

Max Weber's Bureaucratic Theory: Its Strengths and Weaknesses, and Adaptation to the Modern Era – A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis



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Keywords	Abstract
Bureaucracy start-up tolerance Humanism gender adaptation tradition and customs dictatorship political regime management	This paper presents a theoretical and empirical analysis of the positive and negative aspects of Max Weber's theory of bureaucracy. An anonymous survey was conducted as the primary empirical method, carried out within a private company based in Warsaw. The study takes into account both classical and modern elements of bureaucracy, including seemingly contradictory dynamics. For the identified negative aspects, potential solutions are proposed, while methods for further motivating the positive aspects are also discussed. In conclusion, the paper offers findings and recommendations based on both theoretical insights and empirical data. The events describe the stages through which the regime's impacts observed in professional life extend to personal life and social development.

Introduction

The word bureaucracy has its roots in Latin and Ancient Greek.

The first part of the word, bureau, originates from the Latin word burrus, which was used to describe dark or somber colors. A related term, la bure, referred to a cloth used to cover desks typically used by officials. Initially, bureau referred to the desk itself, but over time it came to denote the entire room in which official work was carried out.

The second part of the word, -cracy, derives from a Greek term meaning power or rule, and it refers to a form of governance or authority (wordpandit.com).

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In his initial reflections, Max Weber presents bureaucracy as the ideal type of a social administration institution and outlines its fundamental characteristics. Bureaucracy is based on a strict system of formal principles and rules, which—though varying in content depending on the sphere of application—are inherently expressed through impersonal forms. Weber identifies six core features that characterize this model of administration. These features are also elaborated in detail throughout his works (R.Aron 1992. P.578).

1. Bureaucracy operates as a system of rules and administrative laws. In other words, the reality of the bureaucratic sphere is governed by a set of formalized and depersonalized rules that provide a clear “algorithm” for action.
2. Max Weber also emphasizes the organizational form of the bureaucratic system, which manifests itself in a designated space (an office) that is separated from the personal affairs and property of the official.
3. Another feature of bureaucracy is the strict hierarchical distribution of authority within the system and the regulated procedures for the exchange of official information between the different levels of the bureaucratic hierarchy.
4. The transition from traditional society to modern society is accompanied by the emergence of a new social class—the bureaucratic class—which arose as a result of property owners delegating managerial functions to officials.
5. In order to implement general rules—which must be distinguished by their stability and structural coherence, respond to the demands of specific situations, and be as precise as possible—it is essential that officials receive professional training in law and administrative management.
6. Due to the specific requirements imposed by the bureaucratic system on its personnel, the position of the official becomes a profession that demands systematic education and training (R.Aron. 1992. P-578-580).

Max Weber conceptualized rationalization within the framework of bureaucracy. According to him, the emergence of a structured culture among individuals, economic stability, job dependency, and the preservation of societal values can only be achieved through bureaucratic rationality. While Weber acknowledged the adverse side effects of this process—such as the suppression or erosion of individual creativity—he still considered rationalization to be a necessary and superior mode of social organization. He framed rationalization as a deliberate, future-oriented, calculated, and goal-directed idea.

When comparing the modern world with the traditional one, Weber harshly criticized systems based on customs and traditions. In their place, he proposed a model grounded in technological development, scientific knowledge, and rational governance. In this context, he envisioned a metaphorical beacon of light representing rationality—not designed for the comfort or



convenience of individual citizens under normal circumstances, but instead structured for the collective well-being of the entire society. This beacon may be understood as the illuminating force of bureaucracy, aimed at fostering systemic understanding and cohesion. Had this bureaucratic structure focused exclusively on individuals, it might have been indistinguishable from employment agencies. Instead, Weber argued that sociologists must calculate based on principles of value, and analyze outcomes in ways that benefit the majority of society. In doing so, they are expected to produce a coherent and functional social model. That was the core of Weber's effort.

Weber's bureaucratic model can be broken down into several key pillars, each reflecting central tenets of his theory and their associated implications:

- **Stability of Rules:** This principle underpins sustained development and continuous progress. It seeks to establish consistency within society's economic and moral frameworks by embedding structure and predictability into social life.
- **Social Integration over Individualization:** This refers to the rejection of radical individualism in favor of societal cohesion. It emphasizes becoming part of the collective, suggesting that even if one stumbles, it is possible to rise again with the strength of the community.
- **Specialization and Professionalism:** This aligns with principles of qualification. From recruitment to the structuring of selection processes, it is oriented toward building a high-quality society. The goal is to ensure that individuals work in fields suited to their expertise, and to maintain competition based on merit. Importantly, professionalism is not limited to highly technical or elite occupations—it must apply to every profession.
- **Clear Hierarchical Structure:** Bureaucracy operates through a centralized authority where rules and decisions stem from a unified source. This centralization fosters professionalism, contributes to social order, and promotes discipline. The hierarchical system enhances workplace focus, transparency in task distribution, and clarity in organizational roles. However, this model does not prioritize collective decision-making or democratic participation, since authority is concentrated in a central leadership structure. This may have side effects from a democratic perspective. Of course, it is possible to develop this further and find several solutions (Mitzberg, 1983. P. 177-210) (a detailed explanation will be provided below).

In today's world, the bureaucratic approach continues to exist in professional life with both its positive and negative aspects. Systematization, professionalism, efficiency, control, and specialization are all products of bureaucracy, and hierarchy is also considered part of this structure. However, its negative effects have remained constant. For example: individuals living within a closed system gradually become accustomed to it and develop a kind of adaptation reflex that they can no longer escape. As a result, they cannot devote time to their personal creativity, distance themselves from innovative thinking, and fail to pursue goals with an idealistic approach (as the dynamic of free will is significantly weakened), among other issues. However, these challenges can be addressed through startup-based approaches. A startup is a business model that



emerged in the 21st century and is characterized by rapid growth. The solutions it offers can be implemented not only in large corporations but also in small-scale enterprises. The key lies in fostering a relationship between manager and subordinate that is loyal, respectful, goal-oriented, and focused on mutual results. The outcome must reflect a bilateral effort and engagement. Although startups mostly emerge in the technological sector—for example, in fields like artificial intelligence, digitalization, and blockchain, their application in other areas is also possible. Just as sociological theories can be analyzed and applied across various disciplines, the innovative and creative mindset of startups, along with their rapid development process, can open the door to individuality and diversity. It may even positively influence Weber's concept of the "iron cage." (Weber, M. 1978. P. 956-1005).

Startups also seek a rational and structured work environment. However, unlike classical bureaucracy, the emphasis here lies on teamwork. But is it possible to integrate the startup model into a centralized management system?

Yes, it is possible, though the effectiveness may vary. For example, rather than relying on the opinion of a single specialist, evaluations of products or employees can be conducted by multiple specialists. This can still be managed centrally. A/B testing between employees or customers is also feasible, which can highlight weaknesses in quality and help indicate the level of operational dynamism. From a socio-psychological perspective, this can also be viewed as a way of expressing partial sympathy or opinions toward leadership positions.

If startups are properly aligned with Weber's theory, they will not become burdensome; rather, they will operate flexibly and effectively. On the other hand, Weber's management principles are also aligned with startup dynamics. Within startups, leadership and accountability mechanisms—when not overly rigid—can contribute to successful governance. Career advancement based on merit is a particularly significant concept in Western cultures. Setting clear standards and avoiding chaos are essential. Clearly defined roles, future orientation, and goal setting (i.e., clarifying everyone's responsibilities) are crucial. Leadership and, ultimately, accountability mechanisms ensure transparent outcomes and promote a culture where both successes and failures are acknowledged. In teams, this transparency encourages correction of mistakes in case of failure, and in the case of success, motivates further advancement toward greater achievements. In the end, instead of rigid long-term planning, the focus should shift toward frequently tested issues and products that meet actual needs. This is not based on guesswork—it is a matter of data-driven analysis (Ries Eric. 2017. P. 31-68).

The Concept of the “Iron Cage” in the Rationalization of Bureaucracy and Its Negative Effects

Max Weber's concept of the “iron cage” presents a critical framework for understanding the psychological condition of individuals and society under bureaucratic structures. It raises the



question of how the psychological state of society can be interpreted within a bureaucratic system. Can Weber's own concept of "anomie" be said to prevail in such a context? Could this structure open the door to a robotic social reality?

The inability of individuals to allocate time to their personal lives, the increasingly calculated nature of modern life, the elevation of rationality as the dominant principle, and the establishment of a rigid system based solely on technical efficiency significantly undermine the individual's self-awareness. These phenomena are now considered inevitable elements and conditions of contemporary life. Avoiding them is akin to being excluded from the educational classroom of modernity.

In the rationalized system, career paths and life goals are governed entirely by a centralized structure, thereby reducing the individual to a functionary in the career ambitions of managerial authorities. The form of rationality highlighted here does not serve the ultimate goal of societal justice. Instead, the "iron cage" primarily illustrates how formal rationality infiltrates all spheres of society. In this context, bureaucracy as the institutional form of rationality eliminates the principle of meaningful goals. As Weber notes, "Rationality is life outside the cage. Within it, there are only means and procedures" (Weber, M. 1930. P. 95-122). These words can be interpreted as akin to a bird flailing within a cage, unaware of its true desire until it is released. In bureaucracy, this is referred to as discipline—manifested, notably, in the regulation of employees' working hours. Weber refers to this condition as "anomie," meaning the fragmentation or dispersion of values. This can be likened to a waiter whose carefully arranged order collapses upon encountering a barrier—his intended purpose is scattered. Scientifically, this dispersion reflects the distribution of effort: some directed to the head office, others to reporting systems, yet others to demands and proposals. The result is that labor becomes fragmented and gifted away to different institutions (Giddens, 1993. P. 689-692).

From an emotional perspective, the experience of burnout asserts itself. The perceived meaninglessness of life may cause individuals to abandon their goals altogether. Alienation sets in—individuals begin to behave like artificial beings, functioning with robotic minds. While Weber acknowledges the motivational power of religious ideology—particularly through his discussion of the Protestant ethic—he also notes that over time, the original spiritual purpose becomes secondary. Since religious feeling constitutes a sacred, non-material value for the individual, people are less concerned with what lies behind their initial enthusiasm. The individual gradually loses their spiritual autonomy (Weber, 1930. P. 47-85).

Instrumental rationality becomes the dominant worldview in the individual's life. Emotional engagement and loyalty to one's work weaken. However, emotional connection is crucial in determining how significant one's job truly is. Emotion is the fruit of responsibility and the embodiment of motivation. In an instrumentally rational framework, this element disappears. Although Weber's concept of alienation is often compared to Marx's, Weber focuses specifically



on religious and cultural contexts, emphasizing the loss of meaning in the pursuit of utility. Through mechanisms of control and standardization, emotions remain present but are transformed into automated responses. Sociologist George Ritzer builds on Weber's critique, coining the term "McDonaldization" to describe how this system emotionally manipulates individuals through mechanized processes (Ritzer, 2011. P. 1-22). The emotional realm is not removed but is rather standardized and automated in the bureaucratic system.

While the notion that the minority is subordinate to the majority is widely accepted across various fields, in bureaucratic systems the reverse often holds true: the majority is subjected to the control of a minority. In systems where the balance of power is disrupted, a small number of individuals retain control, marginalizing democratic values and the culture of voting. This phenomenon may be described as the ethics of monopoly. This aligns with Robert Michels' theory of the "iron law of oligarchy," which asserts the inherent convergence of bureaucracy and oligarchic tendencies. Critical sociologists and organizational theorists have approached Weber's ideal of bureaucracy with significant criticism. Their objections go beyond mere metaphors and point to the imbalance between functional efficiency and humanism. The activity of the individual is constrained by legal-normative frameworks, which limit personal agency (Michels, 1911. P. 31-33).

A more radical and rigorous critique is provided by Zygmunt Bauman. He emphasizes that bureaucratic ethics played a fundamental role even in cases of mass violence and genocide. He argues that a culture of obeying orders—regardless of moral content—becomes a form of social training. As such, the execution of orders becomes normalized. Bauman illustrates this using the Holocaust as a prime example. According to him, the Holocaust was not merely the result of racism and hatred, but also the product of modern bureaucratic rationality. This system functioned through task specialization, hierarchical structures, procedural regulation, and a strict ethic of centralized obedience. In this context, ethical responsibility was displaced by a culture of "following orders." There was no consideration of good or evil, right or wrong. Individuals simply performed their assigned duties: one person loaded victims onto trains, another signed execution orders, another handed out prison uniforms, and yet another registered the victims' names as if they were ordinary municipal citizens. "Next. The next one, please." This was the logic of the system. What prevailed was not moral judgment but the voice of authority. Bauman's analysis shows how dangerous bureaucracy and its rationality can become when disconnected from moral values. He writes: "The Holocaust was the product of modernity. It occurred through the application of rationality stripped of ethical responsibility." (Bauman, 1989.p. 35-68).

As in the history of Poland and other countries, factors indicating that bureaucracy, as analyzed by Bauman, destroys the future consciousness can be observed today in both Europe and the East. These factors demonstrate that, particularly in state educational institutions, workers such as teachers, by submitting to management and the directives given to them, perpetrate moral violence against students from different ethnic backgrounds. Some sociologists explain this phenomenon



through Pierre Bourdieu's field theory. No matter what the student does, the teacher, by adhering to the laws, utilizes them in a systematically excessive manner, and as a result, a trauma of not knowing their social role emerges among students who are considered the specialists of the future (Hashimov 2025; 105-107).

This perspective invites us to view not only the Holocaust but also other mass atrocities as potentially linked to bureaucratic structures. Examples include the current genocide in Gaza, the massacres committed by France in Algeria, and those by Nazi Germany and the USSR in Poland. In each case, power devoid of moral grounding is coupled with institutional systems that reinforce that power. Simplistic and moralizing claims such as, “Those weren’t real people; they lacked family values and moral upbringing,” are inadequate from a sociological standpoint. Bauman emphasizes that society’s path toward atrocity cannot be explained by the family unit alone, but must also consider the bureaucratic work system from which individuals earn their daily living. It is this system—repetitive, obligatory, and normalized through daily participation—that instills its own form of “training.” Over time, these obligations cease to appear exceptional, and what emerges is a fully adapted robotic system of human action.

Nevertheless, with both its positive and negative aspects, the bureaucratic system has retained its practical power and institutional relevance. It is particularly evident in state institutions, though it is equally applicable to private-sector organizations such as corporations and holding companies. The appeal of bureaucracy lies in its leadership structure, professionalization (i.e., specialization and standardization), and rationality. Despite appearing rigid from the perspective of the “iron cage,” the bureaucratic system continues to serve as an effective model for many institutions. In many cases, it remains the only viable organizational structure in the realities of modern institutional life.

Bureaucracy is a phenomenon that manifests across all political regimes—whether under communism, liberalism, or democracy. Because it facilitates control over the work regime and aligns well with both managerial needs and systemic continuity, it is often overlooked or even endorsed by those in power. In the administration of labor and governance, it is ultimately the government’s approved program that dictates the bureaucratic line of action. In this sense, the influence of bureaucracy is solidified and legitimized by the ruling authority itself.

However, not all individuals within the system act ethically. If every official behaved ethically, bureaucracy might operate transparently today. Instead, the bureaucratic regime often becomes rigid in the hands of those who wield it. This was particularly evident in the Soviet Union, where an enormous bureaucratic apparatus developed under the communist regime. It was a fusion of communism with a strict dictatorship. This rigid authoritarianism exploited bureaucratic tools to maximize labor extraction, further entrenching the power of the ruling elite by placing the workforce under the control of administrators. Whether effective or dysfunctional, the quality of the bureaucracy was often irrelevant to the regime’s priorities. The Soviet regime stood as one of



the longest-lasting and most dominant dictatorships of the 20th century. Its global influence stemmed from three main factors:

- Its status as a victor in World War II;
- Its vast territorial expanse, making it the largest country in the world;
- Its extreme bureaucratic culture, through which it asserted its ideological superiority over Western civil societies.

Sometimes, a nation's achievements can obscure the suffering of its people. This was evident following the Red Army's victory, when propaganda campaigns concealed the oppressive mechanisms that enabled such military success. To avoid falling prey to such propaganda, individuals must be well-informed—especially within bureaucratic societies, where bureaucrats tend to be more intelligent and pragmatic than their predecessors. Keeping up with daily political developments becomes essential.

It is important to examine bureaucratic rationality not only within current political regimes but also by comparing past regimes. This comparative approach minimizes analytical bias.

The prominent Soviet sociologist Alexander Zinoviev, who lived through some of the harshest periods of the USSR, is known for his sharp critique of Soviet bureaucracy. Zinoviev used satire and irony as tools of social analysis, offering both humorous and serious insights into the Soviet system. His critique can be divided into two main strands: satirical and scholarly reflections.

Satirical Critique:

- **Parasitism:** Zinoviev viewed the regime as one that promoted empty rhetoric and exploited society without contributing to its welfare. He depicted the bureaucratic class as draining state resources while merely creating an illusion of governance. In one of his satires, he humorously mentions the existence of a “committee for committees on committees,” referring to the creation of endless, useless structures that had no real benefit to state administration.
- **Bureaucratic Hypocrisy:** Zinoviev argued that officials constantly professed their commitment to meeting public needs, while in reality working to advance their own interests.
- **Formalism:** He highlighted the absurd abundance of paperwork in Soviet bureaucracy, which contributed little to actual problem-solving. Bureaucratic assistance to citizens was often conditional upon personal interest. He compared this behavior to that of modern-day civil servants in democratic countries, who may ignore a citizen's complaint unless it originates from a superior agency. Zinoviev maintained that, while such formalism still exists today, it reached its peak under the Soviet regime.

This situation is also portrayed in another satirical form—for example: “We have such an institution that it has authority over all other institutions.” With this phrase, Zinoviev ridicules the



bureaucratic entanglement and overreach within state institutions. Even more importantly, it illustrates a paradox: the regime itself, recognizing the excessive dysfunction of its bureaucratic apparatus, begins to create additional institutions—sometimes even illegal or extra-legal ones—just to remedy the problems generated by existing institutions. The goal is no longer lawfulness or efficiency, but merely to have “an institution” capable of managing societal breakdown.

Scientific Critique:

- **Zinoviev’s Systems Theory:** Zinoviev describes the Soviet regime as an all-encompassing system, in which the bureaucratic class and administrative society form the core pillars. Like many critical sociologists, he sees this regime not as the result of individual actions, but as the product of an overarching systemic logic. The system is likened to a tree that waters itself and reaps its own fruit—self-sustaining and self-justifying.
- **The Language of Propaganda:** Bureaucracy, in Zinoviev’s analysis, uses a symbolic and manipulative language to maintain control and ensure public compliance. Whether in state-run or market-oriented institutions, this rhetoric lures many into passive acceptance. Despite its formal style, it is ultimately an empty form of speech that serves only performative and public-relations purposes.
- **Adaptation Mechanism:** Zinoviev identifies bureaucrats as a distinct social class, separated from ordinary citizens. This class develops its own set of norms, principles, and internal codes of behavior. Bureaucrats are not only shaped by the system—they also reshape others in their image. If they have lost their moral values or display hypocrisy, they tend to project these traits onto their subordinates. In order to survive in such a regime, individuals are forced to adapt to these criteria.

This view overlaps significantly with Zygmunt Bauman’s theory, where the execution of orders becomes normalized, unquestioned, and emotionally detached. The obedience to authority is not rooted in conviction but in systemic conditioning—orders are followed because they come from above, not because they are ethically right.

In an increasingly dominant bureaucratic regime, Zinoviev offers powerful and unsettling quotes to highlight the moral and existential cost to the individual: “The system is not created for the human being; the human being is created for the system.” “If you are not compatible with the system, you must change. Otherwise, the system will change you.”

Bureaucracy, Zinoviev argues, teaches us that submission to the system is possible under every form of government. Whether it is an overt dictatorship or a cosmetically polished “democracy,” bureaucracy becomes a mechanism that shapes human life—adapting individuals, pacifying them, and coercing them into living with lies. The Soviet regime, especially in its early years, cultivated what Zinoviev terms a “bureaucratic instinct”—an ingrained behavioral pattern formed over time and gradually normalized within society. Through this mechanism, the regime shaped public behavior, reactions, and worldview, observing how society would internalize and reproduce



bureaucratic logic. Bureaucracy, then, becomes not merely an administrative tool, but an ideological, ethical, and anthropological phenomenon—a mechanism that sustains the system without ever overtly contradicting it. This is where Zinoviev significantly diverges from Max Weber: instead of an abstract rational model, he exposes the internal contradiction between what "should" be done and what "actually" happens.

From a social-philosophical standpoint, Zinoviev illustrates a deeply ambivalent dynamic. Imagine an active society where certain reformist individuals—activists—seek change. These individuals are not part of the bureaucracy but are not entirely opposed to cooperating with it either. Eventually, because of their prior experience and technical know-how, bureaucrats are brought to the forefront of the reform movement. Yet, despite relying on the energy and vision of these activists, the bureaucratic system implements only a fraction—if any—of the proposed changes. The result is a betrayal not merely of political ideals but of ethical integrity. Activists, once seen as intellectual patriots or reform-minded elites, end up enabling the very bureaucratic regime they sought to transform. Zinoviev characterizes this as a moral failure, where educated individuals, under the guise of romantic patriotism or vague idealism, contribute to the entrenchment of bureaucratic power. At the same time, the bureaucrats themselves, having committed moral compromises, look back and rationalize their behavior as a systemic necessity. They attribute the roots of these issues to academic or ideological doctrines. Thus, both parties—activists and bureaucrats—must reckon with the moral implications of their actions. This interaction demonstrates not only a political failure but an ethical-philosophical crisis, where the morality of individuals becomes subordinated to systemic pressures. In this view, public morality—whether citizens remain silent or speak out in moments of crisis—becomes a measure of the nation's ethical standing. Zinoviev thus positions bureaucracy not only as a structural force, but as a powerful shaper of behavior, thought, and social relations. It ensures the continuity of the system while simultaneously standing in opposition to individual initiative and the pursuit of truth (Zinoviev, Alexander. 1985. P. 185-198, Zinoviev, Alexander. 1979. p. 210-230).

Max Weber's concept of bureaucracy can be visualized as a hierarchical pyramid, where each ascending level reflects a deeper structural and normative logic of the system. From the base upward, the pyramid includes the following elements:

1. Specialization and Professionalism
2. Systematic Record-Keeping and Accountability
3. Merit-Based Recruitment
4. Predictability
5. Rationality
6. Structured Organization
7. Equality Before Rules

1. Specialization and Professionalism



At the foundation of Weber's bureaucratic model lies specialization. This applies to both individual workers and the overall goals of an organization. The professional competence of the worker enhances the organization's credibility and efficiency, increasing public trust and contributing to long-term sustainability. When employees work strictly within their areas of expertise, it reduces internal chaos and preserves organizational stability. This principle is not only essential for private companies—where trust from clients translates into revenue—but also applies to educational institutions. For example, private universities, being self-financed, demand a high and consistent level of professionalism from their academic and administrative staff. Public universities, although state-funded, also risk losing prestige and student interest if professionalism is not upheld. In both cases, specialization is not optional but a systemic necessity (H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills. 1946.p. 248-252), (Max Weber .1968.p. 956-973).

2. Systematic Record-Keeping and Documentation

Systematic registration and documentation are among the oldest bureaucratic functions. Even ancient empires maintained rudimentary forms of population tracking and resource allocation. For instance, during the reign of the second caliph of the Arab Caliphate, Umar ibn al-Khattab, monthly allowances were calculated and distributed to citizens—a primitive form of bureaucratic welfare.

Over time, this system evolved significantly. Modern bureaucracies rely not on paper-based systems but on secure digital databases. This not only enhances efficiency but also strengthens data security and transparency. Accurate documentation is central to legal and financial decision-making. Examples include recording working hours, calculating employee benefits, tracking tax payments, maintaining receipts, and preparing financial reports. Institutions such as national tax agencies play a central role in collecting, verifying, and analyzing such data, acting as endpoints for financial accountability across all sectors (Max Weber .1968. p. 956-978).

3. Merit-Based Recruitment and Selection

The third criterion in Weber's bureaucratic model is recruitment based on competence. In contemporary terms, this is known as the process of recruitment and selection. This stage assesses candidates based on specific skills, qualifications, language proficiency, motivation, and psychological preparedness. Recruitment is the initial stage, where potential candidates are identified based on personal achievements and relevant qualifications. This is followed by the selection process, which involves evaluating and choosing among those candidates. The larger the candidate pool, the more complex the decision-making process becomes. This principle is taught in sociology departments under courses like Human Resource Management and even forms the basis for specialized master's programs at some universities. From a sociological perspective, personnel selection is a sensitive process requiring analytical thinking and strategic judgment. The chosen candidate must be beneficial to both the organization and its workforce—not only in terms of productivity and financial gain but also through successful integration into the workplace



culture. A professional selection process must avoid nepotism and bribery, offering every candidate an equal opportunity to demonstrate their talents. All individuals—regardless of religion, race, or personal background—should be treated with dignity and fairness. Political or religious questions should be avoided, and transparency must be the guiding principle. A fair and open selection process fosters organizational integrity and can serve as a model for broader institutional reform (Max Weber .1968. p. 956-973).

4. Predictability of Outcomes

In bureaucratic institutions, outcomes are often predictable. For instance, when citizens apply to state agencies, they generally know what result to expect, thanks to standardized procedures. These systems function according to established routines, which reduce uncertainty for employees and streamline workflow. Because bureaucratic procedures are repetitive and rule-based, the outcomes of decisions can be forecasted with a degree of confidence. The procedural uniformity transforms events into predictable patterns. In modern institutions, involving sociologists or social workers in process design could enhance adaptability (Grabber, 2015. P. 32-36). However, traditional bureaucracies may resist such innovation, preferring institutional routines over theoretical insights. Nonetheless, sociological insight can be integrated at a “start-up” level within institutions to anticipate emerging social dynamics, employee behaviors, and citizen needs. Predictability in this context is not merely administrative—it is also cultural and anticipatory.

5. Rationality

Rationality lies at the core of bureaucratic decision-making. It implies that decisions must be made according to clearly defined goals and justified by legal and ethical standards. Often likened to the justice system, rationality in a bureaucratic context reflects itself in company objectives, recruitment choices, and especially in policy formation. Decision-making should be guided by legal regulations and focused on the well-being of employees. Any deviation from this—whether through arbitrary actions or abuse of authority—can be perceived as illegitimate governance or even bureaucratic sadism. Rationality ensures efficiency and promotes professionalism. Every decision or internal conflict should be addressed by exploring alternative models and solutions. In this way, rationality becomes a cultural norm: it is the discipline of proposing structured models to solve problems. (Max Weber .1968)

6. Structure

The sixth layer of Weber’s bureaucratic model refers to structure, which primarily denotes the hierarchical organization of institutions. This hierarchy spans from the lowest-level workers to middle and upper management. Each level carries specific responsibilities: lower-tier employees are tasked with implementing assignments, while upper management is responsible for issuing directives and overseeing execution. A clear structural distance—or functional differentiation—is essential to ensure transparency, clarity, and efficiency. In bureaucratic systems, effectiveness



arises from a culture of responsibility and acknowledgment of positional boundaries. Without this structural clarity, institutional efficiency and internal communication may deteriorate. The hierarchical relationship between employer and employee can also be explored from a sociological perspective. Philosopher Alexander Zinoviev's ethical approach can be applied here: in a stratified system, ethical standards are interdependent and linked like a chain. When these links are broken, either through poor recruitment at the lower level or weak leadership at the upper level, the entire organization suffers—economically, morally, and socially. Importantly, managers are not separate from the consequences—they are part of the organizational body and equally vulnerable to dysfunction. (H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills. 1946. P. 248-252).

7. Equality

The final tier of Weber's bureaucratic model emphasizes equality. This principle underscores mutual respect and cooperation among employees in pursuit of collective goals. No individual should be perceived as inherently superior to another based on personal bias. Equality in this sense is often misinterpreted as a socialist ideal, but in the context of bureaucracy, it is a structural necessity, not a political ideology. Equality here refers to equitable treatment, shared responsibility, and consistent application of rules. A non-socialist organization can also achieve this through well-designed internal systems. While it is true that political regimes can influence corporate governance through legal or economic interventions, this analysis is focused strictly on the internal bureaucratic structure. The principle of equality requires maintaining professional standards, ensuring equal working conditions, and adhering to rules objectively. When implemented correctly, equality fosters solidarity and fairness without undermining authority or hierarchy. (Max Weber .1968).

This analysis does not aim to classify the bureaucratic model in terms of “positive” or “negative.” Instead, it seeks to identify and describe the seven core elements that constitute Weber's theoretical understanding of bureaucracy. Each level—ranging from professional specialization to equality—carries its own internal logic and power within the organizational context. The strengths and weaknesses of bureaucracy, along with its social and institutional consequences, are discussed in earlier sections.

Empirical Analysis of Bureaucracy in the Modern World Through a Questionnaire Method

Methodology:

This study employed a quantitative survey-based approach to explore the presence and effects of bureaucratic structures in a modern work environment, with specific reference to Max Weber's theory of bureaucracy. The research was conducted in a private employment agency based in Warsaw, Poland, which operates within a relatively formal organizational structure and interacts directly with various labor market actors.



A structured questionnaire consisting of 15 multiple-choice questions was administered in person to 50 employees across different hierarchical levels—ranging from entry-level staff to mid- and upper-level management. Participation was entirely anonymous and voluntary, and no identifying data were collected. This methodological decision was aimed at ensuring psychological safety and minimizing response bias, thereby improving the reliability of the findings.

While the sample size ($n=50$) is relatively small and limits the possibility of advanced inferential statistical analysis (e.g., regression or correlation modeling), the study provides valuable descriptive insights into employee perceptions of bureaucratic functioning. Given the limitations of the dataset, descriptive statistics (percentage-based distributions) were used to interpret the survey results.

The survey design was guided by theoretical constructs derived from Weberian bureaucracy, such as hierarchical control, impersonal relationships, rule-bound decision-making, and task specialization. Each question was designed to test how these characteristics manifest in the modern workplace and whether employees perceive them as supportive or restrictive.

While the methodological framework remains exploratory, the findings provide a foundation for future, more extensive studies using inferential tools and cross-case comparisons. The present research should be seen as a pilot study that offers preliminary insights into the continuing relevance—and challenges—of bureaucratic rationality in contemporary organizational settings.

An empirical study was conducted to analyze the role of bureaucracy in today's world using the questionnaire method. The research took place at «X», a company located in Warsaw, the capital of Poland. The survey targeted employees across different hierarchical levels—both lower and upper tiers of the organization. To ensure sociological neutrality and transparency, the questions were framed without any personal identifiers. The questionnaire was strictly anonymous, with no fields for “name” or “surname” included. This approach helped create a psychologically safe and relaxed environment, ensuring candid responses from participants.

«X» company was selected deliberately for this sociological case study due to its status as an employment agency. Such agencies play a significant role in the labor market by screening candidates and matching them with appropriate vacancies. Their position as intermediaries in the employment process gives them unique insights into organizational procedures and decision-making. Moreover, their work directly impacts citizens' welfare by helping individuals find suitable jobs, thereby acting as a social safety net from an economic standpoint.

The questionnaire consisted of 15 carefully designed questions, crafted in simple and comprehensible language to be understood equally well by both lower-level workers and upper management. Each participant received a physical copy of the survey and completed it individually to maintain objectivity and reduce pressure or bias. The survey was conducted with a sample of 50 employees, maintaining gender balance and focusing on questions that reflect the contemporary



relevance of bureaucracy. The results of each question were analyzed quantitatively and presented in percentage format. Each answer set was interpreted sociologically, and the report concludes with a general summary of the findings and their implications regarding the role of bureaucracy in a modern organizational context.

Survey Results and Sociological Analysis

QUESTION 1: What is your gender?

a) Male — 46%

b) Female — 54%

Explanation:

Gender balance was largely preserved in the survey. The slightly higher number of female respondents may reflect a greater presence of women in the company. Importantly, participants from both genders were nearly equally represented, ensuring balanced input in the evaluation. Among respondents of both genders, there was also a mix of educational levels, which enriched the diversity of perspectives. In many European workplaces, it is common to see men and women working side by side, even in highly bureaucratic environments. This company reflected that inclusive norm. The main issue is not gender itself, but rather whether the working conditions are governed by strict regulations, unequal distributions of responsibility, or subjective management practices.

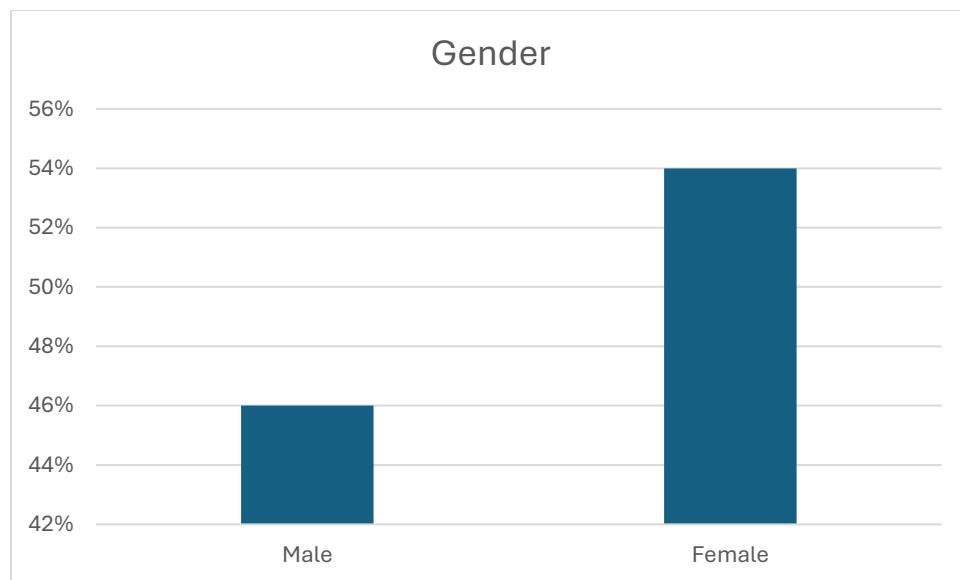


Figure N 1



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QUESTION 2: What is your highest level of education?

- a) Secondary education – 12%
- b) Bachelor's degree – 56%
- c) Master's degree – 28%
- d) Doctorate or higher – 4%

Explanation:

The fact that the majority of participants had higher education indicates a more informed approach to understanding bureaucratic systems. A high percentage of university-educated employees suggests a workforce that is likely aware of their rights and responsibilities and capable of engaging with legal and ethical standards. Educated individuals often have greater access to information and are more likely to advocate for their rights in a structured manner. The presence of doctoral-level individuals in such a setting is also noteworthy. Although doctorate holders usually work in academic or specialized roles, their presence in a private employment agency may point to broader structural or personal reasons—such as dissatisfaction with academic opportunities, limited creative outlets, or a rigid regulatory environment. This highlights how even highly qualified individuals may find themselves in bureaucratic institutions due to systemic constraints.

The high number of master's degree holders may also reflect a changing trend in labor market expectations—where a bachelor's degree is no longer sufficient for some roles, even if the organization itself does not explicitly require higher degrees. This could indicate a societal shift where individuals pursue graduate studies not only for knowledge but to remain competitive in an increasingly bureaucratic job market. Nonetheless, the distribution of educational levels across different roles in the company is a positive indicator of diversity and inclusivity.



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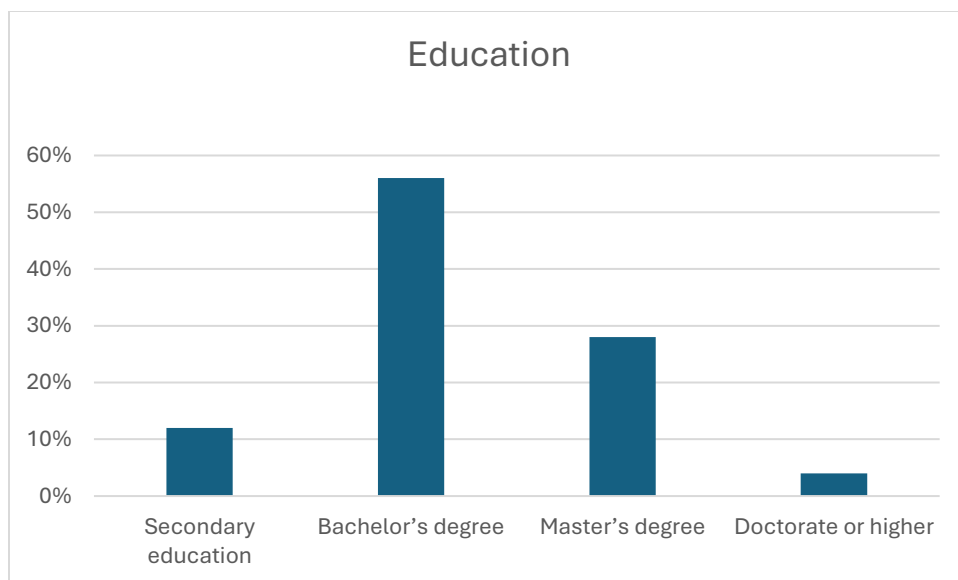


Figure N 2

QUESTION 3: To what extent are decisions made transparently by the management at your workplace?

- a) Very transparently – 14%
- b) Sometimes transparently – 36%
- c) Non-transparently – 40%
- d) I don't know – 10%

Explanation:

The high percentage of responses indicating non-transparency reflects one of the common criticisms of classic bureaucratic systems—strict adherence to rules and procedures at the expense of openness. The dominance of “non-transparent” and “I don't know” responses suggests a lack of confidence in the management's decision-making process.

Transparent decision-making typically benefits employees, increasing morale and trust. If leadership acts solely in its own comfort or interests without employee consideration, it damages professional relationships and overall workplace psychology. For a company to thrive, a strong relationship built on responsibility and mutual respect between management and staff is essential—a point emphasized by both classical and contemporary sociologists.





Figure N 3

QUESTION 4: Do lower-level employees play a role in the company's decision-making process?

- a) Yes, always – 10%
- b) Mostly yes – 22%
- c) Rarely – 44%
- d) Never – 24%

Explanation:

The overwhelming majority of “rarely” and “never” responses indicate that lower-level employees are largely excluded from decision-making processes. This supports the classic bureaucratic model, in which power is centralized and hierarchical. When employees are hired, they should ideally be viewed as an integral part of the organization's future. Ignoring their voices—especially while simultaneously delaying salaries or denying recognition—leads to dissatisfaction. This can result in decreased motivation and lack of emotional investment in the job. In institutions aiming to contribute meaningfully to society, such bureaucratic rigidity and disregard for participatory ethics can create long-term structural weaknesses and even bias in recruitment or promotion processes.



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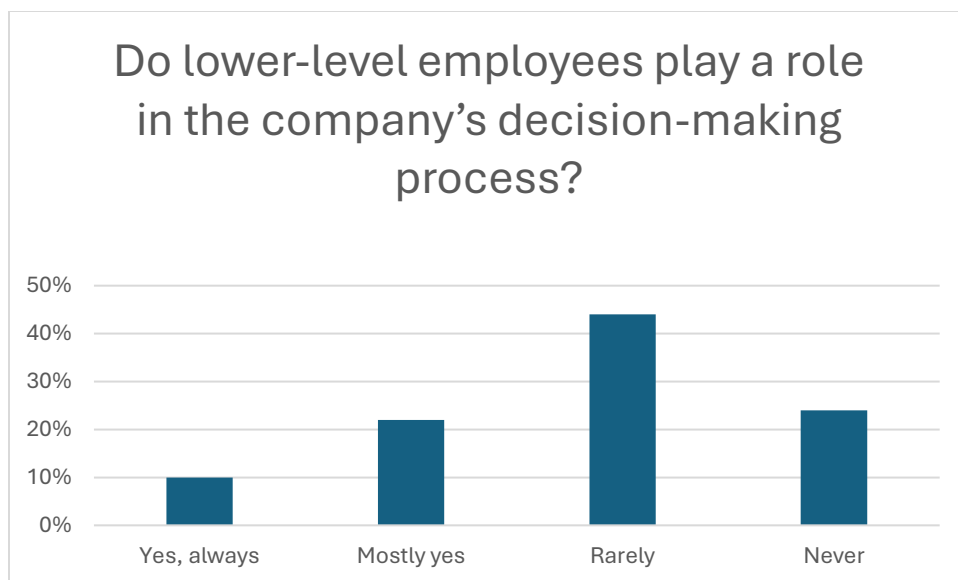


Figure N 4

QUESTION 5: How is the distribution of responsibilities in your workplace?

- a) Clear and stable – 58%
- b) Sometimes changes – 28%
- c) Some confusion – 10%
- d) No structure at all – 4%

Explanation:

The predominance of responses indicating "clear and stable" responsibility distribution aligns with Max Weber's ideal bureaucratic model, where defined roles and structured hierarchies are considered essential. In such systems, each employee has a specific task, and overlapping or vague duties are avoided to prevent organizational chaos.

This structured division contributes to efficiency, accountability, and discipline within the organization. Though a minority of responses reflected occasional disorder or confusion, overall, the responses confirm that the organization operates with a largely disciplined bureaucratic structure. Some negative responses are normal, as opinions can vary based on personal



experiences, but the majority supports the existence of a functionally clear system.

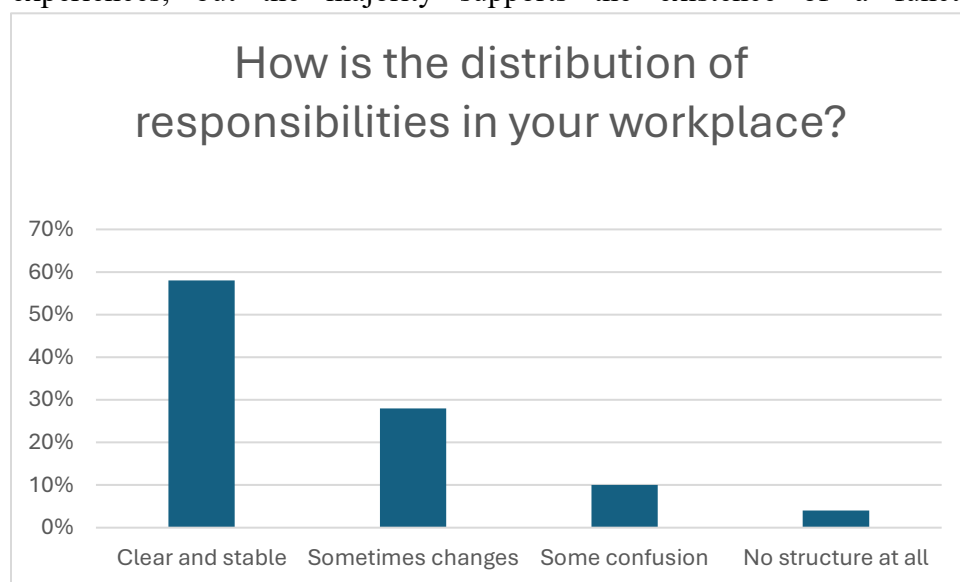


Figure N 5

QUESTION 6: What is the main factor influencing promotions in your workplace?

- a) Skills and performance – 22%
- b) Experience and years of service – 46%
- c) Connections and personal relationships – 24%
- d) I don't know – 8%

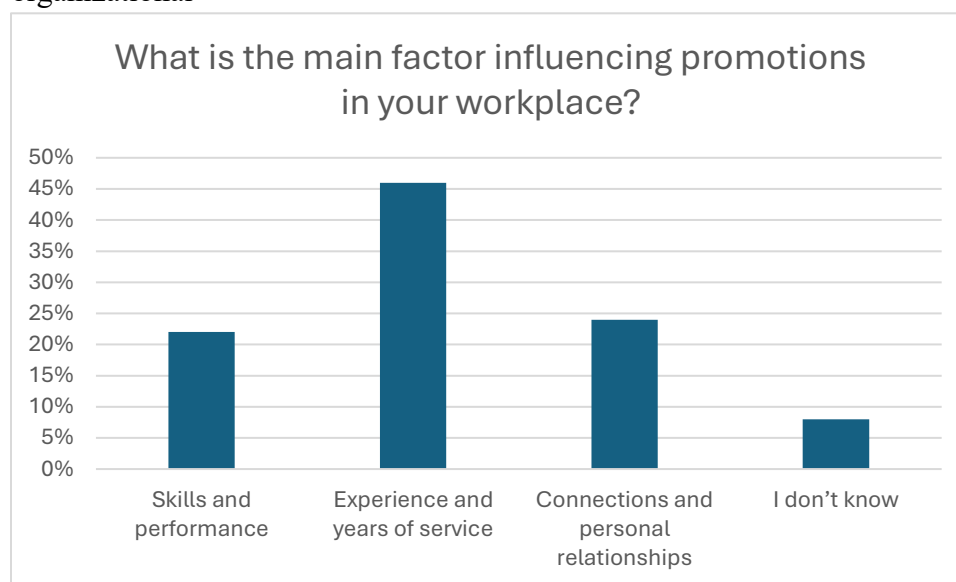
Explanation:

Promotions based on experience and years of service align with Max Weber's principle of "promotion through the career ladder" in a bureaucratic system. This model emphasizes tenure, professional behavior, and consistent service as indicators of responsibility and reliability. A long-serving employee with a clean record is often seen as a trustworthy figure, and their promotion reflects merit through dedication. However, the notable percentage of responses pointing to personal connections and favoritism indicates a deviation from classical bureaucratic ideals. Such practices undermine meritocracy and diminish motivation among skilled employees. Ideally, individuals should have the opportunity to advance based on their qualifications and efforts—this is not only ethically fair but also a motivational tool that fuels professional growth and



organizational

loyalty.

**Figure N 6**

QUESTION 7: How would you describe management's attitude toward employees?

- a) Fair and objective – 32%
- b) Formal and distant – 38%
- c) Authoritarian and strict – 20%
- d) I don't know – 10%

Explanation:

The predominance of "formal and distant" responses reflects Weber's notion of impersonal relationships within a bureaucratic structure. Bureaucracies are designed to minimize emotional involvement to maintain objectivity and equality in treatment. Formality in professional communication is necessary for ensuring discipline and clarity in roles. However, excessive distance and lack of engagement from leadership can lead to disengagement among employees. This disconnect may cause motivational decline, prompting voluntary resignations or inefficiencies, which in turn may lead to forced layoffs. Furthermore, impersonal communication without ethical and psychological sensitivity can harm workplace morale and productivity. To avoid such outcomes, ethical norms, mutual respect, and attention to employees' psychological well-being should be integrated into management practices. A healthy balance between professional formality and human-centered leadership is vital for a sustainable and productive organizational climate.



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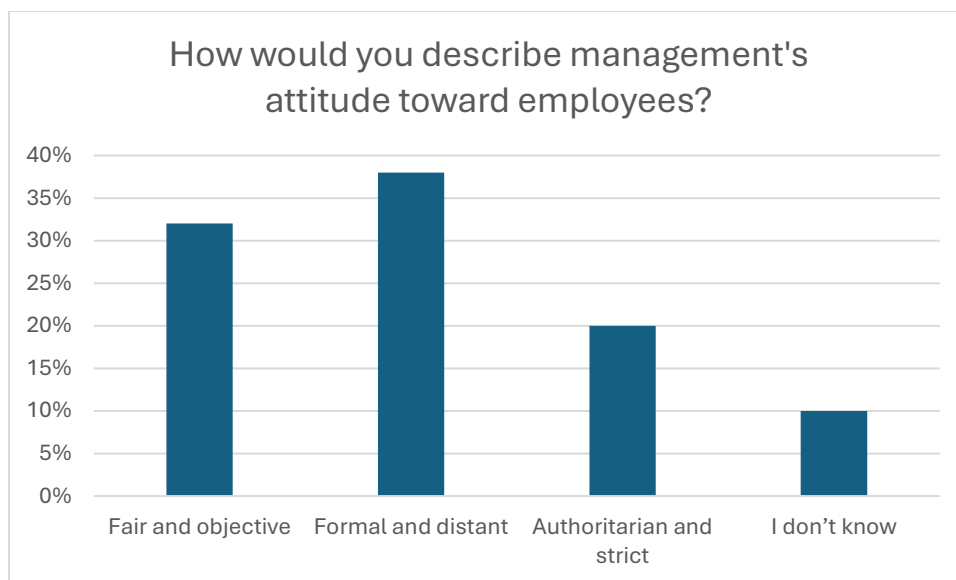


Figure N 7

QUESTION 8: How do excessive rules affect your work?

- a) They make it easier – 18%
- b) They make it more systematic – 28%
- c) They significantly slow it down – 40%
- d) No noticeable effect – 14%

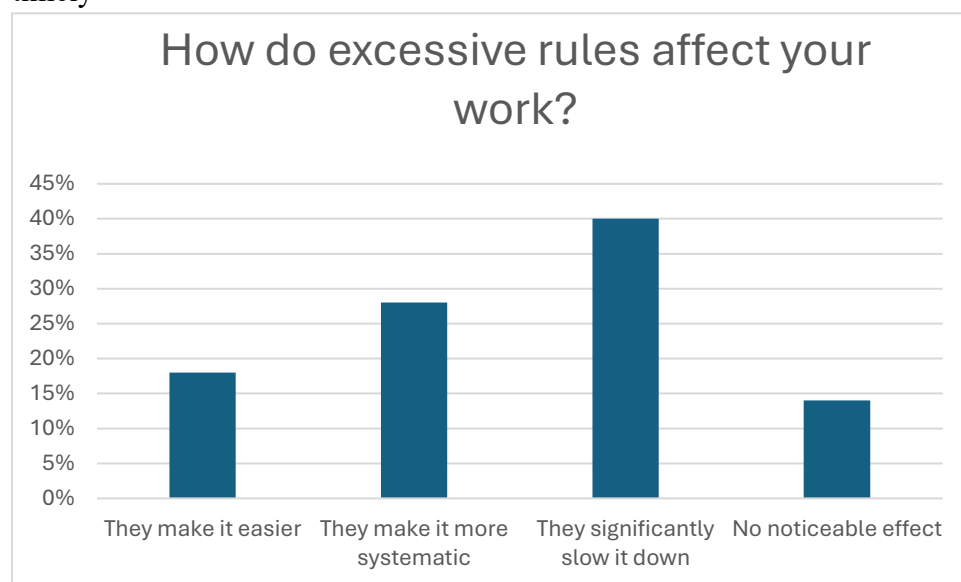
Explanation:

The high percentage of respondents (40%) who feel that excessive rules slow down their work echoes classical criticisms of bureaucratic systems as inflexible and inefficient. One of the key features of Max Weber's bureaucratic model is "management through formal rules and regulations." While this structure ensures order and predictability, it often lacks the flexibility required for modern and dynamic work environments. This rigidity can be especially frustrating when rules become overly procedural, leading to delays, paperwork overload, and repetitive authorization steps. Employees may begin to accept inefficiencies as normal, which weakens initiative and adaptability. Interestingly, only 18% believe the rules facilitate their work—this suggests a clear lack of streamlined or agile practices within the organization. An overly regulated structure, though designed to prevent chaos, may paradoxically hinder innovation, motivation, and



timely

execution.

**Figure N 8**

QUESTION 9: How would you describe the level of cooperation among employees?

- a) Very high – 20%
- b) Fairly sufficient – 40%
- c) Very low – 30%
- d) Nonexistent – 10%

Explanation:

The responses suggest a fragmented picture of workplace cooperation. While 40% of participants perceive cooperation to be “fairly sufficient,” only 20% describe it as “very high.” A striking 40% believe that cooperation is either “very low” or “nonexistent,” pointing to a potentially serious issue in internal communication and teamwork. In bureaucratic systems as theorized by Weber, the division of labor and impersonal relationships often lead to isolated work processes. Each employee follows a predefined role, minimizing informal collaboration. Although such a system promotes order, it can suppress horizontal communication and collective problem-solving. In modern workplaces, effective collaboration often requires flexible structures and interpersonal trust—elements that are not strongly supported by traditional bureaucratic norms.

This gap between structured roles and evolving cooperation demands may explain why so many employees experience weak collaboration. Addressing this misalignment is critical for fostering



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teamwork, innovation, and organizational cohesion.

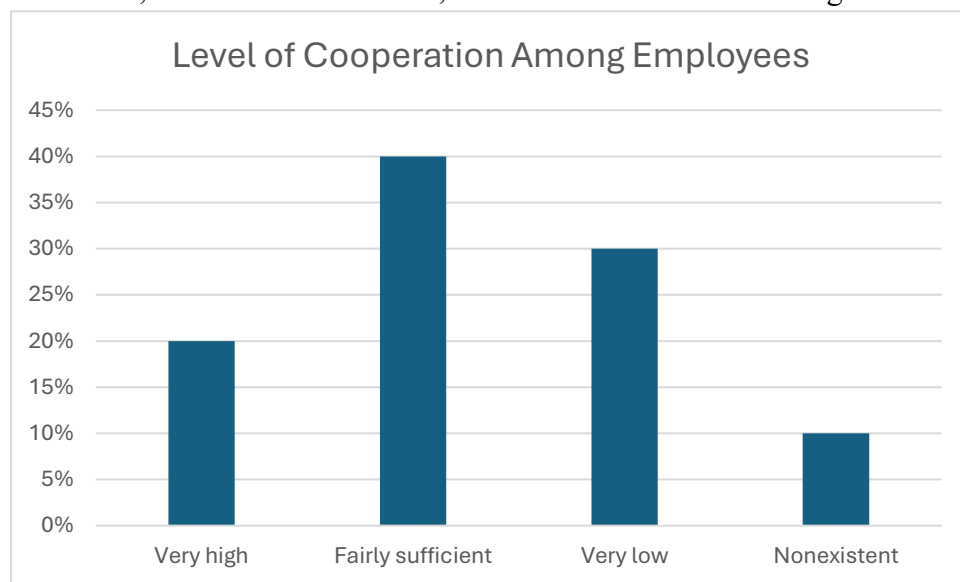


Figure N 9

QUESTION 10: What is the level of documentation and reporting at your workplace?

- a) Very high and detailed – 46%
- b) Normal – 34%
- c) Low – 10%
- d) Not sure – 10%

Explanation:

The dominant response indicating that documentation and reporting are “very high and detailed” (46%) strongly aligns with Max Weber’s bureaucratic principle of “administration through written rules and records.” This structured approach provides a foundation for accountability, consistency, and traceability within the organization. However, while detailed documentation may promote order, it also reflects a rigid, formal environment that might lack agility. The data suggests that the organizational culture leans heavily toward formalism and rule-bound governance. This rigidity may impede the organization’s responsiveness to dynamic challenges or rapid decision-making—traits that are increasingly essential in modern organizational settings. Moreover, only a minority of employees view the management as “transparent and flexible,” indicating that while bureaucratic practices offer clarity, they may not be keeping pace with contemporary expectations of openness and adaptability. Thus, the organization could benefit from integrating more participatory and agile management approaches without undermining the necessary structure.



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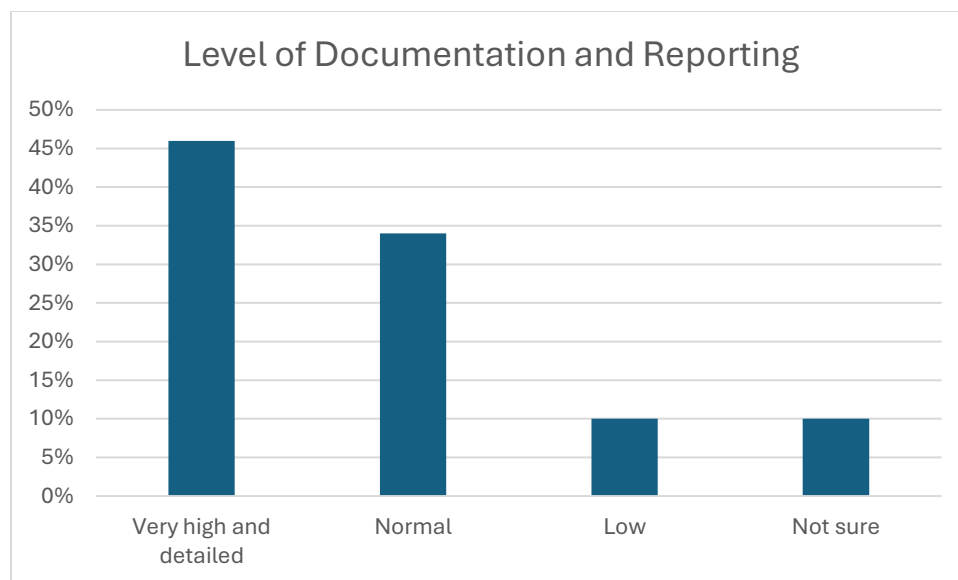


Figure N 10

QUESTION 11: In management, which is prioritized: personal qualities or rules?

- a) Personal qualities – 16%
- b) Rules and procedures – 58%
- c) Both – 20%
- d) Not sure – 6%

Explanation:

The predominance of "rules and procedures" (58%) as the main priority in leadership indicates strong adherence to Weber's bureaucratic ideal, where authority is legitimized not by personality but by formal positions and codified rules. This type of leadership reduces favoritism, enforces fairness, and supports hierarchical control. However, the low percentage of respondents (16%) who believe that personal qualities matter reflects a lack of flexible, human-centered leadership. In modern organizations, personal traits such as empathy, emotional intelligence, and adaptability are considered vital, especially in dynamic or collaborative environments. The findings suggest that while the organization follows a rule-centered administrative culture, it may lack the relational leadership skills necessary to foster innovation, motivation, and trust. Balancing procedural consistency with leadership personalization is key to sustaining both productivity and employee satisfaction.





Figure N 11

QUESTION 12: How is initiative received in your workplace?

- a) Always supported – 14%
- b) Often appreciated – 26%
- c) Ignored – 38%
- d) Discouraged – 22%

Explanation:

The results indicate a generally unfavorable environment for individual initiative. A combined 60% of respondents state that initiative is either ignored (38%) or actively discouraged (22%), which reflects a classic bureaucratic rigidity that prioritizes order, routine, and adherence to established procedures over innovation and personal input. This corresponds with Max Weber's principle of impersonality and strict rule adherence, where decisions are not based on individual creativity but on formal rules. In such systems, personal initiative may be seen as a disruption, rather than a contribution. This bureaucratic mindset can hinder innovation and employee engagement. In contrast, contemporary organizational models promote a culture of initiative and creative problem-solving, viewing employees as active contributors rather than passive executors. The data suggests that the organization may lack mechanisms for recognizing or institutionalizing employee initiative, which could result in decreased motivation and adaptability in the long term.



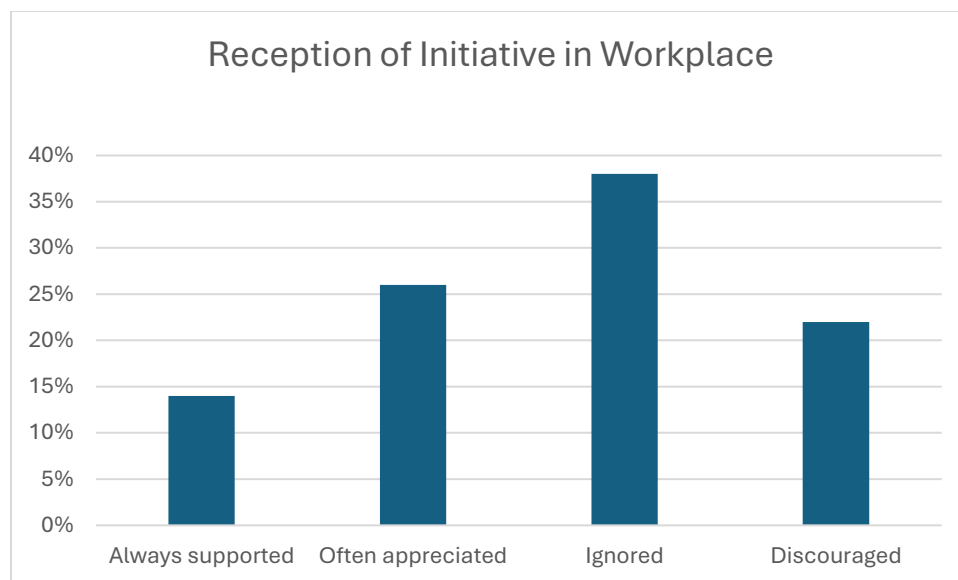


Figure N 12

QUESTION 13: Are there opportunities for implementing new ideas?

- a) There are wide opportunities – 12%
- b) Sometimes possible – 30%
- c) Very difficult – 38%
- d) Absolutely none – 20%

Explanation:

The dominant response that implementing new ideas is “very difficult” (38%) or “absolutely not possible” (20%)—a total of 58%—strongly indicates structural resistance to change. This reflects one of the main criticisms of Weber’s bureaucratic model: while it provides stability, it can also lead to institutional inertia and stifle innovation. Such rigidity may result in employees feeling disempowered and disconnected from the organization’s strategic direction. Lack of avenues for bottom-up innovation or participatory decision-making may also lead to a culture where employees do not even try to suggest improvements, contributing to stagnation. This finding is critical in the context of modern organizational development, where agility, innovation, and adaptability are essential. Encouraging idea-sharing, forming cross-functional teams, and fostering a culture of openness could help bridge the gap between bureaucratic control and creative freedom.



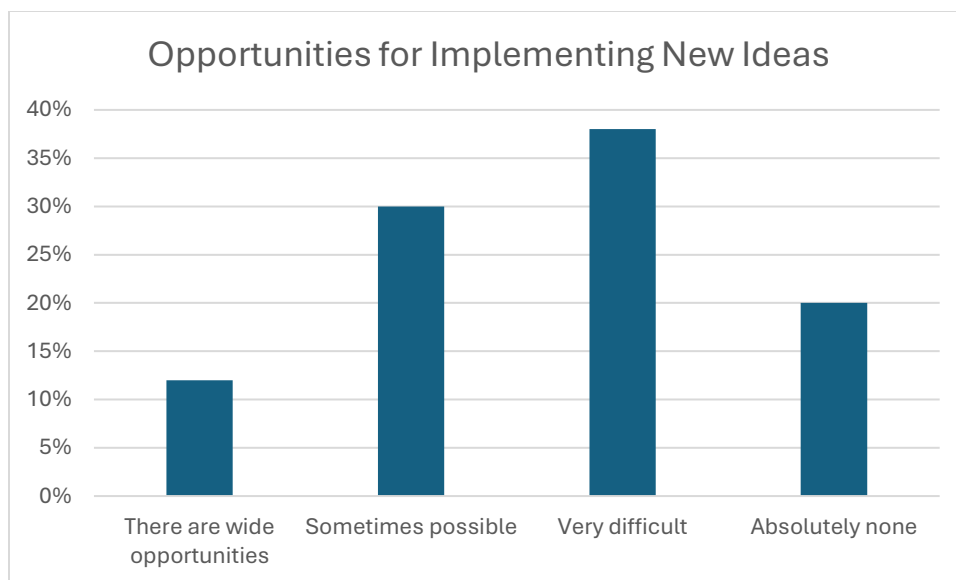


Figure N 13

QUESTION 14: Do you fully understand your job responsibilities?

- a) Yes, completely – 72%
- b) Partially – 20%
- c) Not clearly – 6%
- d) Not at all – 2%

Explanation:

A significant majority of respondents (72%) report fully understanding their job responsibilities, which suggests a clear and structured role definition within the organization. This aligns closely with Weber's bureaucratic principle of specialized roles and division of labor, where every position is clearly defined and expectations are formalized. This clarity is one of the strengths of bureaucratic structures—it ensures that employees know their duties, which reduces ambiguity and increases efficiency. However, it may also indicate that employees are primarily task-oriented, with limited scope for flexibility or role expansion. The 20% who answered “partially” may represent individuals who are new to the organization or whose roles involve cross-functional or evolving tasks that are less clearly defined. While structured role clarity is a positive attribute, modern organizations increasingly value role fluidity and adaptive responsibilities, which may not be fully realized in such a rigid system.



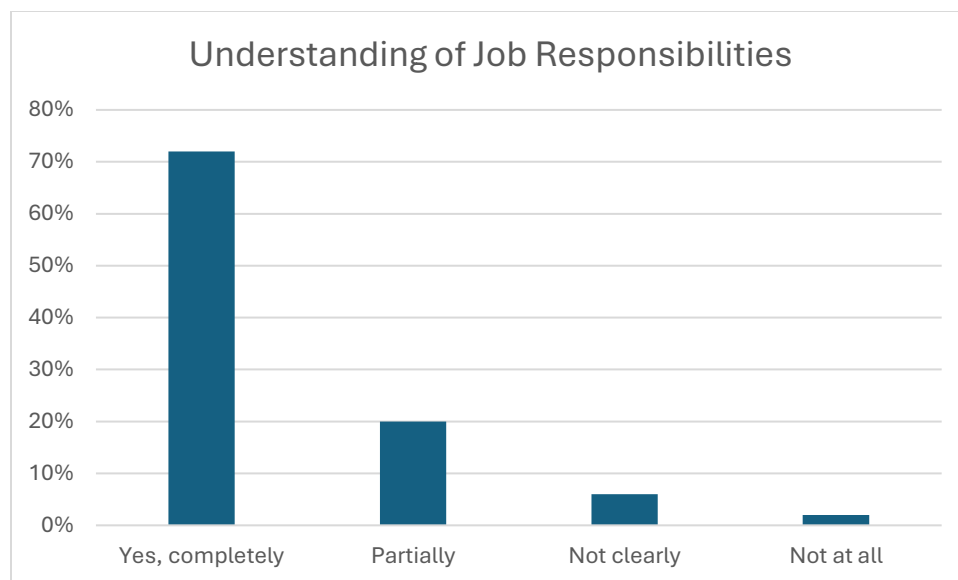


Figure N 14

QUESTION 15: How would you describe your company's management system?

- a) Very flexible and informal – 10%
- b) Somewhat flexible – 18%
- c) Rigid and formal – 54%
- d) Completely rigid and centralized – 18%

Explanation:

A combined 72% of respondents view the management system as either “rigid and formal” (54%) or “completely rigid and centralized” (18%). This result is a textbook representation of Max Weber’s bureaucratic model, which emphasizes centralized authority, formal rules, and hierarchical control. While bureaucratic systems offer stability, predictability, and role clarity, they often lack the agility and decentralized decision-making needed in dynamic environments. The relatively low percentage of respondents indicating any level of flexibility (only 28% in total) suggests that the organization may struggle with adaptability, employee empowerment, and innovation. From a modern management perspective, especially in knowledge-based or rapidly changing industries, flexibility and responsiveness are critical to maintaining organizational effectiveness. The current dominance of rigidity might reflect either institutional inertia or a deliberate preference for control over responsiveness.



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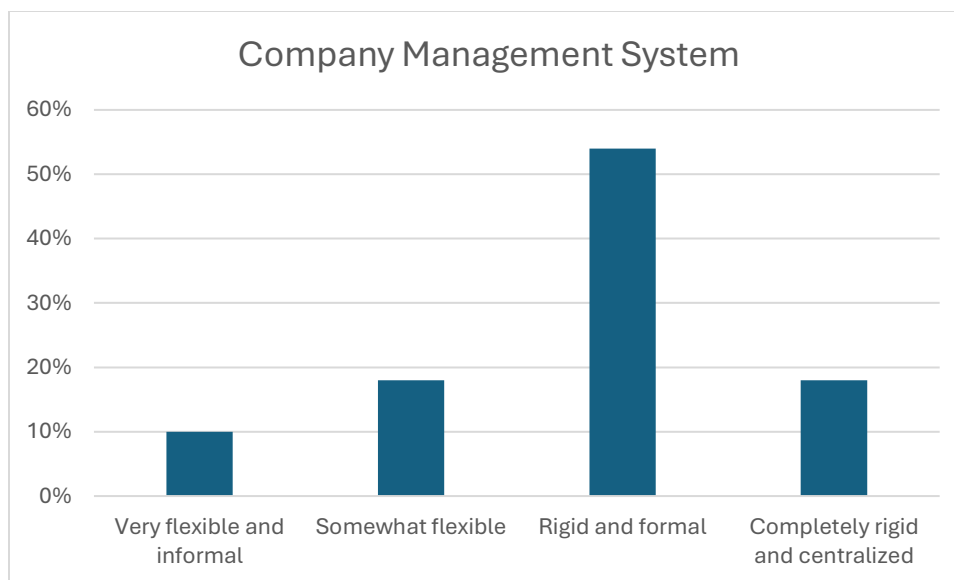


Figure N 15

Although the company I investigated in Warsaw displayed certain positive aspects, unfortunately, elements of classical bureaucracy were also observed—often in a dominant form. Through this research, I aimed to empirically uncover the underlying dynamics and behind-the-scenes processes of the company's operations. Some sections include more detailed explanations, while others are presented more briefly. The reason for the extended explanations lies in the significance of certain questions and the particularly interesting nature of some responses.

Henry Ford was one of the pioneers in simplifying and normalizing the work process. Even in his time, he introduced a model that valued quality, time, rewards, friendly yet disciplined management, and a tolerant relationship between superiors and subordinates. It is my hope that, in the 21st century, such approaches can still be implemented and that this article will serve as a modest contribution to the discourse on bureaucracy—an inseparable part of our professional world. I believe that bureaucratic institutions and companies can benefit from the ideas presented herein (Williams, K., Haslam, C., Williams, J, 1992. p. 517-555).

Modern Neo-Weberian Extensions: Perrow and Crozier

1. Charles Perrow: Bureaucracy and Systemic Failures

Deepened Weber's theory by analyzing how bureaucratic structures can contribute not only to rational coordination but also to systemic risks and organizational failure. In his theory of "normal accidents", he argues that tightly coupled and complex bureaucratic systems are vulnerable to cascading failures, especially when information flow is delayed or distorted due to rigid procedures. This perspective contrasts with Weber's ideal of bureaucracy as a stabilizing force. While Weber emphasized predictability, Perrow warns that over-rationalization and excessive



specialization can reduce adaptability, especially in critical industries such as nuclear energy, aviation, or even IT management.

Application to this study: In the surveyed company, where 40% of employees report that “excessive rules slow down work,” Perrow’s insights help explain how over-regulation might actually increase the risk of organizational inefficiency, rather than reduce it (Charles Perrow 1984; P. 48).

2. Michael Crozier: The Bureaucratic Phenomenon and Resistance to Change

A French sociologist, developed a detailed critique of bureaucratic systems in his seminal work *The Bureaucratic Phenomenon*. He observed that bureaucracy tends to create “zones of uncertainty”, where lower-level actors resist change and manipulate procedures to protect their autonomy. This results in organizational rigidity, limited innovation, and informal power struggles. Crozier emphasized that bureaucracies fail not due to rules themselves, but because they prevent learning and adaptation. According to him, change is blocked because actors hide behind the impersonal structure to avoid accountability or risk.

Application to this study: When 58% of survey respondents describe the management system as “rigid and formal,” and 60% say initiative is “ignored or discouraged,” Crozier’s theory helps us understand how bureaucracies suppress innovation not through evil intent, but through structural paralysis. Even well-meaning actors become locked into routines that inhibit creativity (Michael Crozier 1964; P. 56).

Anonymous Suggestions and Complaints within the Company

Comments Collected at the End of the Survey

Positive Comments:

Employee A (Mid-Level Manager): "The clear definition of roles significantly facilitates our work. Everyone knows their responsibilities precisely, which prevents chaos. I highly appreciate this aspect of the management system."

Employee B (Lower-Level Employee): "The documentation and reporting system is well-established. Everything is conducted formally and traceably, which enhances transparency."

Employee C (Human Resources Specialist): "Adherence to specific rules creates discipline in the workplace. This structure is particularly beneficial for new employees, as it enables them to adapt to the system quickly."

Negative Comments and Suggestions:



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4. Employee D (Lower-Level Employee): "The opinions of lower-level employees are not considered in decision-making processes. I would prefer a more participatory management style. Valuing our initiatives would increase our motivation."

Employee E (Mid-Level Employee): "Excessive documentation and bureaucratic procedures slow down our work. Simplifying some rules would allow us to work more efficiently."

Employee F (Administrative Employee): "Management is overly formal and distant. If they engaged in more open and empathetic communication with employees, the work environment would be more motivating."

Employee G (Lower-Level Employee): "Our initiatives are usually ignored. A formal platform or process for submitting new ideas would encourage greater participation."

Employee H (Mid-Level Manager): "There is a lack of transparency in the organization. We would like to know how decisions are made and what criteria they are based on. This would build greater trust."

Employee I (Administrative Employee): "I feel that promotions sometimes favor personal connections. A more meritocratic system is needed."

Employee J (Lower-Level Employee): "I would like more flexible rules regarding work hours and additional expenses. This is particularly important for employees with families."

Note: Some employees chose not to provide comments, which aligns with the anonymous nature of the survey. This may indicate hesitation to openly express opinions or a lack of trust within the organization.

Conclusions Drawn from Suggestions and Complaints: Segmented by Lower-Level Employees, Mid-Level Managers, and Administration

1. Lower-Level Employees

This group includes operational or administrative staff. Based on the survey results, these employees report limited participation in decision-making (68% "rarely" or "never"), lack of support for initiatives (60%), and a need for more flexible working hours.

Employee A (Administrative Staff, Positive): "The clear definition of roles makes our work much easier. Everyone knows their responsibilities, preventing chaos."



Employee B (Operational Staff, Negative): "Our opinions are not considered in decision-making processes. If our initiatives were valued, we would be more motivated."

Employee C (Administrative Staff, Negative): "Excessive documentation slows down our work. Needing approval for everything wastes time."

Employee D (Operational Staff, Negative): "Work schedules are too rigid for employees with families. We would like more flexible hours."

Conclusion (Lower-Level Employees): The comments from lower-level employees align with the survey findings, appreciating the bureaucratic principle of role clarity while expressing dissatisfaction with the lack of transparency and participation. This reflects Weber's "iron cage" metaphor, where rigid rules and centralized decision-making suppress motivation and creativity. Suggested improvements include more flexible procedures and participatory management.

2. Mid-Level Employees

This group includes team leaders or mid-level administrative staff. According to the survey, these employees noted a lack of transparency (40% "not transparent") and insufficient support for initiatives (60% "ignored" or "discouraged").

Employee E (Team Leader, Positive): "The documentation system is well-organized, and reports are traceable. This ensures order in our work."

Employee F (Mid-Level Employee, Negative): "Management does not share decisions transparently. We want to know the criteria behind decisions."

Employee G (Team Leader, Negative): "Our initiatives are often rejected or ignored. A formal platform for innovation is needed."

Conclusion (Mid-Level Employees): Mid-level employees value the order and documentation provided by the bureaucratic system but are frustrated by the lack of transparency and support for initiatives. This highlights the downside of Weber's "hierarchical control" principle, which stifles innovation. Suggestions focus on transparent communication and platforms for innovation, aligning with the proposed hybrid model in the article.

3. Managers (Senior Management and HR)



This group includes senior managers and human resources specialists. The survey indicates that managers also acknowledge issues with transparency and participation but focus more on the system's overall effectiveness.

Employee H (HR Specialist, Positive): "Rules help new employees learn the system quickly, enhancing the organization's professionalism."

Employee I (Senior Manager, Negative): "Promotions sometimes favor personal connections. We need a more meritocratic system."

Employee J (HR Specialist, Negative): "Management is too formal and distant. More empathetic communication could boost employee motivation."

Conclusion (Managers): Managers support the bureaucratic system's professionalism and discipline but are concerned about non-meritocratic promotions and distant leadership. This reflects challenges in implementing Weber's "merit-based promotion" and "impersonal relationships" principles. Recommendations include ethical leadership training and transparent promotion processes.

General Analysis and Recommendations for the Organization

The comments complement the survey results, highlighting the dual nature of the bureaucratic system: it provides structure and stability but undermines innovation, transparency, and employee engagement. Positive comments affirm that the organization adheres to Weber's bureaucratic principles, creating an orderly and professional environment through clear role definitions, robust documentation, and discipline. However, negative comments, particularly those concerning participation and transparency, underscore the need for bureaucratic systems to evolve to meet modern workplace demands. Employees' calls for flexibility, meritocratic promotions, and empathetic leadership align with Crozier's critique of the "bureaucratic phenomenon," which points to organizational resistance to change and internal rigidity. The reluctance of some employees to provide comments may suggest a "culture of silence" potentially driven by a lack of trust, resonating with Zinoviev's notion of systemic conformity.

Recommendations for the Organization:

Participatory Leadership: Management should organize regular "open door" sessions or anonymous feedback platforms to enhance employee involvement in decision-making processes.

Innovation Platforms: Formal systems, such as internal "incubator" programs, should be established to support employee initiatives and foster innovation.



Streamlined Procedures: Excessive documentation should be reduced through digital automation and simplified reporting systems to improve efficiency.

Ethical and Emotional Leadership: Training in emotional intelligence and ethical leadership should be provided to managers to encourage open and empathetic communication with employees.

Meritocratic System: Transparent, merit-based criteria for promotions should be defined to minimize the influence of personal connections and enhance fairness.

Discussion

The survey results offer a practical lens through which to assess Max Weber's bureaucratic theory in a contemporary organizational setting. The findings generally affirm several of Weber's key propositions, including the formalization of roles, hierarchical authority, and impersonal governance. For instance, the fact that 72% of respondents fully understood their job responsibilities reflects Weber's emphasis on task specialization and clearly defined roles, which contribute to order and efficiency in bureaucratic systems (Weber, 1968).

However, several limitations and contradictions also emerge. The high number of respondents who indicated that decision-making is non-transparent (40%) or that lower-level employees rarely or never participate in decisions (68%) points to the centralization of authority and exclusionary practices, a critique often raised by neo-Weberian scholars and critical theorists. These patterns reflect what Michels (1911) described as the "iron law of oligarchy," in which bureaucracies inevitably evolve toward authoritarian control structures.

Further, the finding that 60% of employees felt that initiative was either ignored or discouraged reinforces the notion that bureaucratic systems may suppress creativity and innovation—a concern echoed by George Ritzer (2011) in his theory of McDonaldization, where standardization overrides individuality. This also aligns with Weber's metaphor of the "iron cage," wherein individuals become entrapped in systems that prioritize efficiency over emotional and moral values (Weber, 1930).

While clear responsibility distribution (58%) and detailed documentation practices (46%) are beneficial for consistency and accountability, they also reflect a rigid work environment, potentially limiting flexibility and adaptability. This duality underscores Bauman's (1989) warning that modern bureaucracies, when disconnected from ethical responsibility, can normalize dehumanizing routines—even in everyday administrative settings.

Interestingly, despite the structured environment, only 28% of respondents described their management system as flexible, suggesting a significant gap between formal structure and participatory leadership. This gap may result in low motivation, emotional detachment, and



employee alienation, as indicated by Weber's notion of impersonalism and later elaborated by Giddens (1993) in his discussion of institutional detachment.

In sum, the data reflect a partial confirmation of Weber's bureaucratic model, particularly in terms of predictability, hierarchy, and formalism. At the same time, they expose the human cost of excessive routinization and centralized decision-making. While bureaucracy may provide organizational stability, it can simultaneously erode trust, limit innovation, and foster alienation if left unchecked.

To address these shortcomings, a hybrid model that integrates Weberian structure with startup-inspired flexibility may offer a more sustainable approach to governance. This would involve decentralizing some decision-making processes, encouraging employee initiative, and cultivating a more empathetic leadership style—thus combining the strengths of classical bureaucracy with the adaptive needs of modern work environments.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the article demonstrates that bureaucracy is far from being an ideal system. However, it remains the most structured form of administration that humankind has devised thus far. Although its drawbacks often seem to outweigh its benefits, this is still a relative matter, highly dependent on the principles and quality of those in charge. For instance, the director of Company X may adopt a compassionate and quality-oriented approach toward employees, offering rewards and recognition for their performance, and paying close attention to motivational factors. On the other hand, the owner of Company Y might adopt an intolerant attitude toward staff, failing to appreciate their efforts and neglecting aspects of stimulation and motivation altogether. Both scenarios are plausible.

The main suggestion presented in this article is that all bureaucratically managed organizations should prioritize motivation and stimulation as essential components of their administration. These should begin with material incentives and be complemented by other factors. Work hours and schedules must be formally recorded, additional expenses accounted for, and security ensured. Moreover, financial needs should be calculated separately for married and single employees.

Max Weber's theory of bureaucracy remains a cornerstone of modern organizational management, yet its limitations and need for adaptation to contemporary realities are evident. Through an empirical study conducted at a private company in Warsaw, this article has analyzed the strengths and weaknesses of bureaucracy. The survey findings confirm that Weber's principles—such as hierarchical control, role formalization, and procedural governance—provide stability and efficiency. However, they also reveal significant shortcomings in transparency, employee participation, and innovation, aligning with Weber's metaphor of the “iron cage,” where excessive rationalization and formalism can suppress individual creativity and weaken socio-emotional



engagement. To mitigate these drawbacks, a hybrid model integrating classical bureaucratic structures with startup-inspired principles is proposed. This approach could foster a more flexible and participatory management style by encouraging employee initiative, decentralizing decision-making, and promoting emotionally intelligent leadership. Practically, organizations could adopt tools such as A/B testing, team-based projects, and open communication platforms to create a dynamic work environment. Companies like Google and Spotify exemplify the successful integration of bureaucratic stability with innovative cultures, demonstrating the feasibility of this synthesis.

Moreover, the ethical and social implications of bureaucracy must not be overlooked. As Bauman's analyses suggest, bureaucratic systems detached from moral responsibility can lead to significant societal harm. Organizations should therefore integrate corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs and ethical leadership training to reinforce employees' commitment to moral values. Additionally, modern technologies such as digitalization and artificial intelligence offer opportunities to enhance bureaucratic transparency and efficiency. However, over-mechanization risks creating new forms of the "iron cage," necessitating careful implementation. Future research should explore how bureaucracy manifests across diverse cultural and regional contexts. For instance, bureaucratic systems in post-Soviet countries may exhibit stronger authoritarian tendencies compared to Western models. Further investigation into the influence of gender and educational attainment on bureaucratic decision-making, as well as the application of bureaucracy in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which often require more flexible structures, would be valuable.

In conclusion, bureaucracy remains an indispensable framework for modern organizational governance, but its efficacy depends on the quality of leadership, adherence to ethical principles, and adaptability to changing demands. Organizations like Company X, which adopt empathetic and quality-oriented approaches, can transform bureaucracy into a powerful tool that balances stability with innovation. Conversely, rigid and authoritarian management, as exemplified by Company Y, risks undermining employee motivation and societal well-being. The future of bureaucracy lies in its ability to integrate flexibility, ethics, and humanism, ensuring it serves both organizational goals and the broader social good.

In contemporary times, leading universities such as the University of Warsaw, Nicolaus Copernicus University, and SWPS University offer master's-level courses in Human Resources (HR). This reflects the continued relevance of bureaucracy and the involvement of sociologists who influence it in our modern world. From the perspective of popularity, this field opens a new window for the discipline. The article maintains its relevance by emphasizing the forward-looking role of bureaucracy, which aligns with contemporary ideas and resources, as well as its prominent and sought-after role in newly emerging professional fields.



Finally, it should be noted that people increasingly prioritize comfort and convenience in their lives. Factors contributing to this trend may include financial resources, media, geographical location, the economic conditions of a country, working hours, and similar aspects. Consequently, it emerges that people generally desire shorter working hours and higher salaries. However, when such expectations are met, they must fulfill their responsibilities accordingly. Yet, an issue arises here: in the future, will people seek to further reduce working hours, or not? Only time will tell. Nevertheless, the more working hours and work schedules are reduced, the greater the demands will become, and at some point, physical capacity may not suffice to meet these expectations. This could potentially lead to a paradox.

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