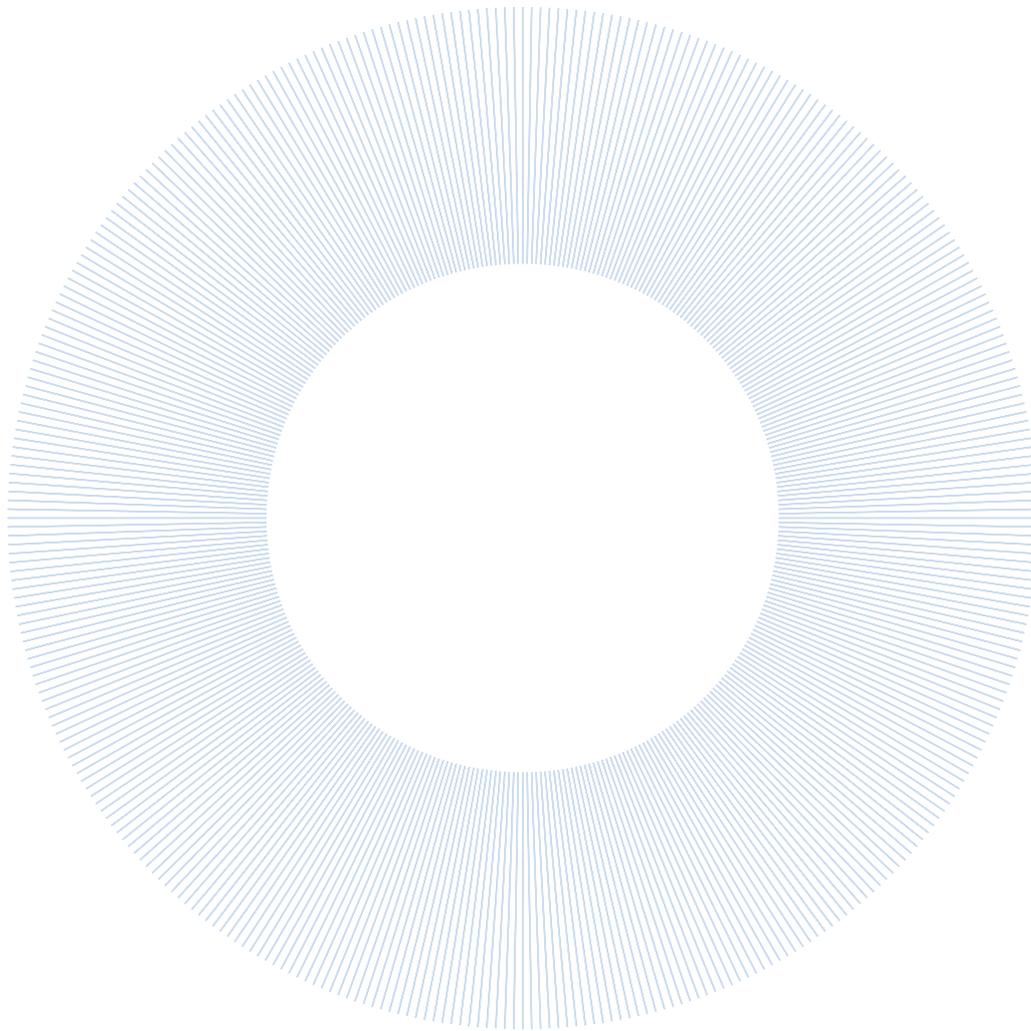# The Futures of Bureaucracy?

Stewart Clegg

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THE FUTURES OF BUREAUCRACY?

Bureaucracy is under attack and has been for some time, especially these past 30 years. In this paper I will outline the specific qualities of bureaucracy; the challenges to it that different critics have posed, and the possible futures of bureaucracy that are being imagined. In the 1980s, as a key part of an extremely liberal and influential critique of bureaucracy, new imaginings of how to organize corporations and public sector organizations began to emerge. By the late 1990s these had morphed into a view of the network or hybrid organization as the way of the future. The paper will suggest that the global future of bureaucracy is not as simple as some of these criticisms suggest when they see it left behind in the emergence of innovative new forms. Instead, it is suggested, there is a spatial disaggregation of organizations occurring that heralds some unsettling new futures of organizations emerging.

Introduction

Bureaucracy has had a chequered career in social science since its formulation as a concept by Max Weber in the early years of the twentieth century and the subsequent translation of his works in the post-war era. It has been developed as a central plank of one of the most influential large-scale empirically comparative research projects of modern social science, the Aston studies; it has been subject to vitriolic attack by contemporary proponents of the new public management and of entrepreneurial private sector management; it has waxed and latterly waned as the central policy device of modern government, and it has been declared, if not dying, as fading before the onslaught of networks, digitalization, project management, outsourcing and supply chains. This paper reviews the career of the concept and considers its future prognosis.

The Past of Bureaucracy

Bureaucracy has long been seen as a cornerstone of the advanced industrial societies, and even as constitutive of modernity itself. Yet, one of the most striking features of contemporary debate is that this hitherto dominant form has been dismissed as outmoded by commentators of virtually all persuasions. This was not always the case.

Bureaucracy has a long and distinguished history, not least because of its central place in Max Weber's understanding of modernity (Weber, 1978). The founding father of the sociology of organizations, Max Weber, whose work on organizations was translated into English from the late 1940s, with his national and liberal concerns with the foundation of the German state, had naturally attended to the pivotal role that Prussian civil and military bureaucracy had played in that state's founding. For Weber, bureaucracy was neither a novel nor even a distinctively European phenomenon; nonetheless, Germany's rapid development after 1871 owed much to its modern rational legal form. For Weber it often seemed that the opposite of bureaucracy was dilettantism. What characterized bureaucracy for Weber was the social embeddedness of different value systems, and his account of bureaucracy centred not just on formal rules but

also on the idea that the ethics of office implied a form of practical wisdom that, in Richard Sennett's (2006) terms, functioned as a gift for organizing time.

Weber had a precise understanding of bureaucracy. Members of a bureaucratic organization are expected to obey its rules as general principles that can be applied to particular cases and which apply to those exercising authority as much as those who must obey the rules. People do not obey the rules because of traditional deference or submission to charismatic authority; they do not obey the person but the office holder. Members of the organization 'bracket' the personal characteristics of the office holder and respond purely to the demands of office. Whether you like the office holder or not is supposed to be unimportant. Police officers may be disagreeable personally, but they hold an office that enables them to do what they do, within the letter of the law. The rule of law is the technical basis of their ability to take appropriate action, in terms of the definitions laid down in law. Weber's view of bureaucracy was as an instrument or tool of unrivalled technical superiority. He wrote that '[p]recision, speed and unambiguity, knowledge of the files, continuity, discretion, unity, strict subordination, reduction of friction and of material and personal costs—these are raised to the optimum point in the strictly bureaucratic administration' (Weber, 1948, p. 214).

Weber defined bureaucracy as having 15 key dimensions:
1. Power belongs to an office and is not a function of the office holder.
2. Power relations within the organization structure have a distinct authority configuration, specified by the rules of the organization.
3. Because powers are exercised in terms of the rules of office rather than the person, organizational action is impersonal.
4. Disciplinary systems of knowledge, either professionally or organizationally formulated, rather than idiosyncratic beliefs, frame organizational action.
5. The rules tend to be formally codified.
6. These rules are contained in files of written documents that, based on precedent and abstract rule, serve as standards for organizational action.
7. These rules specify tasks that are specific, distinct, and done by different formal categories of personnel who specialize in these tasks and not in others. These official tasks would be organized on a continuous regulated basis in order to ensure the smooth flow of work between the discontinuous elements in its organization. Thus, there is a tendency toward specialization.
8. There is a sharp boundary between bureaucratic action and particularistic action by personnel, defining the limits of legitimacy.
9. The functional separation of tasks means that personnel must have authority and sanction available to them commensurate with their duties. Thus, organizations exhibit an authority structure.
10. Because tasks are functionally separated, and because the personnel charged with each function have precisely delegated powers, there is a tendency toward hierarchy.
11. The delegation of powers is expressed in terms of duties, rights, obligations, and responsibilities. Thus, organizational relationships tend to have a precise contract basis.
12. Qualities required for organization positions are increasingly measured in terms of formal credentials.
13. Because different positions in the hierarchy of offices require different credentials for admission, there is a career structure in which promotion is possible either by seniority or by merit of service by individuals with similar credentials.
14. Different positions in the hierarchy are differentially paid and otherwise stratified.
15. Communication, coordination, and control are centralized in the organization.

Weber's work proved decisive for organization analysis. Characteristics abstracted from Weber and other writers were subsequently taken to be constitutive categorically shared features that bestowed family resemblances on all organizations. By the 1950s, when scholars in the United States started to think about the nature of organizations, Weber was one of several widely used sources. At this time, when organizations first began to be studied systematically, the world of organizations and the word of bureaucracy were seen as largely coterminous; for instance, the first widely used course text for students of organizations dating from 1952 and still the standard reader when I entered university in the mid 1960s, was Robert Merton and colleagues (1952) *Reader on Bureaucracy*. In the early 1960s the idea of organizations as bureaucracy was developed and focused in a large-scale comparative analysis of organizations by the researchers of the Aston School, who narrowed Weber's sophisticated account of bureaucracy to a structural and essentialist theory of organizations (Pugh and Hickson, 1976). The empirical world that confronted the Aston School was one in which, in a rather empiricist manner, they saw only bureaucracy and its variants as prevalent. All organizations were seen as variants on a theme: organizationally, their research suggested that there could be more or less bureaucracy, the extent of which was seen to depend on one key contingency: the size of the organization. As organizations grew in size they became inescapably more centralized, formalized, routinized, standardized, configured as bureaucracies. Size was the independent variable while the dependent variable was the configuration of the organization, with the relation between the two being conceived in essentially contingent terms. The increasing size of an organization, they hypothesized, was a social fact that could be dealt with only in one way – by increasing bureaucratization. Indeed, this was, the Aston School suggested, a law that held universally.

In the work of the Aston School (Pugh and Hickson, 1976), the ideal type elements abstracted by Weber with respect to German nineteenth-century bureaucracy become the definitive features of a functionalist conception of organization structure as an essential form, determined in its particular patterns by specific local contingencies, such as size or technology. Conceptualized as a set of stable structural arrangements emerging from a composite of variables that denote bureaucratization, the essence of bureaucracy became frozen as organization structure.

If all efficient bureaucracies were alike, every inefficient bureaucracy would be inefficient in its own way, one might say. The measure of size that the Aston School used was a personnel measure, the number of employment contracts issued. The Aston School's insistence on the fundamental social fact that bureaucracy was the necessary mode of organizing any kind of large-scale formal organization, irrespective of whether it was a public or a private sector organization, was an empirical finding of the 1960s that came to be increasingly challenged as the century unfolded.

The accuracy of the Aston School's projection of bureaucracy in relation to British industry is, implies Ackroyd (2010), questionable. One of their sample organizations was the Austin motor works in Birmingham. Empirically, fragmentation and disaggregation were long-standing and endemic features of British industrial organizations such as Austin. Austin was later allied with Morris, Rover and a number of other firms in British Leyland, which, although doubtless a large-scale industrial organization, lacked the centralized direction and unitary structures suggested by classic models of bureaucracy. Similar to many other UK firms Leyland appeared to be large when considered in aggregate but such firms were frequently comprised of relatively small subsidiary companies governed through a very substantial degree of operating autonomy on the part of local management. The institutional landscape of British firms was based on radically 'disaggregated' structures, derived not from functional requirements but from the values, policies and strategic objectives of UK managerial elites (Ackroyd, 2010). In assuming the

universality of variants of bureaucracy Pugh and Hickson (1976) and their colleagues assumed a great deal about the sample frame that was empirically questionable.

The conception of bureaucracy that solidified in organization theory was in some respects quite dissimilar to the central ideas of Weber. It was also significantly different from the idea of bureaucracy that came to dominate political discourse in the post-war era. In the post-war era bureaucracy provided a novel way of orchestrating the individual-organization relationship through an organization form premised on the ethical values of universalism and meritocracy (Kallinikos, 2006, p. 135), a conception that found its utmost expression in the articulation of Beveridge's (1944) ideas of a welfare state. In all these early formulations, in Weber (1978), in Aston (Pugh and Hickson, 1976), and in Beveridge (1944), the idea of bureaucracy was both an aspiration concerning how the world should be conceived as being organized as well as a model of concrete practice. Bureaucracy was soon to shift from an aspiration to a term of abuse.

Challenges to Bureaucracy

While Weber (1978) provided a strongly liberal and positive account of bureaucracy as a guardian of liberal rights, as a frame that ensured the treatment of each case on its merits according to rational-legal rule rather than the prejudices of officialdom, outside the realms of scholarship this positive view of bureaucracy was contested. Northcote Parkinson (1955), a British civil servant, published a short and humorous essay in *The Economist*, in which he stated Parkinson's Law: that in a bureaucracy 'Work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion.' For many people who were not scholars this small essay framed a large part of their judgments about bureaucracy. While Parkinson's essay was very much of its class and time, other more radical critiques of bureaucracy began to circulate in the later 1960s from Beijing to Paris; perhaps more surprisingly, by the 1980s, critique of bureaucracy had become a dominant trope of right-wing thought.

Unlikely resonances occur as ideas travel (Czarniawska and Sevón, 2005). The Cultural Revolution, as an idea, began in Beijing and travelled widely through China, but it did not end there. It had resonances in European Universities in the 1960s. Surprisingly, it also had resonances in American and other Business Schools from the 1980s onwards. The last place one might expect to find enthusiasm for Cultural Revolution is in management. However, there are many echoes. Contemporary organizations and the lives of many people in them have been drastically changed as a result of the revolutionary rhetoric of management consultants such as Tom Peters and Gary Hamel. I shall concentrate on Peters here.

Peters' (Peters and Waterman, 1982) revolutionary rhetoric emerged from his experience as a consultant for McKinsey, based in the San Francisco office and at Stanford University. In order to give shape to the struggle against bureaucracy, Peters identifies it with a specific reactionary figure and ethos. The figure is Robert McNamara and the ethos is that of the Harvard Business School. Peters is on frequent record as saying that his whole life has been a struggle against the legacy of Robert McNamara, which he saw as having become the essential *de facto* wisdom of the Harvard Business School, setting the pace for large American enterprise in the post-war era.[1]

Against what he regarded as the terrible mixture of McNamara, Harvard and Drucker, Peters (Peters and Waterman, 1982) taught eight great lessons. It is worth noting that these eight lessons were remarkably parallel to Mao Tse-tung thought (Tse-tung, 1966). Peters battles

against reactionaries and revisionists by introducing eight 'new' phenomena against eight that are 'old.' He would not normally be thought of as a Maoist but the libertarian synergies are significant. The eight great lessons of Peters and Waterman (1982) function as an archetype almost as powerful – and indexical – as Mao's thought (see Table 1).

Peters	Mao
A *bias for action* – active decision-making – 'getting on with it.'	The idea of *permanent revolution*.
Close to the customer – learning from the people served by the business.	*Learning from the masses.*
Autonomy and entrepreneurship – fostering innovation and nurturing 'champions.'	*Champion workers* fuelled by Mao Tse-tung thought to exceed production and harvest targets.
Productivity through people – treating rank and file employees as a source of quality.	*Learning from the masses.*
Hands-on, value-driven – management philosophy that guides everyday practice – management showing its commitment.	Value driven rationality – the overwhelming superiority of *Mao Tse-tung thought applied through Red Guards leading the masses.*
Stick to the knitting – stay with the business that you know.	The emphasis on *communal principles* as the basis of organization.
Simple form, lean staff – some of the best companies have minimal HQ staff.	The attack against bureaucracy – *Mao's 20 lessons on bureaucracy* in *The Little Red Book*; as Mao said in criticism of the Soviet model, 'Why does heavy industry need so many rules and regulations?'
Simultaneous loose-tight properties – autonomy in shop-floor activities plus centralized values.	*Chairman Mao thought provides the central values* coupled with *the autonomy of the local, communal level Red Guards* to implement that thought.

Table 1: Mao and Peters' Eight Great Lessons.

Unlike the Maoists, Peters did not employ physical violence but implicitly he did violence to the lives and careers of those whose jobs were subject to the whims and strategies of corporate revolutionaries. Extensive lay-offs were the tangible outcome of the cultural revolutionary message as preached by management consultants such as Peters. Lay-offs hollowed out companies, middle-class jobs and future dreams. With fewer employees many organizations lost resilience; often they lost knowledge they did not know they had. Costs were cut rather than innovations fostered. Stein (2001) argues that terms such as 'de-bureaucratization' conceal not only the cruel nature of many current organizational practices but also naturalize political decisions as if they were the logic of institutions such as markets, economic necessity and shareholder value. Given the present climate of cuts in the recessionary nations that have emerged from the global financial crisis, we are likely to see more of this rhetoric occurring, justified as ever, in the name of efficiency and effectiveness.

Peters' rhetoric was aimed at the private sector of corporate America but public sector theorists, responding in part to the emergence of a new politics in the 1980s, soon picked up similar ideas. In the 1980s, under the impact of Thatcherism and Reaganism, public sectors became seen not as the bulwarks of a civil society but as an encroachment on market provision. The naturalization of markets was greatly aided from the 1980s onwards by the reforms that the Thatcher government initiated and the idea of the TINA tendency – that There Is No Alternative. Some commentators on the left see the present cuts to the welfare state in the UK as a continuation of these earlier policies under cover of the crisis bestowed on us by the bankers. There are other continuities with past policies, however. One result of the years of Labour Government that ended this year was that there was a disembedding of public institutions and pre-existing norms

and machinery of government. As Paul du Gay (2010) observes, the protocols of bureaucracy have been increasingly usurped and due process surrendered to an emphasis on 'delivery' and transformational leadership, in continuity with many of the emphases of the Thatcher years. One significant casualty of this disembedding of public institutions was the 'disinterested' public servant, whose vocation was the impartial, impersonal and efficient execution of official duties, independent of any political or moral 'enthusiasms.' The development of new public management (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992), drawing on elements of 'public choice' theory, the managerialist cult of 'excellence,' and a belief that markets or quasi-markets should supplant 'bureaucracy' in public administration that has been predominant in recent reform of public sector organization, has hastened the decline of the Weberian ethos further.

While today's senior civil servants remain subordinate to the responsible minister, responsibility for the implementation of policy has become much more diffuse as relations between ministers and civil servants have increasingly been mediated by the actions of ad hoc committees, task forces and special advisors. Moreover, as evidence from the habits of the Blair government suggest, when sofa meetings replaced cabinet meetings, the formal recording of meetings and respect for bureaucratic protocol diminished markedly. Jonathan Powell (Prime Minister Blair's Chief of Staff) notes that of an average 17 meetings a day at Downing St only three were minuted (Powell, 2010). The spirit of formalistic impersonality and the ethic of responsibility gave way to 'responsive' and 'enthusiastic' political appointees.

More especially, policy has become increasingly monitored through the achievement of targets and key performance indicators, simulacra that end up being managed more than that which they are presumed to represent. Many of these simulacra are deemed necessary because market reforms have created quasi-markets rather than markets proper. Thus, the market reforms of the 1980s and 1990s were quickly followed by a proliferation of new regulatory controls, and recent years, in the wake of the global financial crisis, have seen the return of the state as a central actor in the economic management of the advanced industrial societies. The social and cultural purposes of many public sector bodies have been expanded rather than contracted, precisely because societies have become more complex and diverse and markets have failed.

Imagined Futures: The End of Bureaucracy?

From the late 1980s the critique of bureaucracy, which to this point had been largely political, became embroiled in arguments about modernism and postmodernism, a theme to which the present author contributed (Clegg, 1990). Bureaucracy was seen as an essentially modern form of organization, based on differentiation and domination, which begged the question of what a postmodern organization might be. The *fin de siècle* provoked a complex discourse of endings in social science, premised in large part on the belief that the age of high modernity had given way to 'late' or 'post' modernity.

The sense that the advanced industrial societies had reached a historic 'ending' was germane to Claus Offe's thesis of 'disorganized capitalism' (Offe, 1985), and the master theme of discontinuity was reflected in the work of those who rejected the rationalist 'control' model of organization (Cooper and Burrell, 1988; Clegg, 1990) and the rise of 'the new public management' (Hood, 1998; Greenwood et al., 2002). The increasing power and ubiquity of information technology added to the growing sense that bureaucracy was being undermined in the emergent 'network society' (Castells, 2000). Manuel Castells' work on 'the network society' and the 'network enterprise' (Castells, 1996, 2000), from one of the world's foremost

commentators on the social, economic and cultural consequences of the information revolution provoked intense debate on the nature of the transformations now under way in organizations.

Castells (1996) may be seen as the latest in a long line of technological determinists and fetishists for whom digital technology has become the altar for a new secular religion of change. As secularized religions go, that of the digital devotees is fairly apocalyptic and a little messianic. There was a past, irrevocably broken with through the advances of digital technologies, and there is a bright sunlit future, a veritable New Jerusalem, just out of reach but visible through the miasma of the imperfect here-and-now. Only more devotion to newer and better digital technologies, an utter commitment requiring more dollars and tithes on the altar plate, can clear the present miasma. There are many disciples from the IT and consulting world spreading this message. The New Jerusalem will be a robust, almost Quaker, Protestantism not a Catholicism, with its attendant hierarchy and bureaucracy. The post-bureaucratic individual, lost in the lonely existence of their soul, digital virtuosi all, will communicate in a wholly unmediated and direct way. No priests; no bureaucrats; just believers and their digital devices, the only artefacts the new religious virtuosi need.

The major advantage of digital technologies for business and organizations are their virtual possibilities for disaggregating existing designs. Increasingly, organizations are able to segment activities that are critical to their competitive advantage and to specialize those that are not elsewhere. The non-core functions, such as back office accounting, telemarketing or programming, are outsourced to parts of the world where the wage is one third to one tenth of the cost in the home market, dramatically reducing operating costs and increasing competitiveness. The 'network enterprise' thesis emphasizes collaboration, partnership and high-trust working relationships whilst neglecting the key issue of power. The political reality of corporate life is one in which a diverse range of hybridized control regimes allow power elites to devolve operational autonomy whilst retaining a streamlined and effective centralized strategic control over productive organizations. Separate, but related market, hierarchy and networked modes of control are determined not by the abstract logic of a new informational paradigm, but by the 'dynamics of domination' that inhere in the process of network formation. In these networks, the digital world is moving fundamentally towards concentration, standardization and control. The digital revolution has led to an even tighter centralizing tendency and dismantlement of the institutional pasts and organizational memories of a great many organizations.

The virtual organization, apart from its digital accoutrements, suggests Kallinikos (2006, p. 109), entailed the near-total dominance of market values. Ideological projects of marketization that stressed the virtues of private sector models over those of the public sector were pursued vigorously under cover of digital innovation; thus, in parallel with the technological changes were a series of institutional changes from the early 1980s onwards, captured by the term the 'shareholder value' movement, which stressed the primacy of returns to capital investment as the *only* mark of firm effectiveness. One consequence was the development of impatient capital: from the 1965 average of US pension funds holding stocks for an average 46 months, by 2000 this had declined to 3.8 months. The stock price came to overrule other more traditional measures such as price/equity ratios and the most highly praised company in the US became Enron – because its performance was so unbelievably good. Of course it was unbelievable, as we now know. During the 1980s and 1990s organizational change of previously solid business organizations proceeded apace such that the willingness to disrupt one's own organization became seen as a positive market signal.

Whilst large complex organizations have become increasingly heterodox, what has emerged is not the 'end' of bureaucracy, but a more complex and differentiated set of post-bureaucratic (or neo-

bureaucratic) possibilities that have had the effect of undermining some distinctions previously deemed incontestable (e.g. market versus hierarchy; centralization versus decentralization; public versus private sectors). Whilst there can be little doubt that real and significant change is under way, changes in the bureaucratic form cannot be characterized as a straightforward trajectory of historical decline, still less a necessary one.

The major difference from the bureaucratic organizations imagined by Aston in their measures is the changing nature of contract relations. Contemporary contracts are less likely to relate a multiplicity of people to a single organization and more likely to relate a multiplicity of organization in a complex value-chain. Activities that can be performed anywhere, such as call centre work, or processing of basic accounting data, interpretation of radiological data, or the preparation of a manuscript for publication, can be digitized and located in a much cheaper labour market. Wherever material or immaterial matter to be worked on can be easily moved around the world then outsourcing of labour can cheapen its production. Such work can be organized globally so that it flows 24/7.

Outsourcing also occurs in organizations such as hospitals, sometimes overlapping with medical tourism where wealthy people fly to countries where health care costs are much lower for surgical procedures, or in the military (where, for instance, much of the work of the war in Iraq has been outsourced to companies such as Haliburton). The costs of activities are lessened by arranging for some elements of them to be done more cheaply by specialists in these activities, either elsewhere where costs are much cheaper, or in a less regulated segment of the market than that controlled by specific professions or states.

Post-bureaucracy

Power in bureaucracy was largely determined through career opportunities. An inability to fit in, to comport in the appropriate way, or simply to blend into the *habitus*, was a sufficient reason, on many occasions, for a person's career opportunities to be questioned and perhaps restricted (McKinlay, 2002). Even when, in many ways, the person might appear singularly inappropriate as an organization member, if there was good fit in terms of *habitus*, their future was usually relatively unquestioned (see Kim Philby's [1968] memorable account of Guy Burgess' everyday life).

The question of power remains at the core of post-bureaucracy but it is no longer *habitus* and career that structure it. What is distinctive about the contemporary post-bureaucracy is that the major mechanism of the career has undergone a substantial change. In the bureaucracy, the career was an enclosed phenomenon, classically contained within one organization. Post-bureaucracy differs significantly on this dimension. Careers become increasingly discontinuous and project-based in post-bureaucratic organizations. Increasingly they will be liquid careers, flowing like mercury, before reconsolidating in a new plane of activity. The project – whether innovation, R&D, engineering, marketing or whatever, becomes the major vehicle for organization networks and alliances and developmental tasks within specific organizations – although, increasingly these will involve team members from other organizations. As discussed elsewhere, this shift has been taken to signify a need for new competencies of emotional intelligence (Clegg and Baumeler, 2010) able to handle the issues of 'swift trust' that arise (Meyerson et al., 1996).

The person in post-bureaucracy is not the epitome of the trusting and trusted subject that is sometimes suggested. Lack of trust is the very reason why post-bureaucracies' organizational arrangements are somewhat authoritarian. As a hybrid, post-bureaucracies build bridges between

domination and self-determination (Romme, 1999), in 'the paradoxes and tensions that arise from enacting oppositional forms' (Ashcraft, 2001, p. 131). The pressure to perform is intense, and business leaders implement underlying authoritarian mechanisms largely constituted by tight time-reporting schedules for milestones and progress in specific projects.

Taking together the characteristics of networks, alliances, collaborations, virtual relations, multiple stakeholders, liquid careers, financialization, increasing work in projects and an intensifying rhetoric of entrepreneurialism and the importance of swift trust, it is not surprising that the figure of the project manager should have emerged as the point at which many of the contradictions of post-bureaucracy are concentrated. In such hybrid and often unclear situations conflict and confrontation are inevitable, so managing emotions becomes a crucial skill.

These project-based models gained impetus from the 1990s as new century US business models were reinvented in terms of 'financialization' of value and 'flexibility.' The former meant the ascendancy of models of shareholder value and 'incentivisation' of executives through stock options and other financial packaging; the latter the network model that emerged from California's Silicon Valley from the 1980s onwards, seen by many commentators as indicative of future strategy. If one compares it with the Corporate American model, whose heyday flourished in the 1950s and the 1960s, there is a quite sharp contrast.

Silicon Valley Model	Corporate American Model
Highly flexible small-firm start-ups able to reconfigure rapidly the nature and organization of core activities and skills.	Large size.
Limited diversification.	Diversified divisions.
Rapid commercialization and speed to market of new products and services, exploiting niches and discontinuous innovations, with strategic competition against existing capabilities – including those of the innovating organization.	The mass production of standardized goods, mass marketed and distributed to largely homogeneous mass markets.
Shallow hierarchies.	An extensive hierarchy of managerial controls.
Extensive network linkages externally.	Systematic centralized managerial coordination and control of the disaggregated elements of development, production and marketing.
Knowledge workers and creative industry employees controlled by culture rather more than structure, with the culture being focused on 'can-do' and 'change,' not unionized.	A largely proletarianized and unskilled workforce, unionized.
Highly responsive to rapid changes in markets and technologies, with highly skilled knowledge workers and knowledge networks focused on particular projects that can be rapidly developed and terminated.	High development of mechanization limiting flexibility and favouring long production cycles.
Value delivered through start-up focus so that those who are on the ground floor can get rich quick with initial public offerings (IPOS) that deliver equity ownership, with informed venture capital supporting start-ups.	Value delivered through a strong focus on cost reductions through capital intensity, (downwardly) flexible labour markets and outsourcing to suppliers who could be beaten down on price.
Workers who move fluidly from project to project rather than building organizational careers, who are able to operate in highly dynamic and uncertain environments.	Lifetime employment in the model of the 'organization man.'
Clustering of related industries and firms in ecological proximity to one another, and to major technology-based universities, creating a 'hot-house' talent pool.	Extensive supply chains and sub-contracting with contracting largely based on 'at-length' hard money contracts.

Table 2: Contemporary US project versus corporate models.

The core of the Silicon Valley model is its project-basis that depends for its success on a ready pool of known, mobile and highly technologically qualified labour that can learn and move quickly. The project form is also encouraged by the roles that venture capital plays: risks could be spread and realized with relatively low transaction costs. The strategy is one of backing ideas that will disrupt, reconfigure or create markets, forming projects to develop them and rapidly realizing gains or moving on quickly. These project-based knowledge networks seem to be quite specific to certain sectors of business activity, such as highly knowledge specific and highly trained technological expertise in areas such as information technology, biotechnology and nanotechnology. Moreover, they rely on a specific kind of infrastructure of defence contracting, large pharmaceuticals or a sophisticated health-based industry ready to buy-in innovation, and research-based universities with either private, state or a mix of funding, to supply the knowledge-based personnel. Hence, behind the new forms reside the old bureaucracies.

The post-bureaucratic hybrid creates a 'loosened community' (Courpasson and Dany, 2003), in which relationships and groupings are temporarily maintained, where individuals' destinies are more and more separated, where the institutionalised dialogues and interactions are operated through sometimes uncertain and barely legible networks of control, of influence and of friendship. Consequentially, there is far less opportunity for the formation of stable views of the person *in situ*. These tendencies can only be exacerbated by the collapse of the hyperflexible financial markets of the 2000s in 2008–2009 and the reality of cuts, even as they are assuaged by the rhetoric of entrepreneurialism.

In the hybrid political structures of post-bureaucracy, elites remain sharply differentiated from sub-elite members and the former distinguished from the necessary minimal similarity of the latter population of knowledge workers, experts and professionals, with regard to values, demographic characteristics and types of aspirations. Post-bureaucratic organizations cultivate a culture of ambition and a method of circulation. As members cycle through projects they strive for visibility for their achievements in managing the projects as innovative, creative and exciting but also as timely, on budget and dependable. Like Weber's Protestants, they strive to show that the state of leadership grace moves through them sufficiently to join the ranks of the elect, or at least those elites who are currently elect.

Corporate leaders have a direct interest in shaping, grooming and educating selected aspirants, constituting what might be called subjects with an appropriate comportment, etiquette and equipage, able to qualify as disciplined elites who will have a career outside of the projects. Mostly, these characteristics pertain to an ability to accept and work creatively with an existing order and existing rules; thus, they go far beyond merely technical and professional expertise. They are the new way of re-invigorating *habitus* when organizational borders have become porous, careers liquid and professional identities contingent.

The world of projects directly influences elite power structures in contemporary post-bureaucratic organizations for three major reasons. First, they differentiate between those likely to be able to aspire further and those who will not. The latter will end up either specializing in project management or going back to their initial working environment. Project management therefore helps differentiate between pre-selected individuals. Second, different kinds of top management decisions (such as resource allocation, project termination, team leaders' demotion/promotion…) can shape the chances of those in the project roles. Third, project management both creates more complex elite strata to traverse and enables a route of social mobility within the organization. Project management is premised on a high degree of transparency of project performance. Creating a powerful network of shared values regarding career and ambition also facilitates the activation and embodiment of common reference points that structure the

attention and commitment of project members. Such reference points include milestones, key performance indicators, profit-margins, annual performance, respect for deadlines, respect for budgets, deference to which is progressively internalised as incontrovertible business *and* moral values, essential for the healthy survival of the entire organization (Courpasson and Dany, 2003). These reference points strengthen the regime through weaving the social fabric of allegiance for would-be leaders.

Bureaucracy is being superseded and not superseded by post-bureaucracy. While this may sound nonsensical it depends on whether one focuses on re-composition or decomposition. It is clear that in the new electronic panopticons of the call centre, often globally located on the margins of modernity, bureaucracy is alive and well in a particularly centralized, standardized and routinized form. Here the bureaucratization of the shop floor has proceeded into the heart of the white collar, pink blouse and colourful indigenously attired digital factory, which we may refer to as the decomposition of bureaucracy. If, on the other hand, one investigates the upper echelons of leaner and more entrepreneurially oriented organizations then one might draw the conclusion that they were, indeed, recomposed bureaucracies that had managed to turn the iron cage for many into golden chains for the few.

The theme of decomposition is redolent of extended supply chains, outsourcing, the virtual organization and call centres. The theme of re-composition takes us into the world of new, but as yet ill-defined, organizational forms. The shift to outsourcing and organizational disaggregation may coexist with some very familiar politics of surveillance and control. Recomposed (or 'refurbished') bureaucracies feature a range of more innovative developments in which the project leader has superseded the central figure of the bureaucrat. The 'politics of the project' have become the arena in which the strategic interests of aspirant elites are played out.

It is in the land between that there lies the road less travelled. Here, above and outside the routines embedded in the digital factory are the innovation, construction, design and research projects through which young Turks circulate. Doubtless, many 'post-bureaucratic' elements and processes are retained as controls for those excluded from the internal career options such that a life in projects involves 'the refurbishment of bureaucratic procedures rather than their renunciation' (Clegg and Courpasson, 2004, p. 542). Innovations such as 'networks' and 'project management' are, as Hugh Willmott (2010) suggests, extensions of bureaucratic modes of organization – but not for all. In the words of Matthew (22:14, King James Version of *The Bible*), 'Many are called, but few are chosen.' The zone in-between, the arenas through which individual recruits cycle and circulate, managing their careers as they manage their projects, becomes a panoptical space for the elites to watch and for the project managers to be aware that they are under surveillance, never knowing whether this is the project that will lift them out of the in-between zone and get them over the threshold into the promised land.

Since the post-Second World War era the idea of the organization was assumed to be an equivalent theoretical and empirical object. (On these distinctions, see Bachelard, 1984, and Althusser, 1968). Recently, the dialectics of re-composition and decomposition have sundered the presumed unity. It is clear that organizations still exist as empirical objects. However, their status as theoretical objects has been transformed. The theoretical object of organizations, crystallized in the 1950s and 1960s, froze some elements of becoming. It captured in a series of snapshots a moment in the becoming of an empirical object. It was the age of the organization man, of the complete complex organization. Today it is less the organization and more the processes of organizing which comprise the salient theoretical objects, constituted as specific practices such as outsourcing and supply chains rather than a specific concrete thing.

The nature of reality is constantly in the process of *becoming* rather than merely *being* in a transcendent manner (Kornberger et al., 2005). In order to understand the processes of organizing fully today, we need to realize that organizing capabilities of focal organizations are often vested in the chains, networks, alliances and collaborations that they are party to. These are traversed by a multiplicity of projects and panoptical devices, organized around creativity and innovation on the one hand and strictly defined key performance indicators on the other. The organization is much less than the sum of the relations and spaces it traverses. The centrality of relations of employment – the proxy for organization size in the old accounts – has been superseded by the centrality of relations of production, distribution, service provision and supply. Organization – conceived on the old model of bureaucracy – is decomposing into global supply chains, alliances, networks and projects and recomposing into core entities focused on design and strategy, whose members are bound by beneficial golden chains.

Conclusion

Does bureaucracy have a future? Yes, indubitably – but it is one that is very different from that which Weber imagined and which subsequently was developed in their own ways after Beveridge (1944) and by Aston (Pugh and Hickson, 1976). Universalism and meritocracy, qua Beveridge (1944), have now joined bureaucracy almost as terms of abuse, abandoned in the name of targets, selectivity and efficient markets. More specifically, to imagine that a science of organizations, qua Aston, could predict the degree of bureaucracy of an organization on the basis of simple contingency of size, now seems to have been nothing but a delusion that took some fleeting elements of modernity's management for granted as ontological universals.

Bureaucracy, in its literal sense, characterized by work in a career, with a pension and steady progression, seems now to be a diminishing and elite privilege, which elites have exponentially expanded benefits to themselves: in US corporate firms the returns to the top managerial echelons exceed those of the average by a factor of 400% (Chang, 2010), for instance. Doubtless, bureaucracy will continue to flourish in all large, complex and personnel-intensive organizations – but the pressures to outsource, downsize and contract out will not be likely to disappear, as increasing numbers of members manage their identity, as entrepreneurs of the self, severed from the core bureaucracy.

Bureaucracy, as a mode of being in organization, has for many given way to a far more liberal and ontologically insecure state. Such ontological insecurity makes the future more open than the endless repetition of routines and rules that characterized bureaucracy but it also makes it much more a matter of personal responsibility. Under bureaucratic modes of responsibility when the present fails to conform to past expectations of the future, responsibility can be attributed to system failure, requiring system reform, even in so far as any rogue individualism may have flourished as deviance within the ordered universe. The more entrepreneurial the enterprise the more individuals will be held personally responsible for the failures of the situations in which they find themselves.

The ethos that Weber saw as so characteristic of modern rational legal bureaucracy – an ethos of responsibility best served by the character of one schooled in a vocation – is much less evident than it once was in the age of post-bureaucracy. If we consider Weber's list of qualities of bureaucracy once more, post-bureaucratic ideas have compromised the notions of office, impersonality, codified rules, precedents and files. Doubtless authority still remains, albeit on a very different basis from that grounded in career; in addition, while there would still appear to be clear elements of specialization, legitimacy, hierarchy, credentialism, stratification and

centralization, the ensemble that was bureaucracy has been broken in both public and private sector organizations. The knot that tied them together was career and it is this concept, more than any other, that post-bureaucracy has displaced and replaced with the ontological insecurity of the market as the pre-eminent institution. For young people facing this insecurity at the start of their working lives today the future of organizations offers them many opportunities to be liquidly modern; whether such liquidity is a stable frame for identity construction is another matter. It will certainly make life more interesting than in the old style bureaucracy but not necessarily more rewarding or stimulating than the pursuit of a chosen career with a foreseeable future.

Increasingly, perhaps, looking back to the 1970s' recession that produced punk, Joe Strummer and Mick Jones (1977) seem to have nailed the essence of the future for many: 'Career opportunities, the ones that never knock.'

Notes

[1] Sourced from http://www.businessballs.com/tompetersinsearchofexcellence.htm, accessed 2 August 2010.

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