

stifle desirable ‘human qualities’. In recent years, critics have argued that bureaucracy has been rendered effectively obsolete in a new epoch. In response, it has been claimed, organizations are becoming more reliant on informal networks with employees enjoying greater autonomy.

Yet it is difficult to reconcile such claims of change with the available evidence. Bureaucracy, though commonly subject to modification in large private sector enterprises, remains very much alive today. Familiar modern management aims involve both innovation in the application of techniques of management and employee self-discipline and the adaptation of familiar bureaucratic methods to new ends. Certain employment rules, concerning, for example, the demarcation of jobs, have undoubtedly been relaxed. But in other respects – for example, in the display of emotions in many service sector roles – workplace rules often appear more all-encompassing today.

The modifications to bureaucracy in business have encouraged debate on ethics, with critics drawing attention to dangers associated with increasing line manager autonomy in decision-making, the intensification of effort and control of employees as well as the growing casualization of work. But it is in the public sector that the risks of the diminishing influence of bureaucracy have been most clearly highlighted. Here, significant changes to administrative style – the enhanced role of personal responsibility, entrepreneurial ideals and techniques adapted from the commercial enterprise – have been contrasted with an alternative ‘tradition’ of bureaucratic impartiality, fairness and consistency in a way that Weber would have appreciated. Critics argue that trust in the operation of government is threatened by reform. And without trust, democratic citizenship will atrophy.

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See also:

Empowerment; Hierarchy; Public sector.

References and selected further readings

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Burnout

The term ‘burnout’ was first coined in the 1970s by Freudenberger to describe the gradual emotional depletion and loss of motivation he observed among people who had volunteered to work for aid organizations in New York. Freudenberger (1974) defined burnout as ‘a state of mental and physical exhaustion caused by one’s professional life’, and he referred to ‘the extinction of motivation or incentive, especially where one’s devotion to a cause or relationship fails to produce the desired results’. Employees who burn out from their work deplete their energetic resources and lose their dedication to work. On the basis of interviews with human service workers in California, Maslach and her

colleagues defined burnout as a chronic form of work-related stress that is characterized by three main symptoms, namely emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach et al., 2001).

Burned-out individuals feel chronically fatigued, and endorse a negative callous attitude towards their work and the people with whom they work. They often believe that they no longer make a meaningful contribution to the organization. Research has shown that people burn out in their work as a consequence of prolonged exposure to high job demands and low job resources. Having to deal with a high workload and emotionally demanding clients seems to particularly increase the risk of burnout when there are not sufficient job resources available, including autonomy, social support, skill variety and performance feedback.

Employees with higher levels of burnout are more likely to report a range of psychological and physical health problems, including depression, sleep disturbance, memory impairment and neck pain. The burnout syndrome has also been found to be an independent risk factor for infections, Type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular diseases (see Leiter et al., 2014). Consequently, burned-out employees are likely to withdraw from their work in the form of lateness, absence or turnover (Maslach et al., 2001). Moreover, individual performance is compromised because burned-out workers need to invest extra time and effort in performing their job.

Most research on burnout focuses on possible causes and consequences of the syndrome. Scholars have also started to investigate work engagement as the positive antipode of burnout to find out what should be done to prevent burnout. These studies typically show that engaged workers differ from burned-out workers in that the former group has more job and personal resources available to cope with their high job demands. In addition, engaged workers use personal initiative to change their job demands and resources if needed – this latter behaviour is called ‘job crafting’.

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See also:

Employee engagement; Stress; Wellbeing.

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