Organizing in Times of Crisis: The Case of Covid-19

Class 3: Crisis Management and Bureaucracy

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“[Bureaucracy] is superior to any other form in precision, in stability, in stringency of its discipline and in its reliability’.

Max Weber (1978, p. 223)
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Max Weber (1978, p. 223)
Weberian Bureaucracy as a Specific Modern Form of Organization

- Power belongs to an **office**, not the office holder
- Authority configuration is specified by **formal rules**
- Rules specify tasks for different categories of personnel
  - **specialization**
- Tendency towards **hierarchy**
- **Formal credentials** certify required qualifications
- Career: promotion by seniority or **merit of service**
- Communication, coordination and control are **centralized**
Two Traditions of Bureaucracy Critique

Entrepreneurial
Tom Peters
(cited in Du Gay, 1994)

Ethical
Zygmunt Baumann
(1989, p. 15)

Entrepreneurial

Ethical
Entrepreneurial

“I beg each and everyone of you to develop a public and passionate hatred of bureaucracy.”

Tom Peters (cited in Du Gay, 1994)

Ethical

“...the Holocaust is so crucial to our understanding of the modern bureaucratic mode of rationalization ... because it reminds us ... just how formal and ethically blind is the bureaucratic pursuit of efficiency.”

Zygmunt Baumann (1989, p. 15)
Entrepreneurial, Ethical and Bureaucratic?

“Even though we’ll end up picking at most two of them, we’re going to fund factories for all seven, just so that we don’t waste time in serially saying, ‘OK, which vaccine works?’ and then building the factory.”

Bill Gates
Public Bureaucracy in Crisis?
The Democratic Case for Public Bureaucracy

(1) **Proviso of the law**: no administrative action may take place without a legal, democratic basis
   - formally codified rules, prohibition of arbitrary action

(2) **Equality before the law**: individuals must be treated equally by the law
   - predictability, stability

(3) **Rational legal authority**: individual actions of public officials follow a clear chain of command
   - tendency towards hierarchy; roles, not persons
Public Bureaucracy vs. New Public Management

(1) Proviso of the law
(2) Equality before the law
(3) Rational legal authority

The basic rationale behind NSM is an increase in efficiency by utilizing the mechanisms of business-like performance management, while at the same time stepping up the decentralization and autonomy of local governments.

Vogel (2012, p. 370)
Public Bureaucracy vs. New Public Management

**MANAGERIAL**

Focus on efficiency, mainly pursued by means of output control

**BUREAUCRATIC**

Focus on reliability and legality, mainly pursued by means of input and process control
Public Bureaucracy vs. Open Government

Ideal-typical qualities of public administrations

(1) Proviso of the law
(2) Equality before the law
(3) Rational legal authority

"a more democratic, collaborative, and transparent administration through public access to data, deliberations, and decisions"

Kornberger et al. (2017, p. 180)
Public Bureaucracy: More Managerial and More Open?

More in Class 8: Open Science, Data and Commons
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References