Critical Studies in Organization & Bureaucracy

Revised and Expanded Edition

Edited by Frank Fischer and Carmen Sirianni

Critical Studies in Organization and Bureaucracy

Revised and Expanded Edition

Edited by Frank Fischer and Carmen Sirianni

Temple University Press
PHILADELPHIA

Temple University Press, Philadelphia 19122

Published 1984. Revised and expanded edition 1994
Printed in the United States of America

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1984 ♾

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Critical studies in organization and bureaucracy / edited by Frank Fischer and Carmen Sirianni.—Rev. and expanded ed.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN 1-56639-121-0. — ISBN 1-56639-122-9 (pbk.: alk. paper).
1. Bureaucracy. 2. Organizational behavior. I. Fischer, Frank, 1942– II. Sirianni, Carmen.
HD38.4.C74 1994
302.3'5—dc20 93-7403

Preface to the Revised Edition

The second edition of this book, like the first, grows primarily out of our experience teaching about organizations in a variety of undergraduate and graduate settings. Originally we decided to collaborate on a collection of critical studies in organization because most of the mainstream texts did not seem very helpful in analyzing the crises in organizational theory and organizational life, and because even the best of the collections that included critical studies were often too densely theoretical to be of use in most classroom settings. As students we ourselves had often shunned courses in organizations for these very reasons, and as teachers we then found ourselves struggling to make the experience relevant, critical, and empowering, without at the same time losing important theoretical questions in pop sociological analyses of life in the bureaucracy. Judging from our many conversations with other teachers of courses in organizations, the dilemma we faced was not uncommon.

We thus structured our book primarily around a set of accessible case studies of specific organizations, and we have retained this format in the second edition as we have enriched and revised the selection of cases. After an initial section that introduces students to classical writings in organization theory, we present case studies from a great variety of settings in public, private, and nonprofit sectors. Each of these analyses has a critical edge, though they draw upon a range of theoretical perspectives and shun either simple ideological labels or naive organizational alternatives. Our years teaching and studying organizations have convinced us even more than when we began that the world of organizations is both highly, even obdurately, complex and accessible to everyday understanding and collective change. No single theoretical perspective is adequate to these tasks, nor is an approach to organizational alternatives that is not self-critical and willing to confront the problems raised by other perspectives. For reasons of space and coherence, we have not been able to include all the perspectives in organizational theory that we do find useful—that would make for a very different kind of volume. But we have tried to provide a good critical introduction that can motivate and inform further study.

Issues most central to the critical tradition have guided our selections: power and empowerment, forms of control and resistance, class and gender, political economy of bureaucratic systems, technology and domination, social movement and alternative organizational forms. As we argued at much greater length in the introductory essay to our first edition, these themes challenge mainstream approaches along a whole range of dimensions. (We do not think all organization theory neatly falls into critical or mainstream, but these terms are convenient shorthand for our purposes here.) Mainstream approaches often rationalize and obscure the power of managerial and other elites on the basis of presumed administrative and technological imperatives, particularly of narrowly conceived notions of technical efficiency. They usually fail to link organizational dynamics to the relations of class and power in larger political economies, and abstract from history and context in seeking value-neutral and universal laws of organizational development. Conflict and resistance are either glossed over or analyzed as dysfunctions that can be corrected by technical and social-psychological fixes. And the consultants who do the fixing and revise the theory tend to employ positivistic research methodologies that exclude any genuine voice for the research subjects themselves and refuse any alternative rationalities that might be present in their actions. And when mainstream approaches have concerned themselves with alternatives, it has almost always been alternatives developed by those who seek to buttress existing power relations, including the power to frame the problems themselves.

Although key critical questions emerged in the classical writings of Weber, Marx, Michels, and others, organizational thinkers and social actors of recent decades have challenged the assumptions of mainstream organizational thought on virtually every dimension. Indeed, the claims of superior efficiency of bureaucratic and scientific management models have been exploded not only within organizational analyses but in the larger public and even corporate discourse. And this crisis occurs in the midst of more direct challenges to the assumptions of class, power, gender, race, and technique embedded deeply in mainstream approaches, and has opened up space for a richer debate than ever before on the possibilities of postbureaucratic and postindustrial organizational forms than can respond to the crises of efficiency and quality simultaneously with the crises of inclusion and democratization. But although this new terrain of rethinking and reform offers much hope, it also generates its own perils and makes critical approaches to the postbureaucratic innovations of today as necessary as to the bureaucratic ones of yesterday.

In attempting to enrich the selections, we have consulted with many who have taught dynamic courses that included our first edition, and we have drawn upon recent scholarship that has proven successful in our

own teaching. The introductions to each section in the text give fuller synopses of each essay; let us note here several changes that stand out.

We have included in this edition more on both gender and race. Joan Acker's "Reproducing Hierarchy: Job Evaluation and Comparable Worth in State Government" (Chapter 13) examines how hierarchical gender classifications can reproduce themselves even in attempts to reverse this through comparable worth and job evaluation by rank-and-file employees. Louise Lamphere and Guillermo Grenier, in "Women, Unions, and Participative Management: Organizing in the Sunbelt" (Chapter 11), examine the underside of some human relations and teamwork strategies, especially as these are used to intimidate and disempower women and minorities in low-paid jobs. Part II on forms of control and divisions of labor is thus richer in its attention to race, gender, and ethnicity, as well as its attention to reforms that may themselves reproduce control and hierarchy. The issue of gender, power, and tokenism, which Rosabeth Moss Kanter takes up in Part III in "Women and Power in Organizations" (Chapter 17), is now complemented by a psychodynamic and cultural analysis that links the specific histories of gender and race in the United States to the problems of mentoring among blacks and whites, in David Thomas's "Mentoring and Irrationality: The Role of Racial Taboos" (Chapter 18). And race and gender receive further attention in Part IV on organizational alternatives and social change. Robert Moses et al., in "The Algebra Project: Organizing in the Spirit of Ella" (Chapter 26), show how the community organizing traditions of the civil rights movement inspired by the empowering methods of black feminist Ella Baker are relevant in today's educational reforms, and they provide a case study of how innovative math-science pedagogies emerged in a multiracial choice school in the Cambridge, Massachusetts, public school system. In "Learning Pluralism: Democracy and Diversity in Feminist Organizations" (Chapter 29), Carmen Sirianni examines how feminist organizations from the 1960s to the 1990s have been engaged in a long process of democratic innovation, and of learning how to manage the problems associated with various methods of empowering members and representing diverse voices. His analysis ranges over a variety of types of feminist organizations and examines these learning processes in the light of the concerns of recent feminist and democratic political theories. Gary Delgado, in "Internal Organization and Social Structure in Community Organizing: The Case of ACORN" (Chapter 30), examines an important model of community organizing and leadership development, and looks at the intersection of the classic problem of oligarchy with race and gender in the multiracial network of low-income community organizations known as ACORN. David Osborne and Ted Gaebler, in "Community-Owned Government: Empowering Rather than Serving" (Chapter 25), examine innovative

ways of "reinventing government" by debureaucratizing structures and empowering citizens, and by returning government services to the community, from neighborhood-oriented policing to tenant management and ownership of public housing. Rather than disempowering clients through rationing and control, as Michael Lipsky's classic analysis reveals (in "The Rationing of Services in Street-Level Bureaucracies," Part III, Chapter 15), programs, as Osborne and Gaebler show, can be designed to empower even the inner-city welfare mother who is often their foremost victim.

In addition to these last four selections, Part IV has been expanded still further, to reflect our belief that critical analysis has the burden as well as the opportunity to show how things might be different, as well as to bring critical insight to bear on the alternatives themselves. We have included "The Collectivist Organization: An Alternative to Rational-Bureaucratic Models" (Chapter 24) by Joyce Rothschild, who examines an egalitarian and democratic ideal type in light of recent experiences, and analyzes the limits and constraints as well as the strengths of such forms. Robert Howard and Leslie Schneider, in "Worker Participation in Technological Change" (Chapter 27), compare innovative organizational strategies of employee participation in the design and implementation of new technologies in the United States and Norway. Drawing upon case studies from a variety of industries, including telecommunications, postal, and banking services, they demonstrate the limits of technocentric and organization-centered models and the potential of empowering designs aimed at broad social interests, such as skill development, customer service, gender equity, and industrial democracy. Daniel Mazmanian and Jeanne Nienaber, in "Fishbowl Planning: Environmental Regulation, Economic Development, and Democratic Technique" (Chapter 31), provide a case study of a very innovative program of public participation developed in the Seattle District of the Army Corps of Engineers, which shows the potential of mobilizing expert resources, public interest and environmental groups, and varied economic interests in a community-based discourse and open planning process aimed at achieving consensual resolution of conflicting perspectives on development and conservation. Barry Rabe's "Beyond NIMBY: Participatory Approaches to Hazardous Waste Management in Canada and the United States" (Chapter 32) analyzes successful facility siting and management approaches in the province of Alberta, which instituted early and extensive public participation, as well as other comprehensive strategies that helped the province move beyond familiar gridlock. The possibilities of transplanting this model to the United States, where environmental organizations are stronger and political culture more adversarial, are explored.

Several other essays have been added to further enrich the selections. In Part III, Susan Moore Johnson's "Teaching and Learning in a

Bureaucratic School" (Chapter 16) analyzes the dynamic of street-level bureaucracy in urban school systems and thus frames the organizational challenge of school reform today. Charles Perrow and Mauro Guillén, in "The AIDS Crisis and Organizational Failure" (Chapter 23), examine the serious organizational failures in the early responses to the AIDS crisis of private and public health care systems, and federal and municipal agencies. In Part II, Frank Fischer's "Organizational Expertise and Bureaucratic Control: Behavioral Science as Managerial Ideology" (Chapter 12) has been revised for this edition. And Vicki Smith's "Manufacturing Management Ideology: Corporate Culture and Control in Financial Services" (Chapter 14) examines the broad theme of corporate culture, control, and ideology in the postindustrial setting of financial services undergoing crisis and downsizing, and thus broadens Part II in a new direction.

We have remained committed in this edition to a volume that can be of use to a diverse group of students in a wide range of courses. It can serve students of organizations and bureaucracy in sociology and political science departments, as well as those in administratively oriented professional programs that require study of organizational behavior. As either primary text or supplemental reading, it speaks to the issues raised in professionally oriented public administration programs, labor and management studies, and human and social services.

Michael Ames, editor-in-chief of Temple University Press, has encouraged us to do this revised edition, and we are grateful for his kind support and keen insight over the years. Many of the authors have provided us assistance beyond the gracious sharing of their work, and numerous others have shared their pedagogical insights on how to make the study of organizations engaging and empowering. Much of the content of this volume is designed to provide the basis for critical empowerment and participatory engagement in the face of bureaucratic hierarchies that no longer serve us very well, and we hope that it can enrich and enliven the process of learning itself.

Contents

PART I

Classical Problems and Perspectives

This section presents a selection of classic discussions of bureaucracy and organization.

Max Weber's essay is probably the most well-known classic of all, and it set the stage for most subsequent thinking. It is no accident that such a major contribution on bureaucracy came out of Germany; the Prussian bureaucracy was renowned the world over and had provided the context for Hegel and Marx's analyses in the nineteenth century. In this selection, Weber discusses the general features of the bureaucratic type, some of the reasons for its development, its advantages over previous types of organization, and why, once established, it is extremely difficult to destroy. While Weber himself favored legislative controls over bureaucracies, he was quite pessimistic about the long-term prospects for reigning in bureaucratic power.

Karl Marx, though usually not considered a theorist of organization per se, had a number of acute insights into bureaucracy, and his general analysis on social development provided a point of reference for many of the debates that were to follow. In his discussion of the "spirit of bureaucracy" from 1843, Marx develops a stinging critique of the Prussian bureaucracy. Though written in the dense philosophical style of his youth, Marx's basic points are clear enough. Bureaucracy, obsessed with its power and its formalism, views the world as an object to be administered and extends its tentacles as far as it is able to reach. Marx notes bureaucracy's formal characteristics: hierarchy and secrecy. He explains how the levels of the bureaucracy mutually deceive each other; how bureaucrats, concerned above all with their own careers, mask their own interests as general interests of state; and how the bureaucratic meaning of things is often quite different from the real meaning. Marx's own hopes for the complete elimination of bureaucracy are more fully revealed in his discussion of the radically democratic organizational features that he

perceived in the Paris Commune, the municipal system that was developed by the mass of Parisian citizens in rebellion against their own centralized and insensitive state in 1871. The Paris Commune subsequently became the symbol of an alternative form of participatory government for many radicals throughout the world.

Robert Michels directly addressed himself to Marx and attempted to show that real democracy in organizations is impossible, although many social struggles would continue to dress themselves in its mantle. Based on his analysis of the Social Democratic party and the trade unions under the kaiser, Michels argues that oligarchy, or rule by a clique of leaders who do all they can to protect their own position in the organization, is inevitable. For profound organizational and pyschological reasons, oligarchy asserts itself as an "iron" sociological law.

Much of the labor turmoil in the early decades of this century, in both Europe and the United States, was a motivating concern behind the next essay. Frederick Taylor, known as the father of scientific management, developed a set of principles for what he considered the best and most efficient way to organize production. While few adopted Taylor's views totally, they did have a profound impact on organization thinking and on the reality of work organization in the lives of many people. Taylor argued not only that management should have complete authority over the organization of work, but also that tasks should be simplified and fragmented as much as possible and that the brain work should be concentrated in the hands of management.

In the 1970s, after it became clear that Taylorist principles, far from dead, had even spread to various forms of white collar work, Harry Braverman undertook a reevaluation of the significance of Taylorism. His study was particularly timely, in light of the rising degree of dissatisfaction among both blue- and white-collar workers not only in the United States, but in many other major industrial countries. Since its publication in 1974, Braverman's analysis has become a classic, and perhaps the most cited piece, in the study of the modern workplace. Braverman attempts to show that the real meaning of Taylorism lies not in some neutral organizational precepts about efficiency, but in the struggle by management to secure control over the workplace and to lower the cost of labor. The fragmentation of work and the separation of conception and execution are not inevitable features of the modern workplace and advanced technology, but reflect management's interest in profit and control.

In a classic essay of the human relations school, Roethlisberger and Dickson develop an analysis of the organization as having both a human and a technical side, an informal as well as a formal one. On the basis of their famous studies at the Hawthorne Plant of Western Electric, the authors argue that the network of personal relations and the "nonrational" sentiments are crucial for understanding what makes an organization function—and what makes workers often resist the demands of

management. Although the value of human relations theory has been much debated (Part I, Chapter 6), there can be little doubt that Roethlisberger and Dickson alerted organization theory to the necessity for studying the informal human side of organizations as well as the formal and technical features.

In the final selection, Alvin Gouldner, a major figure in the revival of critical thinking in American sociology, addresses himself to the various types of bureaucracy in industrial settings. The three types (mock, representative, and punishment-centered) reflect different degrees of agreement or conflict between workers and management. The values legitimating them are different, and the consequences of violating them also vary. Gouldner's analysis attempts to expand Weber's theory by uncovering those aspects of bureaucracy that concern human relations, consent, and democratic process in addition to authority, efficiency, and expertise.

1
Bureaucracy

Max Weber

Characteristics of Bureaucracy

Modern officialdom functions in the following specific manner:

I. *There is the principle of fixed and official jurisdictional areas, which are generally ordered by rules, that is, by laws or administrative regulations.*

1. The regular activities required for the purposes of the bureaucratically governed structure are distributed in a fixed way as official duties.
2. The authority to give the commands required for the discharge of these duties is distributed in a stable way and is strictly delimited by rules concerning the coercive means, physical, sacerdotal, or otherwise, which may be placed at the disposal of officials.
3. Methodical provision is made for the regular and continuous fulfillment of these duties and for the execution of the corresponding rights; only persons who have the generally regulated qualifications to serve are employed.

In public and lawful government these three elements constitute "bureaucratic authority." In private economic domination, they constitute bureaucratic "management." Bureaucracy, thus understood, is fully developed in political and ecclesiastical communities only in the modern state, and, in the private economy, only in the most advanced institutions of capitalism. Permanent and public office authority, with fixed jurisdiction, is not the historical rule but rather the exception. This is so even in large political structures such as those of the ancient Orient, the Germanic and Mongolian empires of conquest, or of many feudal structures of state. In all these cases, the ruler executes the most important measures through personal trustees, table-companions, or court-servants. Their commissions and authority are not precisely delimited and are temporarily called into being for each case.

II. *The principles of office hierarchy and of levels of graded authority mean a firmly ordered system of super- and subordination in which there is a supervision of the lower offices by the higher ones.* Such a system offers the governed the possibility of appealing the decision of a lower office to its higher authority, in a definitely regulated manner. With the full development of the bureaucratic type, the office hierarchy is monocratically organized. The principle of hierachical office authority is found in all bureaucratic structures: in state and ecclesiastical structures as well as in large party organizations and private enterprises. It does not matter for the character of bureaucracy whether its authority is called "private" or "public."

When the principle of jurisdictional "competency" is fully carried through, hierarchical subordination—at least in public office—does not mean that the "higher" authority is simply authorized to take over the business of "lower." Indeed, the opposite is the rule. Once established and having fulfilled its task, an office tends to continue in existence and be held by another incumbent.

III. *The management of the modern office is based on written documents ("the files"), which are preserved in their original or draught form.* There is, therefore, a staff of subaltern officials and scribes of all sorts. The body of officials actively engaged in a "public" office, along with the respective apparatus of material implements and the files, make up a "bureau." In private enterprise, "the bureau" is often called "the office."

In principle, the modern organization of the civil service separates the bureau from the private domicile of the official, and, in general, bureaucracy segregates official activity as something distinct from the sphere of private life. Public monies and equipment are divorced from the private property of the official. This condition is everywhere the product of a long development. Nowadays, it is found in public as well as in private enterprises; in the latter, the principle extends even to the leading entrepreur. In principle, the executive office is separated from the household, business from private correspondence, and business assets from private fortunes. The more consistently the modern type of business management has been carried through the more are these separations the case. The beginnings of this process are to be found as early as the Middle Ages.

It is the peculiarity of the modern entrepreneur that he conducts himself as the "first official" of his enterprise, in the very same way in which the ruler of a specifically modern bureaucratic state spoke of himself as "the first servant" of the state.[1] The idea that the bureau activities of the state are intrinsically different in character from the management of private economic offices is a continental European notion and, by way of contrast, is totally foreign to the American way.

IV. *Office management, at least all specialized office management—and such management is distinctly modern—usually presupposes thorough*

and expert training. This increasingly holds for the modern executive and employee of private enterprises, in the same manner as it holds for the state official.

V. *When the office is fully developed, official activity demands the full working capacity of the official, irrespective of the fact that his obligatory time in the bureau may be firmly delimited*. In the normal case, this is only the product of a long development, in the public as well as in the private office. Formerly, in all cases, the normal state of affairs was reversed: Official business was discharged as a secondary activity.

VI. *The management of the office follows general rules, which are more or less stable, more or less exhaustive, and which can be learned.* Knowledge of these rules represents a special technical learning which the officials possess. It involves jurisprudence, or administrative or business management.

The reduction of modern office management to rules is deeply embedded in its very nature. *The theory of modern public administration, for instance, assumes that the authority to order certain matters by decree—which has been legally granted to public authorities—does not entitle the bureau to regulate* the matter by commands given for each case, but only to regulate the matter abstractly. This stands in extreme contrast to the regulation of all relationships through individual privileges and bestowals of favor, which is absolutely dominant in patrimonialism, at least in so far as such relationships are not fixed by sacred tradition.

The Position of the Official

All this results in the following for the internal and external position of the official:

I. *Office holding is a "vocation."* This is shown, first, in the requirement of a firmly prescribed course of training, which demands the entire capacity for work for a long period of time, and in the generally prescribed and special examinations which are prerequisites of employment. Furthermore, the position of the official is in the nature of a duty. This determines the internal structure of his relations in the following manner: Legally and actually, office holding is not considered a source to be exploited for rents or emoluments, as was normally the case during the Middle Ages and frequently up to the threshold of recent times. Nor is office holding considered a usual exchange of services for equivalents, as is the case with free labor contracts. Entrance into an office, including one in the private economy, is considered an acceptance of a specific obligation of faithful management in return for a secure existence. It is decisive for the specific nature of modern loyalty to an office that, in the pure type, it does not establish a relationship to a *person*, like the vassal's