



ICLAF 2022

06 SEPTEMBER 2022

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF LAW, ACCOUNTING & FINANCE 2022

Conference Proceedings

JOINTLY ORGANISED BY

The Department of Law and
The Faculty of Accountancy,
Universiti Teknologi MARA,
Cawangan Negeri Sembilan,
Malaysia

DOES THE BUREACRACY WORKS WELL? A CASE OF TANGKAK DISTRICT COUNCIL

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Abstract

The term "bureaucracy" also refers to a system of administration and law enforcement. It is a set of legal rules enacted by an organization. This paper discusses the challenges faced by employees in the Tangkak District Council (TDC), in the state of Johor, Malaysia, when attempting to implement Weberian bureaucracy. The bureaucratic approach allows the organization to control its services or production while also granting the manager or administrator the authority to delegate and establish administrative principles. In this study, we use data from semi-structured interviews and observations. It contributes to the researcher's ability to obtain information and answers to study the issues. Based on the researcher's observations and the interviewees' responses, it is evident that bureaucracy features are present. Notwithstanding the undesirable effects came out while implementing the theory, namely overburdened daily tasks, a complex process of assignments and understaffed personnel to the tasks assigned, the Weberian Bureaucracy certainly helped the organization to be able storing the data for future reference and identify the factors which hinder the bureaucratic practices. We suggest for the job scope and portfolio requirements to be re-evaluated, to alter the personal selection criteria based on the candidate's qualifications and adherence to moral and ethical principles, and finally to utilise the up-to-date technology as a method to deliver better services to the public.

Keywords: administration, bureaucracy, district council, government, Weberian bureaucracy theory.

Introduction

A bureaucracy is an administrative, government, or social system with a hierarchical structure and complex rules and regulations which also refers to a system of administration and law enforcement. Max Weber's believed that bureaucracy was the most efficient method of establishing an organization and administration as everyone is treated equally in a bureaucratic organization, and the division of labour for each employee is clearly defined (Weber, 1947).

Various perspectives on bureaucracy but Max Weber sees it from a positive angle that is, bureaucratic organizations are more reasonable and efficient. The ideal type of bureaucracy requires a complex administrative system, the properties of the system such administration includes in terms of accuracy, speed, no ambiguity, have judgment, set aside interests, no disagreement, step savings, sustainability, and agreement (A. Rahman A.N., 2009). However, bureaucracy is an unavoidable notion, both in common language and even in organisational analysis, even if in the critical sense (Ang, 2016). Bureaucracy, in general, is connected with extremely undesirable characteristics of businesses, such as operational delays, adherence to opaque rules, extensive paperwork requests, and even innumerable obstacles in meeting users' or customers' requests (Serpa & Ferreira, 2019).

Studies on bureaucracy were extremely complex because it deals with a variety of issues, including institutional, human resources, systems and procedures developed and implemented by the bureaucracy,

and aspects of bureaucratic reform. Bureaucratic rules and regulations are helpful when applied successfully in an organization, however, they seem to be obstructive when unexpected situations occur. The enormous challenge that the bureaucracy faces is how they can carry out their duties and responsibilities efficiently and effectively because, at this time, people always view the bureaucracy as a service process that is very complicated, rich in structure but poor in function, a lot of corruption, collusion, and nepotism, and a lack of basic operational standards (Yusriadi et al., 2017). As a result, the bureaucracy bears responsibility for the consequences of such management.

Tangkak District Council (TDC) was selected in this study as the local authority organisation that carries out the management and administrative process in the Tangkak District Area. TDC was formed on 1 August 1976 in accordance with the Local Government Act 1976, by combining the Local Councils of Tangkak, Kebun Baru, Sagil, Bukit Kangkar, Sungai Mati, Serom, Bukit Gambir, Grisek, and Kundang Ulu. Tangkak District Council covers approximately 13,566 hectares and has approximately 70,400 residents and 17600 asset holders. Aside from Tangkak District Council territory, this Council's administration area includes 20 meters (40 chains) of roadside along Kampung Teratai, Durian Chondong, Kg. Baru Bekoh, and Bukit Asahan.

While the practice of bureaucratic management is the focus of discussion, it is important to see how the management process is practiced and how well the bureaucracy works. By only focusing on the characteristics of bureaucratic management practices by the Tangkak District Council without looking at other forms of management, this study also wants to look at its implications for the management system of public administration organizations. The selection of bureaucratic management practice as the focus of the study is because it is practiced by all complex organizations in the world.

Problem Statement

Bureaucracy is a very difficult issue in getting a business in government organisations such as licenses (Rasli et al., 2020). Rasli et al. have studied the aspect of assessing integrity as well as the challenges of implementing authority in government organisations from the perspective of society and government staff. His study highlights the community's perspective on the services obtained as well as the problems they feel, especially involving bureaucracy, integrity and challenges that local governments face.

Issues concerning bureaucracy also were discussed by Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin while holding the post of Prime Minister of Malaysia on 6 July 2020. He mentioned the constraints arising from the bureaucratic approach practised in the administration in tackling the COVID-19 pandemic. He believes that bureaucracy and administrative issues should not impede the country's economic recovery and added we must not let the red tape and bureaucracy stymie us.

According to Max Weber's Bureaucratic Theory, bureaucracy is the foundation for the systematic formation of any organisation and is intended to ensure efficiency and economic effectiveness. It is an excellent model for management and administration in bringing the power structure of an organisation into focus. With these observations, he lays down the basic principles of bureaucracy and emphasizes the division of labour, hierarchy, rules, and impersonal relationship. It is critical to understand the basic principles of bureaucracy to effectively apply them in an organization. Hence, this study was conducted to explore the principles of Weber Bureaucracy that will guarantee an efficient and effective work culture that has been practised in Tangkak District Council.

Although nowadays, words like "bureaucracy" and "authority" have a negative connotation, the bureaucratic approach allows the organisation to control its services or production while also granting the manager or administrator, the authority to delegate and establish administrative principles. The bureaucratic administration was the most efficient of organisations, and as an ideal, the more effective and efficient the organisation's standardised functioning will be. Indisputably, it is the established rules and procedures that enable all employees to work efficiently and consistently.

However, due to its many hierarchical layers, bureaucracy is characterised by a large amount of red tape, paperwork, many desks, a specific office culture, and slow communication. This is the system's most

serious flaw. It is also unfortunate that employees are often estranged from one another and from the organisation, making them less loyal. Bureaucracies are also heavily reliant on regulatory and policy compliance. This limits employees' ability to come up with innovative ideas, making them feel like a number rather than an individual. Later research (the human relations theory) revealed that employees value attention and want a say in decision-making.

Even Max Weber, widely regarded as the father of modern bureaucracy, was well aware of such issues, criticisms, and fears about bureaucracy. Bureaucracy is especially inevitable in organisations where legislation plays an important role in delivering a consistent output. However, management must overcome some challenges. Hence, this study is conducted to identify the factors that hinder the bureaucratic practices in the management of the Tangkak District Council and to identify the impact of these negative elements on bureaucratic practices at the Tangkak District Council.

Based on the background research, the purpose of this case study is to identify the bureaucratic concerns displayed, to explore the principles of Weber bureaucratic that guarantee an efficient and effective work culture has been practised in Tangkak District Council, to identify the factors that hinder bureaucratic practices at the Tangkak District Council and to identify the challenges faced by employees in the Tangkak District bureaucratic practices at the Tangkak District Council.

Literature Review

The name "bureaucracy" is formed from two words: "bureau" and "Kratos." The term "bureau" alludes to the office, and the Greek suffix "Kratos" refers to authority or control. Thus, the term "bureaucracy" refers to the power of the office (Hummel, 1998 & Wasim 2011). In general, bureaucracy is the process of organizing scattered transactions and actions according to rational and objective rules (Başaran, 2000).

The bureaucratic management theory, introduced by Max Weber stated that to manage an organisation efficiently, it is essential to have a clear line of authority along with proper rules, procedures and regulations for controlling each business operation. Government organisations majorly adopted Max Weber's bureaucracy theory. Weber gave the following six principles for managing an organisation effectively and efficiently, namely; authority hierarchy, formal rules and regulations, division of labour, career orientation, impersonality, and formal selection process.

Factors Which Hinder Bureaucratic Practices

According to Mori (2017), management can be hindered by a bureaucratic structure in the following ways:

- i. Bureaucracy inhibits an individual's creative potential (Hamel, 2006). The bureaucratic organisations leave little room for enthusiasm, creativity, and self-direction, which limits the implementation of new management approaches. The employees are treated as though they cannot be trusted or will not work diligently unless pushed.
- ii. Bureaucracy is detrimental to organisational effectiveness. Due to alterations in modern organisations' aims, methods, culture, structure, and operating environment, it appears challenging to establish creative management methods due to lack of adaptability and dynamism. Bureaucracy erodes employee morale and dedication by pitting individuals within an organisation against one another and misdirecting their energy into conflict or competition instead of mission accomplishment (Hamel, 2012).
- iii. It is a restriction of New Public Management. This is because bureaucrats are typically involved in the planning and management of the administrative reform process. It promotes the separation of functions into separate agencies, the replacement of traditional hierarchies with flatter, more flexible and responsive structures, and the decentralisation of management authority within public agencies, giving top management the freedom to manage with clear accountability (Larbi, 2003). However, without adequate communication and involvement of employees in the process of new public management, its worth is difficult to discern, and new management techniques cannot be implemented.
- iv. Bureaucracy hinders the concentration on organisational objectives. Most individuals tend to focus on their respective areas and comply as best they can to the rules and procedures in

place. The employees lack a sense of belonging in their organisation, and the vast majority of them are unaware of their organization's vision and objective, working instead to impress their managers (Chand, 2015). This inhibits management innovation since employees are not concerned with their contribution to the organization's overall objectives and value. In many instances, their primary concern is proper adherence to the rules and processes, and they do not perceive a need to work harder or adjust because the emphasis is narrow.

Challenges In Implementing Bureaucracy

The bureaucracy in Malaysia has not averted popular criticism for its inefficiency, corruption, and failure to protect public interests, despite its commendable roles in directing the socio-economic development process. The media, civil society organisations, the intelligentsia, and the political opposition have skilfully leveraged the main scandals to highlight the growing public concern about the poor performance and lack of responsibility and responsiveness of the bureaucracy. This has supplied the fuel for the "clean and efficient" movement, which began in the early 1980s, and a succession of following measures to promote proper values and ethics among public officials. Numerous laws and regulations have been drafted, important reforms have been implemented in numerous administrative domains, and a comprehensive training and bureaucratic reorientation programme have been implemented. Despite this, current data reveals that corruption and other irregularities continue to plague the public sector. Though generally favourable, the performance of several reforms in public service and the institutional procedures put in place to address ethical issues has manifestly fallen short of expectations (Mori, 2017).

Research Methods

This study uses a qualitative methodology to address the questions "how" and "what." It examines a phenomenon argued by existing theory by testing and applying it in a case of an organization. In other words, this study is both descriptive and analytical, exploring the extent to which Weber's theory of bureaucracy is applied or otherwise in the case of the Tangkak District Council. Data gathering strategies are concentrated on interviews and observations in addition to library research based on books, journal articles, seminar proceedings, and newspaper clippings.

The research design for this study's interview is a semi-structured interview. This strategy provides the participants with greater freedom and diversity to elaborate, as well as the chance to learn more from them. In terms of sampling, the purposive sampling is used. The strategic nature of this sort of sampling necessitates a lot of work to achieve a suitable fit between the study's goals and the sample size (Bryman, 2004). Inclusion criteria of informants are based on staff serving in the district council. The researchers also managed to interview the staff. About five informants are interviewed. They are very close to one another. The data are evaluated using a theme analysis, which involves transcription, coding, analysis, interpretation, and confirmation (Sarantakos, 1998).

Finding and analysis

This section presents the findings of the study based on feedback obtained from interviews and observations conducted in the Tangkak District Council. The study explores the extent to which Weberian bureaucracy is put into practice, as well as the factors that hinder the approach. Personal information of individual interviewees is kept confidential.

Opinion On Bureaucratic Approach

When asked about the characteristics of bureaucracy, some informants perceived this bureaucratic approach with a hierarchy of authority, a source of command, a top-down system, and giving and receiving orders. One of the responses is as follow:

"In this department there are instructions from the head of the department. There are also from other departments and follow the organization chart of the council."

Documentation is also a theme often mentioned by informants. One informant related the documentation with the keeping and recording of memos, minutes of meetings and correspondence. Another informant emphasized the need for proper documentation as to help individuals to recall the details of the works. To

him, without proper documentation, continuous development was hard to be achieved. Another informant looked the documentation process with the filing process for the purpose of more systematic arrangement and organization. Here are some of their sayings:

"Bureaucracy that I understand... things that involve... complicated work, like e-kasih, you have to fill in a form when you want to register and then fill it in the computer".

"All I know is that bureaucracy is something related to filling, that there are rules to be followed. by the system"

Regulations are another subject that informants frequently touch on. Among them is the existing condition of work, namely working hours. Examples include using the thumbprint method to sign in and out and wearing appropriately when working at the front counter. For staff who have a reasonable reason to leave early on a working day, it is necessary to fill in the prescribed application form. This is one of the regulations that is stipulated in the Local Government Officials (Conduct and Discipline) General Regulations 1988. The response is shared here:

"Among the rules we have to follow are working hours, so it's compulsory to be fingerprinted on the machine according to working hours .. all clothes again when working at the front counter."

However, the existence of this hierarchical structure has also given different connotations especially to employees at the lower management level, they feel inferior. Ideas are not required for them to develop the organization, only the department heads and higher officers have the authority to make choices and decision. Here is her response:

"It feels like we are bound by the rules... again when we are subordinates, we have to follow the boss and if we want to give ideas when the boss asks because we don't want to show off"

Factors Hindered Bureaucratic Practices In Tangkak District Council

When the informants were asked about the reasons why bureaucratic practices are difficult to implement in the Tangkak District Council, many agreed and in addition have diverse responses. The specialization of work and the division of tasks as argued by Weber to ensure that the work carried out effectively is affected when the District Council faces with the shortage of staff. One informant further explained that the shortage could cause an increased workload for staff which later on affects the quality of services.

In addition, the neat and orderly distribution of responsibilities is also affected if it is not managed well by the head of the department. As a result, the implementation of services will suffer from a lack of equity and severity in task supervision. Task distribution is an area related to the firmness and fairness of department leaders. There are also employees who are assigned tasks outside of their proper expertise and field. The response is as follows:

"Follow the boss too because like the boss of this department does distribute tasks fairly and there are only three of us and we really need to know everything... but if there are employees in other departments who are forced to work outside of their duties. You can say each boss' attitude is strict and some are not strict"

Talking about leadership issues, one informant shared about the attitude of his head of department who was too compliant with the standards in overseeing his subordinate staff. In this regard, Merton (1987) used to criticize this kind of environment that exists in organizations to the extent it inhibits individual freedom and creativity in organizations. For example, a strict discretion which does not allow staff to pick up children at school at certain times is seen as excessive.

Talking about this leadership issue, one informant shared about the attitude of his head department who was too tied with the standards in overseeing his subordinates. In this regard, Merton (1987) criticized the rigid behavior that exists in organizations that hinders individual freedom and creativity in organizations.

For example, a strict discretion which does not allow staff to pick up children at school at certain times is seen as excessive. This is a classic example that exists in most workplaces in Malaysia. For researchers it is not a big issue, however it needs to be handled well and harmoniously.

"This rule is important but according to the perceived situation. But here there is a practice of flexible working hours according to the number of working hours... so it is easy to take care of children in school"

The process and nature of documentation is also mentioned as a cause of the increased workload. For example, the *e-kasih* application requires the review and scrutiny of several important documents such as copies of identity cards, salary slips, health reports and more. Despite the fact that the work was done digitally, document verification is still necessary. This work that seems to be done twice is actually out of the question, just to make sure that one job is fair, transparent and error free. Here are the responses:

"Various information needs to be collected and kept as evidence for the e-kasih. For example, you have to make sure that if you want to apply for. The documents must be completed before the next process can be carried out."

"It takes a long time too... like every month we have to collect data on tourists who come to Tangkak district... it is always difficult to get information because we have to call to remind them... if there is no cooperation, it is difficult to prepare for the tourism activities"

One of the crucial traits of bureaucracy listed by Weber is bureaucratic rationalisation (Godoi et al. 2017). In the case of the Tangkak District Council, based on the results of interviews, informants found few practices appear to be contrary to the principle of the bureaucratic rationalization. Firstly, the decisions are made inconsistent with the practice and the precedent, caused by external and personal factors. Second, the existence of factionalism in the department which then triggers biased decisions. Third, the officer's exaggerated personality, which eventually has an impact on the workplace and workflow. Here are some of their responses:

"We have to filter everything that comes in first, but for this decision, there are also personal issues involved because sometimes when we work, let say if the staff is sick or has a personal problem, they are being heard, I'm too have the problem, but the treatment is different"

Recommendation and Conclusion

In light of the findings above, few fundamental suggestions are highlighted to address some of the issues. The first is to increase the recruitment of staff. This issue is not new to Malaysia's public sector and the Tangkak District Council in particular, is not an exception. However, this fundamental problem should not be taken lightly. Insufficient staff is not a small matter. It is impossible for a culture of high performance and quality service to be achieved if the organization faces this kind of problem. It is a basic thing that needs to be met but it appears to be taken for granted. Second is staff recruitment aspect. This process should be carried out transparently and openly to guarantee that the staff appointed are right and qualified. If such things do not take place, such an unproductive culture will develop, leading to laziness and negligence, which then create a detrimental effect on the employee performance and the organization's reputation. Third, technology for data processing and storage. Storage of documents and data at the Tangkak District Council is still at an elementary stage. Demands for e-governance, Industrial Relations 4.0, high-capacity filing systems (such as the use of Google Drive or Cloud) need to be applied and imposed as fast as possible as to guarantee smoother, integrated and effective service delivery.

Future Study

Some study limitations were discovered, and these can be considered for further research. The lack of the participants is one among them. A more varied viewpoint in terms of age, gender, and other factors will enable the study to produce more thorough and in-depth findings. Second is in terms of research method. The results of existing qualitative studies can be strengthened and supplemented with quantitative investigations, particularly in terms of how the organization perceive the success of Weber's bureaucratic approach.

Acknowledgement/Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research.

Author Contribution

TM AmirulHakimi & Muhammad Azamuddin – Writing & Data Collection, Ahmad Faiz – Conceptualization & Supervision, Anie Farahida – Review, Editing & Corresponding Author.

Conflict of Interest

Author declares no conflict of interest.

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