

The following are general comments about the structure and content of an academic essay written for university – they are not prescriptive and intended as an educational guide only.

Question

Discuss the claim that post-bureaucracies are more suitable than bureaucracies in delivering change and innovation to an organisation

A bureaucracy is a systematic organisational structure that is hierarchical and rigid which focusses on centralised power. This centralised power provides the organisation with the authority to direct and control employees via an autocratic leadership style. Each employee specialises in an area, however, this specialisation can actually de-skill employees. In contrast, a post-bureaucracy employs a horizontal structure with decentralised power which enables employee empowerment (Clegg et al., 2012). This essay will argue that post-bureaucracies are better at delivering change and innovation. In the first section, by using the readings of Barker (1993), Dimitroff et al. (2005), and Clegg et al. (2012), I will discuss the use of concertive control as a device to deliver change and boost production. This is in contrast to the views of Weber arguing that bureaucracy is the most efficient method to manage (Clegg et al., 2012). The second section will explore the influence of soft power and its efficiency in delivering innovation compared to bureaucracy through the readings of Josserrand et al. (2006) and Courpasson and Clegg (2012). In the last section, through the readings of Morgan and Spicer (2009) and Birkinshaw and Gibson (2004), I will explore the idea that change is inevitable and management can only integrate change into their system in post-bureaucracies as bureaucracies are too rigid to effectively do this.

One of the key strengths of post-bureaucracies is their use of concertive control. This type of control shifts power from management to staff but maintains “corporate” control through company values. These values guide employee behaviour, for example towards improving production and delivering innovations. One such example is ISE Communications where the workers are empowered to work in small teams and are to make decisions and introduce innovations, for example, changes in the handling procedures of the organisation. Hence, concertive control through management’s soft power has encouraged staff to be more involved with the product and has developed their sense of responsibility to the overall management process. Values are used to “teach” new team members about the existing “rules” in the team which limits resistance (Barker, 1993).

In contrast, Weber argues that a bureaucracy and “the coercive” control exercised by its systems and rules is the most efficient method of management (Barker, 1993). This is

Commented [A1]: Definition and explanation of key terms: **bureaucracy** and why the writer sees this as a limited system - that specialisation de-skills employees.

Commented [A2]: Definition of ‘post- bureaucracy’ and why it is positive for employees: empowers – gives them more power. Note also reference to source (authors, year).

Commented [u3]: The writer’s position - sometimes also called ‘thesis’.

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Commented [u5]: How the position will be argued - i.e. post bureaucracies deliver change and innovation through:
 Concertive control
 Soft power
 Being able to integrate change.

Commented [A6]: 1st argument - that bureaucracies are more successful because they use concertive control.

Commented [u7]: Real-life illustration of a company.

Commented [A8]: How soft power and values help in concertive control.

Commented [u9]: Contrasting argument that bureaucracies are more effective as they manage more efficiently.

because coercive control promotes efficiency and production. An example is Ritzer's model of McDonaldisation which is a highly rationalised and cost-efficient concept using four key mechanisms: efficiency, calculability, predictability and control. Efficiency refers to the implementation of the most efficient method of production and involves roles and tasks; calculability refers to pricing, predictability to standardisation through ordered routines (Clegg et al., 2012) and control to the standardisation of the product. This efficient process of standardisation means that McDonald's delivers change only by altering current processes and enforcing new procedures which are also reflected in a modulated company culture.

Commented [u10]: Real life example – McDonald's system of management .

However, while coercive control can promote efficiency in production and some change, it can impede innovation as everything is planned and standardised "top-down". This can result in a disengagement from company processes with, at times, disastrous results as was seen in the Challenger Shuttle Tragedy (Dimitroff et al, 2005). Dimitroff et al. (2005) argue that political pressures on NASA and NASA's subsequent pressure on staff ultimately contributed to "groupthink", the situation where individuals agree with ideas for fear of being held responsible when actions go wrong. Hence, bureaucracies may have clearly structured systems which can support innovation and change but as demonstrated through NASA, this systematic nature can impact on innovation and judgement.

Commented [u11]: Why author disagrees with this position – too much control from the top – down.

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Only direct quotes require a page number.

In contrast, post-bureaucracies may use "soft power" to encourage the development of ideas and expression of opinions from staff. According to Burns and Stalker (as cited in Josserand et al., 2006), post-bureaucracies operate a "softer internalised control". This soft power creates an open and embracing organisation which allows staff to effectively contribute and adapt to changes and innovations. For example, StateCorp's successful change to a more corporate and commercial business was made possible with a transition from a strict bureaucratic structure to a flatter, more decentralised one. StateCorp encouraged greater communication between general managers and line managers during their meetings (Josserand et al., 2006) with line manager contributions contributing to company strategy. Further, they were given the power to make more decisions. This new empowerment meant individuals were more greatly involved in the organisation's change process and because of this, changes and innovations were delivered more effectively.

Commented [u14]: 2nd argument - the use of soft power by post-bureaucracies in delivering innovations and change.

Commented [u15]: Explanation of how soft power works .

Commented [u16]: Illustration through real example – StateCorp.

However, soft power may also lead to staff resistance and bureaucracies may be more effective in managing this (Courpasson & Clegg, 2012). In the case of the Health Maintenance Organisation, the management team was incapable of managing resistance. While managers "warned" resisting members, insufficient action was taken to enforce the changes they wanted to make. This culminated in actions such as the nursing staff refusing to implement new recording procedures (Prasad & Prasad, 2000). This resistance

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demonstrates that at times “soft power” can be ineffective in enforcing innovation and also demonstrates a weak organisational culture.

Interestingly however, leadership based on soft power may be a more efficient way to manage resistance and deliver change. Browning (2007) emphasises this through the example of Shackleton’s leadership. Shackleton encouraged and supported his crew during the unexpected event of their ship’s sinking. This style limited resistance and was necessary to implement the changes necessary for their changed situation. In this case, if Shackleton had relied only on absolute control, it could have resulted in the breakdown of the group. When dealing with McNeish’s resistance, Shackleton’s used his authority to warn McNeish of his actions (Browning, 2007). Shackleton used his power to limit resistance. Hence, leadership may be employed as a device to manage resistance and maintain a stable culture through which to deliver change.

In any dynamic environment, chaos is inevitable and will ultimately result in organisational change. According to the chaos theory, chaotic change does not stop and may be shaped by political, cultural and social processes (Morgan & Spicer, 2009). Organisations that are capable of adopting changes will be more successful in delivering innovations. Hammer and Champy’s business process re-engineering (BPR) is an example of a change approach. BPR focusses on achieving higher organisational efficiency and performances through the processes of rethinking and redesigning. These processes are aided by soft domination which empowers staff to flexibly develop visions based on the business environment. However, this approach has failed to gain popularity as 70% of the change initiatives made have failed due to the staff’s lack of understanding of the implementation process leading to unsatisfactory results (Clegg et al., 2012).

Alternatively, an organisation can implement changes through platforms of identity, organisational processes and inter-organisational fields. In these cases, the organisations acknowledge the need to change. Identity refers to the organisations’ manipulation of corporate culture programs to develop the employees’ sense of attachment to the organisation. However, as studies have pointed out the employees do not conform to their work identity but instead develop their own identity based on the qualities that they value. Organisational processes are demonstrated in an electrical company where “total quality management” (TQM) was introduced as a new strategy to allow individuals to understand their work. This has allowed clearer communication between the organisation and its staff which promoted innovation. Inter-organisational fields refer to the individuals with a central role in the change process who use their power to promote the process. For example, managers who direct and assist staff during changes. This assistance allows staff to

Commented [u18]: Counter-argument: leadership that uses soft power can be very effective in managing resistance and therefore can deliver changes.

Commented [u19]: Illustration of how this has worked in reality.

Commented [u20]: 3rd argument - that change is inevitable and all organisations need to be able to adapt. Post- bureaucracies are better able to do this.

Commented [u21]: BPR as one approach to managing change - has not been entirely successful because staff have not been sufficiently involved.

Commented [u22]: ‘Platforms of identity’ as another change approach. This allows staff to deal with change by understanding their work and by using key people to promote change and help people to adapt to it.

smoothly adapt to changes (Morgan & Spicer, 2009). Thus, organisations can adapt to chaotic changes by transforming their platforms of identity, organisational processes and inter-organisational fields through a post-bureaucratic structure which will lead to organisational innovations.

Taylorism assumes that organisations are stable and rational which reflects the systems-based nature of bureaucracy. Under Taylorism, change is undesirable as it forces the organisation to adjust their system (Clegg et al., 2012). Organisations may deliver innovations through strict bureaucratic control. This is evident through Ford's success story car manufacturing. Initially, cars were perceived as too expensive and impractical to purchase. After Ford's first failure he was forced to change his organisation and came up with the models N and T. He introduced assembly lining and mass production which allowed cars to be manufactured through a system where components were added accordingly at different phases. Each phase was managed by bureaucratic control which ensured quality and efficiency. Each production phase was structured and each staff had an assigned role which was systematic and enabled easier changes (Clegg et al., 2012). This change in the organisation's production process through bureaucratic control improved the lead time and was more cost efficient.

In contrast to delivering innovations through strict bureaucratic control, post-bureaucracy employs a softer method to do this through collaborations with stakeholders. According to Birkinshaw and Gibson (2004), ambidexterity is an important factor that can determine if an organisation will continue operating. Ambidexterity embodies adaptability, the organisation's ability to respond to opportunities and alignment, the coordination of processes involved to achieve value over a short term. In 1998, TSB placed its focus on aligning with the return on equity and neglected the adaptability side of customer needs. This negligence led to TSB's loss of 60% of its market share. However, in a large computer company, a sales manager became aware of a new need through communicating with clients and developed a specific business case (Birkinshaw & Gibson, 2004). This communication allowed the organisation to satisfy the customers and develop a closer relationship with their stakeholders.

In conclusion, post-bureaucracies are a more appropriate method in delivering innovation and change into organisations. Systematic bureaucracy may be able to deliver change through coercive control which can stimulate efficiency and production. However, generally they see change as undesirable and allow it only through strict systems which may hamper innovation. On the other hand, post-bureaucracies provide a more efficient and softer method to change and innovate. They use of employee empowerment or "concertive" control to catalyse changes and innovations (Barker, 1993). Flexible leadership change

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Commented [u24]: Post-bureaucracies are better able to deal with change as they use more collaboration.

Commented [u25]: An example of where this happened successfully.

Commented [u26]: A restatement of the writer's position.

Commented [u27]: The use of 'may' - it is possible for bureaucracies to do this, but it is not typical.

platforms and the focus on organisational culture also contribute to the success of these processes.

Commented [u28]: A restatement of the arguments that allow post-bureaucracies to deliver change and innovation .

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