registry charging neglect or abuse." 14

In the organized system, the bureaucrat is not officially allowed to tune in to the subjective meanings and needs that a client may be trying to convey. The bureaucrat must tune in only to those meanings and needs that have official standing. The result: it is possible for a baby to die even though advocates for the homeless may charge that the baby "spent repeated nights without shelter sleeping on the floor" of a welfare office and that "he was constantly seen dying by Human Resource Administration workers, but none intervened to protect him." 15

When social interaction becomes organized, those actions become rational that are logically in line with the goals of the organization. This is what Weber meant when he said, "Bureaucracy is the means of transforming social action into rationally organized action." 16 Personal responsibility becomes systemic accountability. The system may have faults, but this does not mean we can assign blame to persons operating the system according to rules defined by those faults.
Thus the press may roast the Pentagon bureaucracy for being unable to find an officer who would shoulder responsibility for a crash that, in 1985, killed 248 soldiers aboard a chartered plane at Gander, Newfoundland, but such criticism is simply inappropriate. Accountability, like the military's transport system as a whole, is systemic: the system might be maldesigned but, at best the dutiful officer is accountable to that system and not responsible to outsiders with their separate social values.

That generals act like bureaucrats rather than warriors may be frustrating, but it is surprising only to the uninitiated. In the case of the dying baby, the government charged with his care could honestly report that while the system had weaknesses—which could be corrected after the fact by introducing nurses and physicians to welfare offices—all the system's workers did their jobs properly.

The goals of the bureaucratic social system may in themselves be human or humane. It is just that other human and humane goals not encompassed in the system's objectives cannot be considered by those functionaries who carry out its objectives—at least not in their official capacity. Such goals or needs stand logically outside the goals and needs of the bureaucratic system. They are, in the system's terms, "illogical" and therefore irrational." It is one of the great ironies of bureaucratic interference in social life that those most in need of whatever help bureaucracy might be able to offer also feel least effective in dealing with it. A study for the U.S. Congress showed that only 46 percent of people with an income below $5,000 felt themselves to be highly effective when dealing with bureaucracy; the figure was 69 percent for those with an income over $15,000.

Great care must therefore be taken, it would seem, in the design of the objects of bureaucratic systems so as to give a chance to human interaction at the functionary/client level. But this may not be enough. Bureaucracy's need for control may impose a form of social interaction incompatible with situations in which people need to care for each other. It may be true, as defenders of public bureaucracy have argued, that "Governments gets the messy jobs, and government agencies have many goals imposed on them," goals that private bureaucracy-business can't handle. But the problem may be that any type of organization that insists on rationally organizing social interaction may be systemically unfit to take care of goals and policies that require caring human interaction.

In summary, bureaucracy changes the way human beings relate to one another as social beings:

1. Bureaucracy replaces ordinary social interaction, in which individuals act by mutually orienting themselves to each other, by rationally organized action, in which individuals orient themselves to goals and meanings defined from the top down.
2. Bureaucracy replaces mutually defined meaning of social action by orientation toward systems functions.

The extent to which the bureaucratic world is not the normal human world can also be understood psychologically, Weber himself pointed out that bureaucratization favors the development of "the [new] personality type of the professional expert." Because Weber did not develop this theme further in psychological terms, we may have missed that he was speaking about the creation of a new, truncated type of human being.

THE BUREAUCRATIC PERSONALITY

Clients find bureaucrats cold and impersonal. But clients have an escape. They can sacrifice what bureaucracy has to offer. They can cut down on dealing with bureaucratic personalities. Most clients, except the most dependent, can turn to other aspects of life-like economic enterprise, social life, and politics. Their own personality is shaped by other than bureaucratic demands.

Bureaucrats are not so lucky. Their job contract with bureaucracy soon becomes a psychological contract: This they cannot escape. Pulled on a daily basis between the human demands of social life and the organizational demands of work life, they live in the tension between two personalities. One is integrated and in charge of itself. The other is fragmented by division of labor and hierarchy and under the control of others. (See Chapter 3.)

Two forces originating in organizations' structure shape the bureaucratic personality. First, there is always someone else who is in charge of what you do (hierarchy): deciding whether what you do is socially right or wrong. Hierarchy relieves you of personal conscience and guilt. In psychological terms, hierarchy acts as the individual's superego. Second, what you do is predefined by job description, rules, and the division of labor. This relieves you of having to decide for yourself what work activity is most appropriate for the task at hand. In psychological terms, job definition replaces ego function, the function of mastering the world out of one's own sense of what works.

Individuals respond quite differently to modern organization's demand that, when push comes to shove, members must check their conscience and sense of mastery at the plant gate or office door. One consultant reports this response from bureaucrats to whom the institution’s demand for ego and superego control was pointed out:

Now, clearly, they would make this argument: Yeah, there are those people who work there whose ego may be questioned in terms of the fact that they are conformist or that they are terribly compliant civil servants, and therefore will do whatever their superiors tell them to do.
But this total collapse in front of bureaucracy's demands is not the experience of most:

Their experience was more often that political appointees in leadership positions, for example, would make things difficult for them, but that they could make things difficult for those political appointees, given their position in bureaucracy over time and the history they have in their organization, and so forth. So in that sense what they were describing was this tension: given the constraints how can they maintain ego integrity or self integrity?

Psychologically, then, the bureaucrat lives a daily life suspended in the tension between organization structure and self. Psychology itself, however, cannot tell us anything about the ultimate degree to which bureaucracy is the enemy of self. Human beings, it could be argued, have always had to adapt themselves to their environment. Yet, in the bureaucratic environment, which human beings themselves constructed, they may have overemphasized essentials of human nature that so finally challenge other essentials as to nearly destroy human nature. There is something fundamentally wrong with bureaucracy and not with the individual bureaucrat. The individual always retains his or her human potential. This becomes apparent only when the psycho-logic of bureaucracy is pushed to its logical conclusions. The result becomes clear in two ways: when bureaucracy pushes a human being to the ultimate extreme by "terminating" him or her, and when bureaucracy's basic values themselves are changed as has happened in recent attempts to humanize bureaucracy.

Douglas LaBier, a Washington psychoanalyst dealing with government employees, describes the pain of a perfectly well-adjusted federal bureaucrat when the environment became less bureaucratic:

A federal bureaucrat went along for years perfectly happy in his role of giving pain to other bureaucrats on behalf of his boss. This individual's sadomasochistic personality fitted his official role of "hatchet man." The hatchet man's boss upheld a strictly top-down chain of command by a reign of terror. Finally the boss was replaced by a new boss who believed in letting employees help in deciding policy as part of a participative management style.

No longer afforded a legitimate channel for expression the hatchet man's previously "well adjusted pathology now erupted as the work environment changed to become healthier."

The hatchet man now began to actively interfere in the work of the division, badmouthing people behind their backs, sabotaging projects that were being worked on, trying to disrupt communications by impeding the flow of memos, and the like. Finally, in pain, he went to see the psychoanalyst, who asked not the usual questions about childhood, but: "Has anything changed in your work lately?"

The symptoms and the pathology are specific to the hatchet man and situation, but the pain is universal. An entire new movement of
psychoanalytically oriented organization analysis beginning in the 1970s has found that bureaucracy produces pain. (See Chapter 3.) The efforts of psychoanalysts focusing on work is to alleviate such pain. But there is something that psychoanalysts are specifically prevented from doing by their own competence in dealing with the psyche. This is to undertake the social and cultural analysis that shows why bureaucracy is an ultimate challenge to all human beings.

The origin of emotional tension at work, of pain, of an ultimate challenge to the humanity of people lies in the structure of modern organizations itself. It is not to be sought in the individual weaknesses of inmates. This becomes most dear when the bureaucracy "terminates" a bureaucrat. A former contract administrator for a private bureaucracy - the office of mining company:

I didn't really mind getting fired. The company had been in trouble for a long time. What I did mind was passing my boss every day in the hallway and his being unable to look me in the eye, say hello, much less smile. I still had two weeks to go before I'd actually have to leave. He'd see me coming down the hall and he'd turn away.

How did that feel?

Why, it makes you feel like you're nobody—a nonentity!

The challenge of bureaucracy to all humankind is not essentially a psychological one. Bureaucracy is not satisfied with disordering the psyche by breaking away large chunks of it and reordering the psyche by distributing it over in organizational structures. Bureaucracy also challenges an individual's entire being. The Greeks had a word for it: being = ontos. The fundamental challenge of bureaucracy is not merely a psychological one, it is an ontological challenge. The individual submits to it in agreeing to the initial work contract. Once major functions of the self are placed outside the self-conscience in hierarchy and mastery in job definition—the individual has surrendered his or her being to the organization. This also explains how the organization retains its hold over the individual. An individual trained in letting the organization make decisions of conscience and mastery for her or him over many years loses the ability to refer to her or his own standards for what is right or wrong and whether work is done well. Without the functions originally surrendered to the organization and now lodged there, she or he is—nobody. Not accidentally do we speak of "Incorporation." The driving force for all social relations, political power, and administrative control in bureaucracy therefore is the experience of a nameless fear that without one's job one will cease to exist. The driving force of bureaucracy, its hold over humankind, is existential anxiety.

In summary, bureaucracy radically alters the psyche of human beings:
1. Bureaucracy replaces autonomous personality with organizational identity.
2. Bureaucracy takes the functions of conscience (superego) and mastery (ego) out of the individual's psyche and distributes them across organizational structures: hierarchy and the division of labor.
3. Bureaucracy, in creating dependency of the individual self on structures of the organization (in effect, mingling self and organization), controls its functionaries by manipulating the existential anxiety over loss of being that a separation from the job threatens.

BUREAUCRATIC CULTURE: PARADOX OF NEEDS

Modern organization was designed to take care of human needs; yet everywhere in modern organization human needs lie in chains. This paradox of bureaucracy is already evident in the new type of action and the new type of personality required. Each person involved with bureaucracy – administrator, employee, client – experiences this paradox in his or her own way. Each stands in a different location in relation to the bureaucracy and therefore has his or her own perspective.

The daughter of an eighty-five-year-old woman admitted to a Bakersfield, California, hospital with a heart attack is told three weeks later that her mother is being moved to a nursing home:

I said what she needs is acute-level care and they said, Well, they can give her the same care over there. And I said, Well, I know they can't because they're not equipped for that, you know. So -uh-she said, I'm sorry-this is one of the sisters at the hospital. She said, we're losing money on her and Medicare won't allow her to be here any longer. So, she said, she has got to go. [Two days after the phone call, the woman was moved out.]... And they strapped her down, and put her in the ambulance, and took her over to the convalescent hospital. Well, I stayed with her all day, and I came home about 9/9:30 that night, and in three hours they called me and said she was dead.

A hospital spokesman, denying that the woman was moved for economic rather than medical reasons:

We have the responsibility, too, to remind the physician of his responsibility to let the patient and the patient's family know where they stand in terms of the benefits of an insurance plan, or Medicare plan, versus the economic resources that have been expended toward the patient's care.

The physician who approved the woman's discharge:

Question: Was that based on medical reasons or what you call pressure from the hospital to get her out of here?
Physician: I think I can honestly say I just felt pressure to release her. I’ll never be coerced into doing something like that again.

The case, an entirely predictable result if we understand the bureaucratization of human needs, is not unique. These instances are the result of a government-mandated program in which physicians are asked to place
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patients in standard categories — diagnostic-related groups or DRG’s — for which typical length of stay in hospital has been established. If length of stay exceeds the norm, the hospital is no longer reimbursed by Medicare.

The origins of the cultural paradox lie in this: The client approaches the bureaucracy with a full set of human needs. These are interrelated. But a policy or program is designed to satisfy only one or a few of them. More important, there is the essential difference of how needs are defined by a living human being and an organization, constructed by humans but not human itself.

You and I as human beings define our needs according to projects—something we as yet hope to accomplish in our lives. Literally: project = a plan that throws us ahead of ourselves on behalf of ourselves. We are not what we have just finished being yesterday but what we intend to be tomorrow and are becoming today. In short: life goes on. (Or, it will, if bureaucracy lets us.)

In contrast, bureaucracy defines needs not by projects for the future but by standards of policies and programs defined in the past. The legislation, the policies, and the programs that bureaucracy administers set standards of yesterday for what it takes for a human being to become a "case" today—to be served or controlled. The evidence for becoming a case, including assessment of need, is determined by rational, scientific, and legal standards; these look to the past: to what already is. The artificial construct that is the organization cannot encompass the ongoing fullness of human life, which looks not only backward, but lives ongoingly in the present, and looks in anticipation toward the future. This is so simply because organization is not life. Bureaucracy in its administrative function must, to follow the policy standards that authorize it to act, look at human needs not as if they were part of an ongoing project of a living subject but as if they were finished characteristics of a dead object.

This backward-looking orientation of bureaucracy is often obscured by the actual experience of bureaucrats. In actually applying the standards of the past—for example, those of the lawbooks or of the precinct captain's orders of the day—the cop on the beat must hurl himself or herself into the future and its not-yet-defined possibilities. In short, the officer must make contact with reality. That reality creates itself ongoingly before the officer; to survive on the job he or she must deal with it. The cultural tension within which the bureaucrat lives is defined by being torn between past enactments of a model of reality and present encounters with reality itself. No work at all can be done if the bureaucrat clings strictly to the enacted model of reality without hurling himself or herself into reality itself. Yet in even touching what is real—the objects and people in front of us, with whom we must deal—we desert the previously enacted model of that reality. That is why it is in the interest of managers and administrators—the police captain, for example—to have their subordi-
nates do nothing rather than be accused of corrupting the pure model of mandated actions and values that is inevitably tainted by contact with reality.

Thus the City of New York saw to it that all work of two "supercops" was halted when they succeeded in stopping the heroin flow in one precinct by permitting heroin to be available for their informers; the story is told in The Supercops. All work of bureaucrats is measured by past standards, not by current exigencies that rise out of reality. Examples abound; they may not be as extreme as the above, but their very subtlety testifies to their omnipresence.

All too often, studies have found that confidence and potential efficacy is reduced as future opportunities are increasingly defined by standards determined by the past. In the case of those who have allowed themselves to be defined as "the poor," the experience of the past - "the culture of poverty" - closes in on them.

But the middle class does not escape unscathed. It cannot fail to strike an ironic eye that the often praised ability of the middle class to adapt to and even manipulate bureaucratic rules may merely subject members voluntarily to the past orientation of the bureaucratic environment, whereas their lower-class fellow citizens are forced into it.

A past orientation, in fact, also characterizes top-level bureaucrats. When Robert S. McNamara, and his generation of computer geniuses, took over the Department of Defense in 1961, they also assumed that the defense needs of the nation could be satisfied by designing programs that would efficiently adhere to previously established and well-defined, measurable goals. Following the advice of economists instead of soldiers, McNamara then went ahead to conduct a war by past standards and by the numbers -- the Vietnam War. He lost it to those who treated war not as a means to achieve past ends but as a way of shaping a future whose exact character could not be known.

The Bureaucratic War

Since Max Weber, we have recognized two cultures at war with each other in modern civilization. One still clings to what we hold worthwhile in ordinary social life. The other, rising culture defines what the bureaucratized believe worthwhile in the all-encompassing world of modern organizations.

The traditional values of human life, as the contemporary philosopher and sociologist Jurgen Habermas has said, focus on "justice and freedom, violence and oppression, happiness and gratification, poverty, illness and death, . . . victory and defeat, love and hate, salvation and damnation." They are ultimate values: they define what Life is all about.

In contrast Weber summarized the norms of bureaucratic life as
"precision . . . stability . . . stringency of discipline . . . reliability . .
calculability of results . . . formal rationality . . formalistic impersonality
formal equality of treatment." These are instrumental values: they
promise to serve as instruments by which human beings can achieve some
ultimate values. By design bureaucrats are intended to be instruments.
They are expected to fulfill their tasks without anger or predisposition.
Or as Weber says elsewhere:

Sine ira ac studio, without hatred or passion, and hence without affection
or enthusiasm. The dominant norms are concepts of straightforward duty
without regard to personal considerations. Everyone is subject to formal
equality of treatment; that is, everyone in the same empirical situation.
This is the spirit in which the ideal official conducts his office.

But from the beginning there is this question: Can neutral-in a
specific sense: heartless-administration take care of basic human needs
that are never experienced in a neutral way? It is not with formal
rationality or even with the demand for formal equality of treatment that
I, as the average client, approach bureaucracy. I want my needs taken care
of, ill-defined and even contradictory as they are. I experience myself in
my own unique way, through my own personality, with my own unique
set of problems. I do not easily present myself as a "case" to the
bureaucrat, to be processed following universal rules. The quality of my
life, my problems, my needs do not lend themselves easily to definition,
measurement, and decision.

In contrast the bureaucrat's experience of me is quite different.
Viewing the world through a perspective shaped by bureaucratic values,
the bureaucrat sees me not as a distinct individual with qualitatively
unique problems and needs but as number 98 of a mass of cases whose
claim to service or control can be logically determined and quantitatively
measured.

To the registrar of births and the county clerk, the addition of a new
family member is just "another birth," the addition of a simple mark in a
book of accounts. To me the birth of my daughter is an event full of
affection, enthusiasm, anxiety, joy, emotion, passion, and import. She is
my daughter. She has my eyes. My feelings about her, awakened by her
from within me, make me laugh and cry. She is my future, my burden,
my redemption-the transcending testimony of enduring lover my wife's
and mine.

To the Social Security official, a man's death is just another form
filled out; to his wife it is the death of her beloved or hated husband and
all he meant and all the things they ever did together and were to each
other.

To the welfare case worker, you and I are "cases" or we are not
"cases." If we are not "cases," the "case worker" is not allowed, on
eventual pain of losing his or her job, to recognize us or our troubles.
Even if we are cases, our troubles are troubles only if they fall within the bureaucracy's predefined cases of trouble. Bureaucracy encases us. We obtain its services or we are subjected to its controls if we fit its framework. To the extent that none of us ever fits perfectly into frames preconstructed to us by the reason of others, we can say, with the wrongly accused: We wuz framed! Originally designed as the tool of humankind, bureaucracy has turned humankind into a tool for its own ends.

Two basic critiques have been launched against bureaucracy as the result of the observed culture conflict:

1. We value life differently from bureaucracy.
2. We know life differently from bureaucracy.

The first is a simple cultural critique. Its tradition goes from Max Weber to Juirgen Habermas. Cultural critique juxtaposes patterns of values. It simply points out that bureaucracy finds different things worthwhile than do the rest of us who are outside it. These values--such as efficiency--were at one time considered tools for achieving human ends. Today, critics not only question whether a modern organization's internal values are compatible with human beings' values but point to instances in which bureaucratic values have distorted human values. For example, the closest the Pentagon has come to satisfying the human longing for peace has been to offer something sold as the bureaucratic equivalent: "permanent prehostility." This literally means always being ready for war, which is not everyone's idea of peace.

The second critique is more basic. If human beings outside bureaucracy know life in ways radically different from the way bureaucrats can know life, then the adequacy of all modern civilization for knowing what human life is can be put into question. For bureaucracy is the vanguard of modern civilization; it is the modernizer wherever it goes because it hones modern ways of valuing and knowing to a sharp cutting edge. Critics such as Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger point out that ways of knowing define reality. If we accept modernity's method of knowledge--knowing the world by reference to laws of nature and human nature outside of ourselves--we can no longer legitimately know those experiences of what it means to live life and be human that stand apart from such laws. On the practical level this means that I, as a client, am permitted to know myself only in bureaucratic terms. If I cannot accept the bureaucratic way of knowing me--taking cognizance of me--then I will simply not receive its goods. Or, in the extreme, if I don't know enough to get out of bureaucracy's way, it will simply steamroller over me. This critique is the more basic one because it puts once again in the forefront of our thinking the question: How do we know what we are as human beings? The suggestion is that modern knowing leaves us largely
unknown to ourselves. Bureaucracy stands in the way of knowing our humanity.

BUREAUCRATIC LANGUAGE AND THOUGHT

Bureaucracy's values and bureaucrats' way of knowing cut straight to the heart of how we speak and think in the modern world. As outsiders, as clients, we hear ourselves addressed from the top down in language that rings strange in our ears. Our very way of thinking about ourselves is questioned by the way we are challenged to think if we want to make contact with a corporation or government agency. The ordinary human being recoils from that encounter with bureaucratic language and thought in essentially the same way as this man trying to track down his delayed Social Security checks in Washington, D. C.:

Well, I’ll tell you something about this town. They got a secret language here. You know that? Bureaucratese. Same thing we used to call doubletalk. These government people, they don’t hear you. They don’t listen. You start to say something and they shut you out mentally, figuring they know right away what you’re going to say before you say it.

Here a client puts his finger on central experiences of all those dealing with bureaucratic language:

1. That bureaucratic language is different from ordinary language. It is, in fact, encoded in terms all its own. To the outsider these are secret terms, the language is a secret language.
2. That bureaucratic language is a power language. Bureaucrats address clients as if they had the right not to listen to them, assuming, rather, that clients must listen to them. This implies the presumption of power, that the bureaucrat has the means to enforce a speech situation in which he or she speaks (predefines) and others listen (are predefined).

Later we discover that the secret of bureaucratic language lies behind its technical terms, its jargon, and its affinity for acronyms in the way bureaucrats are taught to think. Reasoning deductively from general rules and by analogy from previously established case norms, bureaucrats speak a language that differs from ordinary speech exactly because it is created on a knowledge base that is top down and prior to experience: derived from the universal laws and rules that constitute modern knowledge of reality. We will conclude that:

1. In bureaucracy a new form of speech arises that is top-down instead of reciprocal in defining reality; information replaces communication.
2. In bureaucracy a new form of thinking comes to predominate: analogous thinking in which bureaucrats are trained to recognize reality only to the extent that aspects of it match a previously conceived model of reality; analogous

*For the full text of these observations, see the report of Pasquale Plescia in Chapter 4.
thinking replaces thinking with its original commitment to the exploration and discovery of new realities and possibilities.

In a new classic example of dependence both on top-down speech as definition of reality and on analogous thinking, employees of an airline simply denied as unreal the repeated reports by two passengers of a crashed plane that they had seen two fellow passengers fall out of the broken fuselage into Boston Harbor. A computer printout had not contained the names of the extra passengers. If they were not on the printout, they were not real.

As long as people trust that kind of knowledge and distrust their own experience that things in reality work quite differently from the way the rules say they should, bureaucracy retains the power to define reality through top-down speech. However, as we enter postmodernity, we find problems in industrial production and the provision of human services that cannot be defined top-down. Then new forms of speech, new ways of speaking to each other, new words arise from the bottom up and do battle with top-down words and thoughts that seem increasingly detached from reality. This also calls for a new focus on politics.

**Politics: The Revolt Against Control**

Politics is the enemy of administration. This is why wherever possible, bureaucracy attempts to transform politics into administration. As early as 1927, Max Weber asked questions such as these about the fate of politics:

Given the basic fact of the irresistible advance of bureaucratization, the question about the future forms of political organization can only he asked in the following way:

1. How can one possibly save any remnants of "individualist" freedom in any sense?…
2. How will democracy even in this limited sense [of a check and control on bureaucracy] be at all possible?
3. A third question, and the most important of all, is raised by a consideration of what bureaucracy as such cannot achieve. [How are politics and political leadership still possible in the sense of] battle for personal power and what follows from that power: personal responsibility for his own cause [which] is the lifeblood of the politician as well as of the entrepreneur ?.

By the end of our century, the replacement of politics by administration and the resulting loss of political vision has become epidemic. While political theorist Sheldon Wolin could write of the nineteenth-century, "At bottom the century desperately longed to transcend the political," twentieth-century organization theorists and political scientists could report solid and growing fulfillment of that longing. Wherever organization became dominant, democracy had to be, as Weber antici-
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Panted redefined. While Wolin points to Lenin's redefinition of democracy as "bureaucratic' in the sense that the Party is built from the top downwards," we can point to the rationalist redefinition of democracy by American political scientist Robert Dahl and others who empirically observed that democracy actually works as rule by shifting minorities--later called the plurality of elites. Politicians, political scientists, and other students of modern organization today observe not only the bureaucratization of democracy but of citizens, of politics through campaign management and technology, of interest groups, of courts, of Congress and other legislatures1 even of the president. The same president who praised bureaucrats also complained of the bureaucratization of everything that came before him:

Sooner or later it seems that every problem mankind is faced with gets dumped into the lap of the president right here in the center of it all. But by the time it reaches here, the problem has been dissected, sanitized, and cast into a series of option--almost as though they were engraved in stone. What is missing is the heart behind them, what they mean in human terms.

In fact a number of presidents have limited their political potential by checking off alternatives presented on "option papers, This is a bureaucratic approach to politics that assumes that choices are already present in the environment when, in reality, not even problems emerge fully shaped from the environment.

As a leading consultant and scholar on bureaucracy has noted, "Underlying every public debate and every formal conflict over policy there is a barely visible process through which issues come to the awareness and ideas about them become powerful." Political scientists have only of late issued warnings about keeping this process alive. Examining the increased use of staff by members of Congress, Michael Malbin warned that members of Congress were increasingly denying themselves the opportunity to get a sense for what was going on in other people's districts by personal contact with other members of Congress.

A representative system would require elected members from one district with one set of needs and interests, to talk to members from districts with different needs and interests, if the members hoped to achieve anything. Indirect communication, such as we see today, was not what was envisioned: direct communication among elected members was considered essential to informed deliberation.

Similarly, political scientist Raymond Cox, a longtime staffer in the Massachusetts legislature, cautioned against applying bureaucratic standards to legislative performance: "A legislature may be entirely functional without being either efficient or productive.

Ironically it has been in business that a politics of focusing on how problems are shaping up received its most potent recognition in recent
years. After decades of making policy from alternatives presented them by middle managers, engineers, and executive staff, the American automotive industry suddenly was confronted in the 1970s with the fact that its huge bureaucratic machinery had lost touch with reality. American car buyers were turning to Japanese products that actually functioned as cars. That is, Japanese cars had the ability to get you from one place to another with greater reliability than American cars. After defending itself like any bureaucracy against any input from reality that would endanger internal values, the industry finally turned to a single outside consultant—James Harbour, who had been beating on its doors for years—to hear what made Japan so much better. Within a few years, much of the American auto industry had begun to balance a system of top-down policymaking based on quantity with a bottom-up system of "political" consultation with workers who could tell management what was actually going on in the production line. By 1982, 41 percent of all American companies having more than five hundred employees reported they had worker-management participation programs. In these the goals of management could be brought in touch with knowledge of reality that only hands-on workers could have. Similar revolts against bureaucratized politics can be observed in the public sector.

The problem with the bureaucratization of politics is simply this: bureaucracy, both private and public, is infested with the modern bias toward believing that what is real is measurable. As early as the turn of the century, the philosopher Edmund Husserl, himself a mathematician, predicted that an increasingly mathematized civilization would eventually lose touch with the physical things it was measuring. The civilization had come to believe that all human activities could be predesigned according to universal laws. The model was physics. But an increase in mathematical knowledge about physics ultimately led to a neglect of the knowledge of the physical that comes to the worker when he or she lays hands on a wheel and an axle and tries to fit the two together.

Similarly, in official politics and public service, faith grew in policy clearly predefined and programs with measurable performance standards. These would produce intended results all by themselves. This faith now is challenged by the bureaucratic experience of those who actually lay their hand on things or on clients.

The collision between bureaucracy and politics can be summarized in terms of two opposing tendencies observable in modern civilization today:

1. There is a tendency to "rationalize" politics, to conduct it as if it were a rational process of making decisions among clear choices already formed in people's minds. This leads to the evaluation of politics and politicians according to bureaucratic standards. The central standard is measurability.

2. There is a countertendency to "derationalize" politics: to give renewed care to
those processes by which human beings define who they are, what their problems might be, and what possibilities arise out of conflict between what is already here and what is still possible. This leads to a conduct of politics according to a concern for how problems are framed before decisions are made about alternatives. The mode is one of discovery. New possibilities are evoked; the body politic is convoked. The central standard in politics as much as in economics, private production or public service is quality: from qua = what things are.

Five Foundations of Conflict

Bureaucracy continues its victory march around the globe. It changes human life socially, culturally, psychologically, linguistically/cognitively, and politically. It takes human needs and promises to erect a huge storehouse of goods and services that satisfies these needs. Only the most advanced modernized countries, and others modernizing but with a strong culture of their own, begin to suspect the cost: that, in order to satisfy human needs, bureaucracy must change them. The mentality is best expressed in the words of an American commander in Vietnam:

We had to destroy the town in order to save it.

Bureaucracy, as one psychoanalytic organization theorist has pointed out, is an externalized sell system that promises to construct an outer world of total security for a species of beings whose psyche is destined to struggle between both love and war. In its most grandiose worldwide structure—the nuclear balance of tenor supported by computerized armies and armies of computers, the ultimate bureaucracies—bureaucracy has produced permanent worldwide readiness for war as its answer to human longing for peace. Even at this early a stage of examining the bureaucratic experience, we can see that both its solutions to human problems and its methods are shot through with paradoxes like this.

Socially, bureaucracy brings people physically closer to each other than ever, by making them more interdependent; yet it does this by pushing them farther apart through replacing mutually oriented social action by rationally organized action. Strangers fill positions next to each other without ever looking at each other, each looking upward and outward for hierarchy or the system to tell him or her what to do. Ironically, this system of getting work done is the most powerful yet devised in human history—for that kind of work that can be conceived of and organized from the top down. Only the extent of informal organizations and actual work behavior that falls outside of the formal structure indicates just how much this top-down social structuring of work relies for its success on the voluntary associations of its workers as social beings and on the bottom-up knowledge of reality that only hands-on workers can have.

Psychologically, bureaucracy rips control over conscience and mastery
out of the psyche of the individual bureaucrat and deposits the functions in organizational structures: hierarchy and division of labor. What sense of self is left to the individual comes in terms of organization identity—what the organization says he or she is—not personality—who person becomes when left to grow and utilize all of individual psych potential. In the absence of the inner strength of knowing who we are that comes from an autonomous personality, we suffer recurrent attack of existential anxiety whenever separation from the bureaucratic home threatened. This anxiety also explains why we stay with bureaucracies even when it destroys us, and it is the basis for managers' manipulations of employees.

_Culturally_, bureaucracy replaces ordinary human cultural values with values of its own: values compatible with the inner needs of the bureaucratic machine. Permanent pre-hostility as a quantitatively measurable but qualitatively inadequate substitute for peace is only the most blatant and globe-spanning example. Ultimately, bureaucracy, like modern science and technology, places a faith in _quantitative_ measurement as a standard for what is real where there used to be a faith of human beings in the inner _qualitative_ experience of human life. However, this triumph of quantity is today being challenged, beginning with the decline in quality when control over quantitative aspects of time and space is exaggerated beyond human tolerances and below the utility of products in the mass production of goods.

_Linguistically/cognitively_, bureaucracy commands through the top-down definition of reality: defining what things are. By instilling the practice of analogous thinking, bureaucrats are trained to act only when they recognize aspects of _reality_ matching predefined _models_ for action. Top-down speech and analogous thinking, however, preclude the discovery of new problems and the shaping of solutions continuously adapted to a changing reality.

_Power-politically_, bureaucracy reaches its peak. Max Weber called it _a control instrument_ without compare. Created as the tool and servant of politics, bureaucracy today redefines politics by imposing on it bureaucratic standards. But especially in its encounter with politics, bureaucracy's limits become intolerably obvious. The more bureaucracy relies on the rationalization of everything—which ultimately means placing its faith in the most rational of all mental constructs: the world of numbers—the more it becomes detached from physical, social, and psychological reality. Politics, itself seduced into the process of rationalization and bureaucratization, shows its potential for being the single most important human tool for getting in touch with new realities exactly when rationalization and bureaucracy achieve their triumph. There is potential for both release and tragedy here. If humankind has to learn the lesson of reason's detachment from reality in an event as global as the
current international security structure for example, in a massive failure of a proposed Strategic Defense Initiative (Star Wars) system—it will be too late to celebrate a politics that focuses not on end-states but on human possibilities.

The personal and professional lessons that might be drawn from the analysis of bureaucracy as a separate culture with its own norms, behaviors, psychology, language, and political structure cannot even be outlined in an introductory essay such as this. In general, however, each of the persons most concerned with tackling the problems bureaucracy presents—managers, functionaries, and clients—might begin to recognize that the challenge is not one of making minor adjustments, such as "humanizing" management, "psyching out" the job in order to keep it, or "getting access" to get the goods.

Managers who "humanize" or "personalize" some of their relationships with their hierarchy (they obviously cannot personalize all relationships given the size of most bureaucracies) are not simply stepping on the toes of some people who will be jealous of such relationships from which they are excluded. They are, in fact, subverting the basic structure of modern organization: they are opening up to question the taken-for-granted value system that provides most functionaries with guidelines for success, attacking the identity of functionaries as organizationally defined and thus frightening the excluded to their very core, and factually and legally engaging in "corruption" in the true sense of the word by propagating emotional relationships that threaten death to rationally legitimated ones.

For functionaries the problem is not merely one of making a minimal adaptation to the bureaucracy. In most cases they must allow themselves to be brainwashed into new norms, change their personality structure from self-orientation to dependency, make bureaucratic language and thought their own, submit and uphold the hierarchic power structure, and cut themselves off from personal empathy and relationships with clients. To the extent they do not, the probability of official failure rises.

Clients are in the most difficult position. Without the institutional support given to recruits into bureaucracy, clients must learn a new language, think alien thoughts, tune in, to new norms, bow properly to immense institutional power, understand and flatter the bureaucratic personality, and try to become a "case." Paradoxically, especially in social policy bureaucracies, only to the extent that clients surrender their humanity are they given the bare promise of material support by which to uphold that humanity.

Each of these problem areas deserves separate investigation.
NOTES


3. Ibid., p. 975: "Bureaucracy develops the more perfectly the more it is 'dehumanized,' the more completely it succeeds in eliminating from official business love, hatred, and all personal, irrational, and emotional elements which escape calculation.

4. Ibid., p. 998: Bureaucratization favors development of "the [new] personality type of the professional expert." P. 968: Bureaucracy develops "the official's readiness to subordinate himself to his superior without any will of his own."

5. Ibid., p. 992: This is my expansion on Weber's comment regarding bureaucracy's interest in secrecy, extending even to the use of a "secret script." See chapter 4.

6. Ibid., pp. 987 and 991. See also p. 1403.

7. The book has now been used by all strata of civil servants at the federal, state, and local levels, in quasi-independent agencies and in the private bureaucracy of corporations. This third edition is fundamentally a response to their input.

8. For example, a congressional survey showed that 65 percent of the public and 57 percent of elected officials agreed with the statement, "The trouble with government is that elected officials have lost control over the bureaucrats, who really run the country." Source: U.S. congress, Committee on Government Operations Subcommittee on Intergovernmental Relations, *Confidence and Concern: Citizens View American Government* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1973), part 2, p. 115, and part 5, p. 61. Similarly, 73 percent of citizens and 80 percent of elected officials agreed that the federal government had become too bureaucratic. Ibid., part 2, p. 114, and part 3, p. 60.

9. Here bureaucrats are caught in a classic bureaucratic paradox: they may do their work well and yet the work itself may be criticized. A study that reports that 69 percent of a bureaucratic office's clients were "satisfied with the way the office handled your problem" says nothing about whether the clients wanted to be handled at all or whether the bureaucracy created the problem. Perhaps the office was the Internal Revenue Service, the local police station, or the county jail. See Charles T. Goodsell, *The Case for Bureaucracy: A Public Administration Polemic*, 2nd ed. (Chatham, N.J.: Chatham House, 1985), p. 25, reporting analysts' explanations for lower satisfaction in generalized attitudes toward bureaucracy in contrast to higher specific satisfactions. (Study cited: Daniel Katz, Barbara A. Gutek, Robert L. Kahn, and Eugenia Barton, *Bureaucratic Encounters* [Ann Arbor: Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, 1975.]) Questions about human satisfaction with bureaucracy cannot be asked from within the bureaucratic framework, when what is suspect is the framework itself.


11. Every civil servant I have ever taught has acknowledged the problem of attuning oneself to the realities inside the organization as distinguished from and often opposed to the realities outside the organization. People, situations, and things to be trusted are simply different in modern organizations than they are in ordinary social life. In fact, the issue of trust looms ever large for inmates of bureaucracies. For example, the 1979-80 Federal Employees Attitudes Survey asked bureaucrats to respond to the statement, "Employees here feel you can't trust this organization." Out of a survey of 13,799 bureaucrats, a total of 42.4 percent agreed, 16.2 percent were undecided, and 41.4 percent disagreed. Source: U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 197940 Federal Employees Attitudes Survey, "Measures of Trust, Efficacy, Participation, Authority and Communication and Their Distribution" reported in David Nachmias, "Determinants of Trust Within the Federal Bureaucracy," in


22. The technical terms "superego" and "ego" used here are Sigmund Freud's. But any modern psychology focuses on the conscience and mastery functions.

23. Personal communication with Prof. Michael A. Diamond of the University of Missouri, who has served as consultant for federal and state governments.


28. This case is reported from a transcription of an ABC "Nightline" television broadcast, Feb. 4, 1986.


30. As against the "culture of poverty" argument, it might be argued that some of the poor, because they tend to personalize human relations while middle-class people are better able to relate to one another impersonally, may actually escape bureaucratization. For the personal/impersonal difference between lower class and middle class, see Herbert Gans, *The Urban Villagers* (New York: Free Press, 1965).

31. McNamara was reported to have been strongly influenced by the work of economists Charles J. Hitch and Roland N. McKean, *The Economics of Defense in the Nuclear Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960). My thanks to Gideon Sjoberg for pointing this out.


35. Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, p. 225. Here *sine ira ac studio* is rendered differently. The German terms Weber used in the Staatssoziologie compilation are *ohne Zorn und Eingenommenheit*.

and Martin Heidegger, *What Is a Thing?*, Trs. W. B Barton, Jr., and Vera Deutsch (South Bend, Ind.: Regnery/Gateway, 1967).

37. This refers to Husserl and Heidegger's point that with the advent of modern physics what constitutes knowledge for the entire civilization is not based on qualities *inside of* things, as ancient Greek physics (valid up to Galileo) used to assume. Instead, knowledge is based on *external laws*, which measure quantities of things and their relations. Scientific knowledge of this sort denies the validity of the inner experience of life.

38. See Husserl and Heidegger, above, footnote 37, as well as the discussions of culture and cognition in chapters 2 and 4 based on Heidegger.


50. See Ralph P. Hummel, "Bottom-Up Knowledge in Organizations," paper delivered at the Conference on Critical Perspectives in Organization Theory, Sept. 5-7, 1985, Baruch College, City University of New York.