

Wahab et al: *The Effects of Bureaucracy and its Implications*

**THE EFFECTS OF BUREAUCRACY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR
ADHOCRACY IN THE WORKPLACE:
A STUDY OF LAGOS STATE UNIVERSITY**

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Abstract

Bureaucracy is a formal organization established in a deliberate manner for the realization of specific social goals. It is the dominant institution in modern industrial society. Unfortunately, bureaucracy has developed into objects leading to inflexibility and turning of means into ends. Adhocracy is the opposite of bureaucracy meant to reduce red tapism and rigidity in the latter. Data was collected from administrative staff of the Lagos State University in grade levels 7-14. Multi-stage sampling procedure was used to collect data from 180 respondents. In terms of data analysis, frequency distribution and simple percentile were used. The study found that about one-quarter of the respondents mentioned red-tapism as the major negative effect of bureaucracy. The workers complained of lack of discretionary power in decision-making as work was too centralized. In fact, others complained that it could lead to loss of interest in the job. Therefore, the overcentralised nature of decision-making process in the institution would retard the pace of work, thus the need for Adhocracy. The study therefore recommends the use of Adhocracy in order to improve efficiency and effectiveness in the work place.

Key words: Bureaucracy, Adhocracy, workplace and Over centralization

Introduction

The workplace is a business setting meant for efficiency and effectiveness towards achieving profit maximization. Every body has its own role to play towards achieving these goals. Yet, often workers are at odds with fellow workers. Those occupying the lower part of the organogram feel maltreated by those on top. There is no exception to the rule that things must be done orderly in any organization or establishment, be it in academic or business.

The ultimate aim of any organization is to attain certain pre-determined goals. In an attempt to survive and attain these goals effectively, certain decisions must be made on what type of structure the organization will possess which will entail guidance for individuals associated with the group as per their duties and day to day activities (Sycamnias, 2007). This includes determining the organizational structure best suitable to the attainment of the goals.

One such organizational structure found in today's society is Bureaucracy, developed by a German sociologist, Max Weber (1884 – 1930). The concept of bureaucracy is as old as modern industrial society, while the central theme is rationality (Taiwo, 2000). Weber's Bureaucratic structure is based on a combination of his belief in the market place with the

view that society was the product of rational construction; thus, the increasing dominance of the principle of legal authority in the work place. Weber's intention was to create an entirely rational system which was free of nepotism, whims and fancies of prior authoritarian systems while at the same time being characterized by rules and legal order and coping with the changes that were taking place within society at the time, including the rise of science, the development of industrial manufacturing, capitalism and its systematic pursuit of profit (Sycamniyas, 2007)

A lot of definitions can be found in literature, some of which would be provided. Haralambos (1995) sees bureaucracy as a hierarchical organization in which superiors strictly control and discipline the activities of subordinates. Odenigwe (1983) described bureaucracy as a formal organization established in a deliberate manner for realization of specific social goals. Some see it as a special type of formal organization, given that a formal organization is a form of social grouping that is established in a more or less deliberate or purposive manner for the attainment of a specific goal (Mouzelis, 1973).

Weber distinguished between three types of Authority. The first was Traditional Authority, which was based on the belief that rulers had a natural right to rule. The second was Charismatic Authority premised on the belief that rulers possessed unique personal qualities by which they are able to control their subordinates in institutions such as religion and heroism (as Hitler possessed during Second World War). The third was Legal-rational Authority indicating that formally written rules kept certain individuals in power. Using a combination of these ideas, Weber then developed his own concept of bureaucracy, characterized by the following distinguishing characteristics that includes rigid hierarchical structures, defined authority, compensation in form of fixed salary, technical knowledge, set rules and regulations, specification of tasks in an impersonal climate (Sycamniyas, 2007; Onyeonoru, 2002).

These would then lead to work being divided into parts, allocated to relatively special workers, dispersing responsibilities and centralizing authority to a small number of administrators. This entire structure would then take the form of a pyramid, with the managers on top, passing down rules to their subordinates (Sycamniyas, 2007). This is achieved by a precise and detailed definition of the duties and responsibilities of each position or office. The allocation of a limited number of tasks to each office operates according to the principle of fixed jurisdictional areas that are determined by administrative regulations. The bureaucrat is not selected out of primordial ties but on the basis of formal qualifications that testify that he has the necessary knowledge to effectively accomplish his specialized duties.

The task of large-scale administration or management of organization, which is the concern of bureaucracy, involves the challenge of controlling, managing and coordinating large-scale tasks or complex organizations typical of modern era. Bureaucratic organization was, therefore, for Weber, the dominant institution of industrial society (Onyeonoru, 2002).

Bureaucratic organization confers on the owners of the enterprise or administrators the legal right to control. The right emanates from the legal instrument that established the organization. The organization is further translated into various levels of authority relations in the organization through education and training, ability and skill, specialization and

professionalisation-expertise of actors within the organization (Weber, 1947; Freund, 1969; Fox, 1971; Schneider, 1980)

Weber's bureaucratic model has until recently dominated organizational thinking as the most universally acceptable and globally established form of mass organization (Onyeonoru, 2002). However, bureaucracy now connotes different meanings to different people in the workplace. To some people, it is nothing but rows of desks staffed almost by faceless people, for example the members of the public see it such. To others, it is a frustrating encounter with red tapism, as people do not get things done as quickly as they have loved. All these portray bureaucracy as an unpleasant institution (Ogunbameru, 1997).

One of the main benefits of bureaucracy as intended by Weber revolves around the establishment of rules and regulations. This is to increase the likelihood that employees would be treated fairly and the organization purged of favouritism, discrimination and prejudice.

Bureaucracy has also developed as a dirty word within the minds of many in the society, because it is seen as a development at the expense of individual freedoms such as choice (Sycamniyas, 2007). It also accounts for lack of flexibility and the tendency to turn means into ends. The emphasis on conformity and strict observance of the rules induces the individual to internalize them. In more recent years, organizations have developed a collaborated approach to structuring, combining the sturdiness of bureaucracy with the flexibility of 'adhocracy' (Sycamniyas, 2007).

The Concept of Adhocracy

Adhocracy is the opposite of bureaucracy. The term was first popularized in 1970 by Alvin Toffler and has since become a theory of management. Adhocracy is, for Mintzberg, what bureaucracy was for Weber. Adhocracy lays emphasis on teams, which frequently change their shape, personnel and structure. The teams are usually an organic mass of experts from different spheres of competence that specifically bring their skills to solve organizational problems. Adhocracy is defined as any form of organization that cuts across normal bureaucratic lines to capture opportunities, solve problems and get result (Sycamniyas, 2007). When adhocracy is well implemented, it can be very good at problem solving and innovations and thrives in a changing environment. It also requires a sophisticated and often automated technical system to develop and thrive (Wikipedia, 2007)

Adhocracy is a structural system that breaks away from the traditional ways of bureaucracy by not having formal rules and regulations; it is devoid of hierarchies, no standardized procedures for dealing with routine problems and is organized for a temporary life. The benefits of adhocracy are its flexibility and responsiveness in handling situations quickly and efficiently. At the same time, it allows for collaboration from specialists, thereby allowing for individual creativeness. Workers at all levels have direction as to their expected responsibilities. Similarly, smaller departments within each organization have been created to deal with individual cases that vary from overall goal set. As such, this system can have stability while at the same time dealing successfully with diversity that brings about changes within society (Sycamniyas, 2007).

It is against the background of the foregoing, that this paper intends to examine the negative effects of bureaucracy and advocates for the use of Adhocracy in the work place. It

also examines the level of autonomy or discretion granted to the various departments in the University as well as the emerging problems.

Methodology

The study involved the administrative staff on grade levels 7-14 in Lagos State University. This university is situated in the metropolitan area of Lagos State, Nigeria. The target population comprises vast majority of educated elements made up of male and female aged 18 and above. Data was collected using interview method among the selected respondents. Multi-stage sampling procedure was adopted in the administration of 180 well-structured questionnaires in the study area. This figure was derived from a comprehensive sampling frame and the study sample was representative enough. Survey design was adopted and primary data was collected from 7th - 25th February 2007 from 180 respondents. Specifically, individual-based structured questionnaire comprising 36 questions under 4 sub-sections were employed for collecting quantitative data from the respondents. In terms of data analysis, frequency distribution and simple percentile were employed.

All the 180 questionnaires administered were found to be clearly completed and were therefore analyzed. The unit of analysis was individual staff. The analyses were carried out using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) computer software. Cross tabulation was employed in summarizing and describing the data in line with the study objectives.

Discussion of Findings: Socio-Demographic Profile

The age distribution of the respondents, as at the time of the survey, is indicated in Table 1 of the appendix. Age among others constitutes a vital demographic parameter in describing characteristics of any population. A 10-year age grouping was used. The minimum age was 18 years. From the table, it was observed that the bulk of the population was relatively young as a result of the university policy of employing young and dynamic staff that are trainable. About 40 percent of the respondents were less than 30 years old. Another 40 percent of the respondents were between the ages of 30-39 years while about 17 percent of the respondents were between ages of 40 to 49 and finally less than 4 percent were in the age group of 50 and above.

In terms of sex, about 59 percent of the respondents were male while only 41 percent were female. The distribution of marital status shows that about 54 percent of the respondents that represents 98 percent of the respondents were married. This shows that majority of the administrative staff of this institution are married. On the other hand, about 24 percent of the respondents were single while about 9 percent of the studied population were either divorced or separated. Only 13.3 percent representing 24 respondents were widowed.

Another demographic parameter used was the educational qualification of the respondents. The table shows that about 48 percent of the respondents were secondary school leavers and more than one-third of the respondents actually attended tertiary institutions. Also, about one-tenth of the respondents were primary school leavers while only 8.4 percent of them possessed other qualifications like trade test certificate among others.

Length and Level of Service

Table 1 shows a cross tabulation of the length of service and age of respondents. For example, only one-tenth of the respondents have worked for 6-11 months. The table further shows that a majority of the respondents (51 percent) have spent between 6-15 years in the work place. Also, another 15 percent of the respondents have served for between 1-5 years in service while another 15.5 percent of the respondents have served for between 16-25 years in service. Finally, about 9 percent of the studied population has served between 26-35 years in service. This finding is very interesting bearing in mind that the university was established about 23 years ago. This indicates that some non-academic staff transferred their service from somewhere else. The implication is that most of the respondents have spent sometime on the job to have first hand information on it.

The table also shows percentage distribution of the level of service. It indicates that the majority of the respondents are found on the clerical and sub-clerical cadres. Thus, the clerical and sub-clerical cadres record the highest (71) which is about 39 percent and the second highest (55) which is 36 percent out of the total number of 180 respondents respectively. This finding agrees with an earlier finding whereby majority of the workers in the study possess the educational qualifications of WAEC/GCE needed mostly for routine jobs (Wahab, 2007). Also, about 11 percent were professionals while about 12 percent belonged to the executive cadre. Finally, about 7 percent of the studied population belonged to the administrative cadre.

Negative Effects of Bureaucracy on Decision Making Process

Table 2 of the appendix shows that red tapism is the major problem of bureaucracy while rigidity follows in terms of priority. About one-quarter of the respondents mentioned red tapism as the major negative effect of bureaucracy. Also, about 23 percent of the respondents said bureaucracy relied too heavily on the ranks neglecting the files while another 22 percent mentioned lack of initiative as a negative effect of bureaucracy. The significance of this finding is that not only can the negative effects of the organizational arrangement be identified but they can also be ranked orderly. Furthermore, respondents were asked to assess policy and decision making process of the university. The result shows an over-whelming agreement by 172 out of 180 respondents or 95.6 per cent that decision-making process in the university is either centralized or over centralized.

Thereafter, respondents were asked how much discretionary power was given to staff of the middle cadres. Table 2 shows that about 65 percent respondents are in agreement that staff in the middle cadre are not given enough discretionary powers. When asked about the effects of over-centralization, about 48 percent of the respondents said it does not allow for initiative, 24 percent responded that it makes them lose self-confidence, while 21 percent said it makes work unchallenging. When the senior workers (level 10 and above) were asked whether they would like their subordinates to use their initiatives when there is no direction for them to follow, the general opinion was “no”. The implication of the above is that work becomes unchallenging to such staff.

When asked about the adequacy of discretionary power given to middle cadre staff, more than 85 percent of the respondents mentioned either “very inadequate” or “inadequate” while only about 13 percent of the respondents said it was adequate. The study went ahead to

examine the implication of frequent supervision on job performance. About two-fifths of the respondents mentioned “lack of initiative” while about one-quarter said it leads to loss of sense of self-confidence. Another 21 percent of the respondents mentioned “loss of interest on the job” while only about 7 percent of the respondents said it gives them self-confidence.

Summary of Findings

The cumbersome nature of decision-making process and structure identified in the study area is a cause for worry. This is so bearing in mind the frustrating delays that result from the process with obvious implications. The major effect of over-centralization of authority is that it makes the subordinate staff to lack the necessary initiatives to treat issues.

The system depends too much on hierarchy, which in some cases is too long to make for quick decision-making and efficiency in administration. This routine process tends to be followed regardless of the nature or importance of the issue under consideration. For instance, the review of the university conditions of service has suffered undue delay since 1984 as result of rigorous processes it has to follow before any amendment can be effected. This ultimately will result in poor staff attitude to work, resulting in low job performance.

It therefore becomes apparent that over-centralization of decision-making process in the university not only retards the pace of the system, but also hampers the zeal of committed staff. For example, it would take more than six months for a sick student to be reabsorbed. This jeopardizes the academic life of such a student.

According to Johnson (1996) the diverse effects of this over-centralization of authority on the top hierarchy in a bureaucratic organization is that it makes the subordinate staff to lack the necessary initiatives to treat issues.

The paper therefore posits that the present system on the whole curtails the spreading of decision-making power, causes administrative bottlenecks, unnecessary delays in executing given tasks and indeed, results in gross inefficiency in the optimal utilization of the talents of both superior and subordinates alike.

This system reduces administration to a routine process because papers are passed from subordinates to superior officers, who in turn pass orders accordingly or forward them to their superior officers. The same routine tends to be followed too rigidly regardless of the nature or importance of the issue under consideration with the result that many administrators do not operate at a level commensurate with their responsibilities.

This subjects administration to intolerable delays due to the slow rate at which information that is relevant for decision-making flows from one subordinate to his superior until it reaches the highest officer in the organogram. For instance, the processing of students academic transcripts in LASU can take months due to the various hierarchical levels where it must be vetted before signed by the Registrar of the institution. This invariably results in drawbacks and unnecessary delay, despite the genuine intention to ensure standard.

Conclusion

Thus, in the light of the foregoing, it becomes apparent that the centralized nature of decision-making process in the institution not only retards the pace of work but also constitutes a handicap to the success of the statutory functions of the university. Drygle (1970) reported that productivity is higher in the organization that practices general rather

than close supervision because workers are allowed more freedom and this can improve their exercise of initiative and reduce absenteeism.

In the same vein, Ducker and Hage (1954) have shown in various studies that workers participation in decision-making that enlist individual creativity and enthusiasm, gives them the chance to contribute in setting organizational goals, builds power of groups and emphasizes the dual role of the supervisor as a member of the work group on one hand and management on the other.

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APPENDIX

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Socio-Economic & Demographic Characteristics

Variables	Frequency	Percentage	Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Sex					
Male	107	0.59	Length of service		
Female	73	0.41	6-11mons	18	10.0
Age			1-5yrs	27	15.0
Less 20yrs	33	18.3	6-10yrs	54	30.0
20-29yrs	39	21.7	11-15yrs	37	20.6
30-39yrs	71	39.4	16-20yrs	17	9.4
40-49yrs	30	16.7	21-25yrs	11	6.1
50+yrs	7	3.9	26-30yrs	10	5.6
Marital status			31-35yrs	6	3.3
Single	43	23.9			
Married	98	54.4	Level of service		
Divorced	3	1.6	Administrative	13	7.2
Separated	12	6.7	Clerical	71	39.4
Widowed	24	13.3	Sub-clerical	55	36.6
Education			Professional	19	10.6
Primary	18	10.0	Executive	23	12.2
Secondary	87	48.3			
Tertiary	60	33.3			
Others	15	8.4			

Source: Wahab, E.O. & Jawando, J.O. 2007.

Table 2: Effects of Bureaucracy, Decision Making Process and Degree of Discretionary Power

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Negative effects		
Red tapism	45	25.0
Dependent on ranks	42	23.3
Lack of initiative	39	21.7
Rigidity	35	19.4
Others	19	10.6
Decision making process		
Over centralization	70	38.9
Centralization	102	50.7
Decentralization	8	4.4
Over-decentralization	0	0.0
Don't know	0	0.0
Degree of discretionary power to subordinates		
Right discretionary power	58	32.2
Not even discretionary power	116	64.5
Too much discretionary	6	3.3
No opinion	0	0.0
Adequacy of discretionary power		
Very inadequate	96	53.6
Inadequate	58	32.1
Adequate	23	12.5
None at all	3	1.8
Frequent supervision on performance		
No initiative	70	39.5
Loss of sense of self confidence	44	24.2
Loss of interest	38	20.9
Brings out the best	16	8.9
Brings self confidence	12	6.5

Source: Wahab, E. O. & Jawando, J. O. 2007