CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN BUREAUCRACY

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ABSTRACT

This study is on contemporary issues In bureaucracy. The main objective of this study is to raise discuss on issues of bureaucracy, its characteristics, functions and criticisms in formal and modern organisations. The study secondary data, and sourced the data from text books, journals, unpublished manuscripts, websites, etc., and used same to achieve the objectives of the study. The study applied content analysis as a tool of analysis for the secondary data. As a conceptual discuss, the study reviewed literature on the subject of bureaucracy. The study findings shows that emergence of administrative class in the organisation, hierarchy of authority, professional and expert knowledge of the staff, division of labour +and specialization, permanency and security of tenure of staff, etc., are among the characteristics of bureaucracy. Another set of findings are the implementation of government policies and laws, participation in policy formulation, advisory capacity, collection of government revenues and preparation of government budget as some of the functions of bureaucracy. Other findings prove that there criticisms facing bureaucracy in formal and large organisations.

Keywords: bureaucracy, contemporary issues, bureaucrat, organization.

INTRODUCTION

In modern organisations, the practice of bureaucracy is found in large and formal organizational structures, characterized with distinguish features and designed to achieve the organizational objectives. Although, Ghai (2019, p.1) stated that bureaucracy is associated with the practice in civil service, but not limited to only civil service. The choice of linking bureaucracy with civil service is on account of the large and complex nature of civil service all over the world. However, bureaucracy is beyond civil service in practical terms. No wonder, Banton (2019, p.1) opined that bureaucracy is a large and formal organization with complex and multi-layered system, where due process is applied in its activities. Bureaucracy defines the operational principles of the organization, its activities, uniformity in operations and certain procedures in the organization. Bureaucracy functions in a large and formal organization, with basic principles, particularly the Weber's bureaucracy. Such organisations include the banks, churches, universities, polytechnics, local governments, government agencies, ministries, armed forces, police, etc., and could be in a public or private organization. Bureaucracy has its formal features, characteristics, functions, challenges and principal operators called the bureaucrats. Although, different perspectives arise on issues of bureaucracy, leading to some applauding bureaucracy, and others raising criticisms against bureaucracy.

Despite its challenges, bureaucracy has its advantages over non-bureaucratic organisations in terms of its operations, defined rules and regulations, and set goals of the organization. This chapter therefore aims at explaining the concept of bureaucracy, its characteristics, functions, and criticisms in a modern organization. The study uses secondary data to achieve its objectives on the study of bureaucracy.

Conceptual Explanation of Bureaucracy

The concept of bureaucracy was first used as a French word –"bureaucratique" by a French scholar and one time France Minister of Commerce, Jacquee Claude Marie Vincent De Gounay in 1745 (Naidu, 1996). Bureaucracy as English Language was popularized by German scholar and sociologist, Max Weber in 1920s. Raadschelder (1998, p.142) argued that Max Weber saw the advancement of bureaucracy as the development and advancement of administration for positive and efficient productivity in the service. In his view, Ita & Titus (2018, p.4) added that Max Weber perception on bureaucracy is to explain an ideal type of bureaucracy, with elements of administrative rationality.

According to Frank (2007,p.35) "bureaucracy is the means of carrying out community actions over and into a rationally ordered societal action" The concept of community here implies the organization, as bureaucracy cannot take place without an organization, be it private or public. Bureaucracy provides the platform to operate the organization for the purpose of result achievement in the organisation. In his view, Ritzer (1996, pp.17-20) noted that bureaucracy is more of a western perception, and administrative ideology to administer a large and formal structured organization. The scholar added that bureaucracy is a large-scale organization composed of hierarchy of offices, where people have certain administrative responsibilities and must act in accordance with the organizational rules, usually in a written form to operate the organization.; This perception puts bureaucracy as a large organization with defined organizational structure and principles of operation, in which the bureaucrats willingly abide by the terms of the organizational policies to achieve the organizational goal.

In another perspectives, Page (1988) explained bureaucracy in four different viewpoints.

➢ Firstly, bureaucracy is explained as a system of rule governing a large organization, which is closely associated with governmental system where the organizational officials dominate the organizational activities;

➢ Secondly, bureaucracy is explained as code of conduct based on the practice of organizational general rules;

➢ Thirdly, bureaucracy is noted as the efficiency or inefficiency in operations of the organization, which defined the nature of the result of the operations of the organization; and

➢ Fourthly, bureaucracy is explained as a social group in the offices (bureaucrats), either in public or private organization. These are the official organization workers, and are called public servants.

Similarly, Banton (2019) sees bureaucracy as an organization that has a complex structure with multi-layered systems and process of operation defined to guide the organization. Bureaucracy is operational in both government (public sector) and private organisations, but such private organization must be large and formal in its structure and operations, with defined principles to guide the actions of the bureaucrats. Aluko and Adesopo (2014,p.13) added that bureaucracy is a formal organization with principles of several operations, where people are brought together in a formal and complex setting and are managed by professionals and experts, otherwise known as bureaucrats. As a formal organisation, it implies that bureaucratic organization function in such a manner that all of its activities are carried out on principles of official relations among its members on one hand, and between its members and the public on the other hand, as well as its terms of organizational goals. The strategies to achieve the organisational goals are procedurally defined and comply with by all, as no individual has personal objective or projects personal objective in the organization, rather all members of the organization work towards the achievement of the organizational goal using the organizational principles.

At this point, the bureaucrats play prominent roles in achievement of the organisational goals. Banton (2019) further identified the bureaucrats as the operators of the bureaucracy in a bureaucratic organization, who are appointed by the government as officials and designed to

manage government policies. Although, this study tends to state that bureaucrats are not limited to government officials only, but to include all those who carry out bureaucratic activities in large and formal organizations, either in public or private organizations. Adebayo (2019, p.19) stated that bureaucracy is a process and element of administration in an organization, with such organization operating on formal principles and been large and complex in nature. Of course, such organization must have defined set of goals to achieve.

Rockman (2019) explained bureaucracy as an organization with impersonal and rational set of rules regulating its operations. Such organization has complexity, division of labour, permanence, professional management, hierarchical authority, span of control, chain of command, legal authority and defined employees. It is more of a formal organization where rules are officially applied. The above explains the basic characteristics of bureaucracy in a modern organization. Daneshfard and Abaalmaali (2016, p.215) stated that bureaucracy is more operational in a modern administrative institutions with guiding principles. The relevance of bureaucracy in a modern organization is important and cannot be over emphasized, as its advantages are enormous in the organization.

The Characteristics of Bureaucracy

This section will identify and discuss the characteristics of bureaucracy in modern organisations.

Administrative Class

A bureaucratic organization usually has administrative staff, who are responsible for the daily administrative activities of the organization. The staffs are the bureaucrats, who coordinate the administrative activities and policies of the organisation, with the view of achieving the organizational goals. The administrative staff forms the administrative class in the organization and is characterized as thus:

- ➢ The administrative staff/class are the employees of the organization;
- ➢ The staff are paid salaries based on terms of their employment in the organization;
- ➢ The staff enjoys defined conditions of service in the organization based on the terms of their contract in the organization;
- ➢ The staff are hired based on their knowledge, qualification and skill to render the desired service in the organization; and
- ➢ The staff is conscious class in the organization, who protect the interest of their members in service of the organization.

Hierarchy of Authority

Onah (2015, p.59) sees bureaucracy as the various levels of authority that exist in an organization with the subordinates taking instructions from the superior. This explains the level and hierarchical positions of authority individuals occupy in the organization, and authoritative powers of the individuals in the organization. The authority flows from the top to the down in the organization. The bureaucratic organization has set of defined rules established by the authority of the organization, and is implemented at various levels of the organisations. Instruction and compliance in the organization is based on the established authority, and defines the line of communication and delegation of authority.

Professional and Expert Knowledge

Members of the bureaucratic organization, particularly the bureaucrats are educated and professionally trained on administrative activities of the organization. They assist the political class of the organization in executing the organizational policies. These administrators are recruited into the organization through competitive examinations and are required to have the basic educational qualifications for the respective offices. The bureaucrats are further trained and equipped with the needed skill for the daily jobs, thereby making them more knowledgeable on the jobs, and

developing their professional skill with expert knowledge on administrative work of the organization. This positions the administrative class as the professionals with expert knowledge on the job.

Division of Labour and Specialisation

Bureaucratic organization is characterized with division of labour among members of the organization. The organization is structured in such a way that every member of organization is identified with his/her duties based on the professional knowledge of the person, and constant carrying out of a particular duty after a period of time, accounts for specialization of the person on such duty. Also, division of labour accounts for specialization and increase in productivity of the organization.

Actions are Guided by the Organizational Rules and Regulations

The administrative activities of bureaucratic organisation are guided by the rules and regulations of the organization. The bureaucrats carry out their activities based on the policy directives of the organization and based on their personal will. Things are done based on the prevailing terms of the guiding rules and regulations of the organization, and the command of authority clearly defined within the context of the authoritative powers established on the office and position so occupied. There is a proper channel of decision-making, implementation, and compliance by various individuals and sub-groups in the organization.

Permanency and Security of Tenure of Office

Bureaucracy has a peculiar characteristic of granting its operators (bureaucrats) the opportunity of enjoying relative permanency and security of tenure of office to enable the bureaucrats carry out its duties with some level of confidence and security in the service. The carrier servants of the bureaucracy enjoy long tenure of office. They are recruited at a younger age and retired at the age of 60, 65 or 70 as the case may be in Nigeria based on the office such staff occupy. While in service, except such staff commits a crime, he or she cannot be sacked from the service. The change in government and headship of ministries/agencies does not affect their tenure and condition of service, except when the staff is found blameworthy in the service.

Rationality and Impersonality

Onah (2005) argues that one of the characteristics of bureaucracy is that power of authority is vested on the position/office so occupied by the staff of the organization, and not on the staff or individual in the bureaucratic organization. The implication is that bureaucracy provides the power of the office/position so occupied and not the power of the individual occupying the office. Also, the relationship in the office is official and guided by the office regulations and not on personal basis. In course of carrying out the bureaucratic activities, the bureaucrats are rational and not emotional or sentimental in their activities. This makes bureaucracy to be unbiased and effective in its operations for effective productivity in the organization.

Management and Ownership

Bureaucracy is clearly characterized with defined principle of differentiating the ownership from the management of bureaucratic organization. In public bureaucracy, the public properties and funds are separated from the properties and funds of the individuals, and the ownership of the organization is different from the management of the organization, who are usually the administrative class of the organization. In private sectors, such as banks, large churches, etc., the ownership is separate from the managers, who run the daily affairs of such organization. The investors or shareholders are the owners of the organization, while the managers are the hired staff of the organization, and such staff has no right of ownership to the properties of the organization, rather the right of ownership to assets of the organization lies on the owners of the organization.

Functions of Bureaucracy

The functions of bureaucracy are discussed in subheads as stated below.

Implementation of Government Policies and Laws

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Bureaucracy provides the platform to implement the government policies. The bureaucrats, particularly the civil/public servants are noted for their ability to execute government policies and laws in public sector. Significantly, in the process of implementing the policies and laws of the state, they carry out the implementation function without biases and emotion in their activities.

Participation in Policy Formulation

Bureaucracy creates the opportunity for bureaucrats to participate in the policy formulation process in the organization. The bureaucrats provide the needed information/data to the management of the organization, which guides the management in policy formulation in the organization. To the public bureaucracy, the civil servants supply the records to the political class/executive of the government ministry/agency, from where the political class select the needed information to guide them in policy making for the state.

Operation of Administrative Machinery of Government and Large Organisations

Bureaucracy provides the enabling ground for the running of the day to day administrative activities of the organization, including government agencies in line with the rules and regulations of the organization. The political executive merely provide the supervision, while the administrative class carry out the administrative duties in the organization.

Advisory Function

Another function of bureaucracy is to provide necessary advice to the political executive on management of government activities. The political heads of various government agencies such as the minister, chairman of board, commissioner, ambassador, state governors, local government chairmen among others in Nigeria usually consider the advice of top bureaucrats, who function as the heads of departments and units of government ministries and agencies as very important for the purpose of achieving administrative efficiency and organizational productivity.

Collection of Government Revenue and Preparation of Budget

As part of the functions of bureaucracy, the civil servants advice the political executive on issues of fiscal planning of the state, tax structure and tax administration. The bureaucrats collect the government tax and revenue for the purpose of state development, and also prepare the government budget for the financial year.

Taking and Keeping of the Organizational Records

The bureaucrats take and keep records of the organization for the purpose of development planning of the organization. The bureaucrats collect necessary data and store it for future use. They collect, classify and analyse the records regarding to all government activities, and supply such records to the political executive for the purpose of policy formation and national planning.

Intermediary Role between the Government and the People

In modern state, the bureaucracy provides a two-way communication channel and bridge the communication gap between the government and the people. In other words, the bureaucracy provides the public relation functions, as the civil/public servants communicate government decisions in public bureaucracy and management decisions in private bureaucracy to the public. On the other hand, the same bureaucrats communicate the needs, interests and opinions of the people to the government/management on issues of public interests. This makes bureaucracy to function as a two-way channel of communication between the government and the people.

Bureaucracy Reduces Personal Relations and Favouritism in the Organization

Riddle (2018) stated that bureaucracy applies objectivity in the process of staffing the organisation by applying merit as the basic criteria for selecting the best staff for the organization. This function helps to reduce personal relations and unnecessary favouritism in selection process of the organizational staff, as well as the staff relations among themselves in the organization.

Criticisms of Bureaucracy

This section of the research identifies various criticisms of bureaucracy as stated below:

Emergence of a Class within the Organization

Bureaucracy as a complex and large scale organization is usually managed by the administrative class, known as the bureaucrats. The activities of the bureaucrats are pronounced and prominent to the extent that even non-members of the organization easily identifies it. These bureaucrats are knowledgeable on the organizational activities and therefore see themselves as very important class with distinct power in the organization. It therefore makes the bureaucrats to sometimes agitate for power with the original owners of the organisation.

Rigidity in Communication

Davoren (2019) stated that communication in bureaucratic organization is usually rigid due to the uniform and consistent structure of operations in the organization. This rigidity slows down the decision-making and implementation process in the organization, thereby making bureaucracy to be unnecessarily strict in its operations.

Too much Emphasis on Organisational Rules and Regulations

Bolhassan (2014) emphasized that bureaucracy concentrates more on the guiding rules and regulations of the organization, than on the goal of the organization. Everything is done based on existing rules and therefore innovation and adaptation to contemporary changes become difficult in the organization. This is where bureaucracy is viewed as not willing to adapt to new rules and regulations, except the existing rules of the organization.

More Importance is given to Certificate Qualification

Bureaucracy places more emphasis on certificate qualifications of the organizational employees in areas of recruitment and promotion, than technical competence of the staff in the organization. This makes non-bureaucrats in the organization to see bureaucracy as a drive towards certification qualification and not technical competence.

Difficult to Coordinate and Manage due to its Size

Bureaucratic organizations appear to be relatively difficult in its management due to its large size and complex nature of the service. This makes it difficult for easy and effective coordination of the organizational activities, and management of its goals. This challenge makes bureaucracy to create loophole in the organization.

Difficult to Identify Individual Productivity and Accountability

Due to the principle of collectivity and division of labour, no individual in the organization can be held accountable for the productivity of a good and service. This is due to the involvement of large number of people in the production process at different stages of competence before the production is achieved.

Less Recognition is given to Informal Groups

In bureaucracy, the bureaucrats are classified as formal members and group in the organization, others including those who contribute to the success of the organization, such as casual workers and contractors as non-formal group or members of the bureaucratic orgainsation. This disparity in recognition accounts for internal division among the workers of the bureaucratic organization, leading to discrimination among them.

CONCLUSION

Summarily, bureaucracy is an important institution in management of large and complex organization. The relevance of bureaucracy is noted in its application of structured policies in achieving the organizational goals. Although, bureaucracy has its criticisms, yet its advantages appear to out-way the criticisms. It is therefore our recommendation that the application of bureaucratic principles in an organization should be encouraged and guided with the contemporary demands of the organization to enable the organization achieve its goals without hitches. Also, that bureaucracy should be guided with the view that its relevance in the organization is based on the existence of the organization, and therefore the bureaucrats should protect the bureaucratic

principles and the organization, than their demands in the organization. Indeed, the bureaucracy is good and necessary in a modern organization to ensure the success of the organization.

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