

<a> The Politics of Bureaucratic Organizations

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Today researchers generally agree that bureaucracy is a powerful political actor when it comes to decision-making within bureaucratic organizations. Thus, administrative politics are processes of power and influence at the interface of hierarchical levels, organizational units, and public employees with the overall goal of influencing administrative and political decisions. Such processes are commonplace in bureaucratic organizations which are linked, first and foremost, to political authorities and citizens (Buchanan, 2008). The drivers of politics are organizational or personal interests and the relationship between political and administrative actors and their shared responsibility. Specifically, non-elected bureaucrats contribute their divergent views, interests, and legitimacy into the policy process. Thus, “policy choices emanate from opaque interactions and bargaining among multiple executive actors more so than from deliberation in democratically elected bodies” (t Hart & Wille, 2012, p.330).

In this chapter, we discuss politics as part of a specific form of organization, namely, bureaucracy. The purpose of bureaucratic organizations is to create stability, equity and equality (Ritz & Thom, 2019, p.8). Repetitive tasks are standardized in processes and specialization is formalized in units to achieve these purposes. Consequently, standardization and formalization makes the actions of bureaucracies efficient, predictable and creates orientation (Kühl, 2010, p.220). At the same time, in a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous context, standardization and specialization are often too rigid to respond to contextual change and the multi-causality of serious problems. The demand for more cooperation and greater coordination in broader networks and at a less formalized individual level to counteract this rigidity is increasing within and between bureaucratic organizations (Bach & Wegrich, 2019, p.91).

Therefore, the need for more interaction creates and extends the scope for the dynamics of power and influence in bureaucracies.

Our chapter addresses this fundamental tension of politics in bureaucracies against the background of a literature overview focused on politics of bureaucratic organizations. The chapter not only discusses the basic prerequisites of politics, but also the various different perspectives on politics at a structural, procedural, and individual level. Given the normative character of politics, the chapter also emphasizes dysfunctional and functional political effects (see Fig. 1). In the last section of this chapter, we present an analytical framework outlining the sources of politics in bureaucratic organizations.

`Insert Figure 1 here`

** Requirements for Politics of Bureaucratic Organizations**

The extent, intensity, and speed of politics in bureaucratic organizations depends on certain requirements without which power and influence do not exist. We focus on the five requirements context, relationship, dependency, intention, and interest (Hart & Wille, 2012). The use of politics means the decision to consciously use one's power and influence (Pettigrew, 1977, p.84). Therefore, the requirements act as grounds for whether or not politics can - or should - be used at all in a given situation. These requirements help to identify whether there is an opportunity to use politics at all, but do not trigger any compulsion to do so.

First, politics always takes place in a specific *context* (Peters, 2019, p.472). If we describe a state department or an administrative unit of municipal social services, then the particular context and specific spheres of power and influence are quite different. Typical contextual factors of bureaucratic politics are organizational culture, tasks, structure, technology, and

leadership, as well as the internal system of rules and strategies of an organization. Context creates the framework within which politics can have an impact on decision-making processes. For example, “the consequences of the implementation of today's strategies will provide part of the context for tomorrow's strategies” (Pettigrew, 1977, p.79).

Relationship as the second requirement describes the form of relatedness of organizations and persons. If there is no connection and communication between the two, there will be no politics. Relationships are based, for instance, on collaboration, coordination or co-production processes (Bach & Wegrich, 2019; Heims, 2019). Such work relationships are important and beneficial for organizational performance and policy outcomes. The problems in relationship-based processes are non-transparent power structures and imbalanced knowledge levels between the participants (Turnhout et al., 2020, p.16). Many co-production relationships fail because of a lack of awareness of the various different power levels, preferences for scientific arguments and the neglect of empowerment practices (Turnhout et al., 2020, p.17).

Third, politics requires *dependency* in addition to relationship. At least one partner must be dependent on the decisions of the other partner in order for politics to have an impact in a relationship. Dependency means, for example, that people with different levels of authority are involved in strategy processes and goal setting. Although the subordinate actor can participate in such processes, he or she is dependent on the superior. However, dependency does not apply exclusively to hierarchical dependency. There also exists, for instance, contract-, information-, or resource-based dependency. The more dependent an actor often is, the less influencing power he or she has.

Lastly, influencing others is always based on *intention or interest* (t Hart & Wille, 2012, p.329; Kapoutsis, 2016, p.41; Peters, 2019, p.471). For instance, an employee in an education

department has an interest in convincing his or her supervisor of the need for a new mental health program because there is sufficient evidence that such programs can help to avoid mental health issues in adulthood. Aside of such intrinsic interest, there are also extrinsic motives such as, for instance, serving a certain clientele. Without intention and interest, processes of power and influence do not exist, and actors cannot politically shape relationships and dependencies in a politico-administrative context.

** Perspectives of Politics in Bureaucratic Organizations**

Individuals and their intentions and interests provide a starting point for politics in bureaucracies. However, individuals' political behavior always depends on structural and procedural elements of bureaucratic organizations.

<c> Structure and Politics

Bureaucracies are stable, heterogeneous, and specialized organizations. They need to be stable because the purpose of bureaucracies is to ensure institutional sustainability, allowing a conflict-free coexistence of individuals in societies (Ritz & Thom, 2019, p.8). This purpose creates special structural occurrences, which, unlike on the free market, are shaped primarily by the logic of stability, equity and equality. As already observed in the Weberian ideal type of bureaucracy, administrators contribute to stability and predictability while being independent from political influence and reliant on professional expertise (Sager & Rosser, 2009). However, “even in good Weberian administrative systems, the line between political and administrative positions is not completely watertight, and there is always some blending of roles and responsibilities” (Peters, 2019, p.472). Such blending was furthered as a result of administrative reforms, such as, for instance, New Public Management [Cross reference to Laegreid Christensen and to Bouckaert]. This increased room for maneuver in public administration and opportunities for organizational politics. In addition, because they are large, bureaucracies are

inevitably heterogeneous and specialized organizations. Size matters and an increase in organizational size was one of the starting points of modern bureaucracies, which display high levels of specialization and differentiation. Therefore, bureaucracies have a high level of need for coordination in order to make decisions in line with the organization's purpose. In such a coordination-intensive context, three structural phenomena, which are to some extent contradictory and exist in parallel, are key for politics in bureaucratic organizations: the fear of losing autonomy, politics for accountability, and the explicit need for coordination.

Bureaucracies fear losing autonomy. They resist external pressure for formal regulation because they do not want to limit their decision-making power. The importance of preserving or even defending the autonomy of the organization includes resistance to political advances and at the same time the protection of one's own identity (Bach & Wegrich, 2019, p.15). In many organizations, this isolation leads to the phenomenon of “silo thinking”. Behind silo thinking is the intention to defend organizational interests (‘t Hart & Wille, 2012, p.329) . This is done primarily through politics driven by considerations of turf protection and reactions to reputational threats (Bach & Wegrich, 2019, p.15). Turf protection relates to the guarding of relatively undisputed jurisdiction over specific tasks and ways of carrying them out. The unit wants to keep and monopolize “work that they prefer to do” (‘t Hart & Wille, 2012, p.332). Therefore, units try to protect themselves by separating their tasks from those of other units. This segregation makes coordination and cooperation with other departments sophisticated, because the boundaries of one's own unit would then be blurred and mutually transgressed. If there are clearly allocated tasks and missions, then the organization can decide whether or not to collaborate. If there is a mission overlap or even a shared organizational mission, the danger of turf fights may arise. “Turf fights are much more likely in cases in which organizations have overlapping core missions and cannot gain resources they value from cooperating with organizations with the same (or very similar) tasks” (Heims, 2019, p.120).

The defense of organizational interests and reputation is linked to the *politics for accountability* (t Hart & Wille, 2012, p.334)[Cross reference to Schillemans]. Bureaucratic organizations must be accountable to the public for how they spend taxpayers' money. “While this accountability may be formal and legal, it can also be highly political, given that the chain of command allocates major accountability roles within the public sector to ministers and parliaments” (Peters, 2019, p.472). Thus, accountability roles are the shared responsibility of bureaucrats who are committed to the reputation of their ministers and organizations. There are multiple audiences in reputation processes and many try to exert influence in their interest. Cultivating one's reputation is part of politics for accountability and a means of gaining and securing autonomy while proactively building a protective shield against any opposition (Blom-Hansen & Finke, 2020, p.26).

Although bureaucracies fear losing autonomy and strive to protect their own ground, there is constant *need for coordination* and traditional bureaucracies are actually very efficient in coordinating. Whereas horizontal coordination includes coordination efforts among actors at the same organizational level, vertical coordination happens across organizational levels. Meanwhile, intra-organizational coordination describes coordination between ministries, offices, and departments within a public entity. Inter-organizational coordination refers to coordination efforts across organizational boundaries such as nations, states, cities, or in networks between these institutions including public and private organizations.

Since a public entity or inter-organizational coordination cannot formally regulate all decision-making structures, informal and sometimes also illegal, non-regulated structures of influence arise between the formally-regulated power structures. However, the degree of formal regulation in coordination extends or reduces the autonomy and responsibility of the dependent actors and, thus, room for politics changes. Nevertheless, the narrow scope for subsidiary

decisions and formal or rigid procedures are seen as an obstacle to meeting today's challenges of inter- and intra-organizational coordination in bureaucracies. The reason is that they are slow and depend on the capacities and support of formally legitimate actors. Thus, more informal coordination across institutions, organizational units, and hierarchical levels forming network structures is a consequence of a context in which organizational boundaries are blurring, formal authority and status are less respected and communication methods are immediate, direct, and inclusive. A major consequence are higher levels of politics in the form of inter- and intra-organizational negotiations, bargaining, pressure and counter pressure (t Hart & Wille, 2012, p.330).

From a structural perspective, the situation can be summarized as follows: processes of power and influence are often formally legitimized across horizontal and vertical lines of authority. These formal boundaries empower organizations and employees to protect themselves by separating them from others and cultivate its own reputation by politics of accountability. Nevertheless, politics creeps into the gaps of an organization's rationality and is increasingly used where informal channels of communication and influence allow for a better and more efficient coordination of tasks.

<c> Procedures and Politics

In addition to the structural perspective, administrative procedures are key to politics in bureaucratic organizations. Bureaucratic organizations function due to their stable and legitimate procedures and processes, which guarantee that policies are implemented, and services are delivered. The administrative processes correspond to what the administration performs for politicians and supplies to service recipients. From a public management perspective there are three major processes which allow politics to happen: strategic management, budgetary procedures, and personnel processes (Ritz & Thom, 2019, p.277).

In *strategic management*, the development of strategic plans and programs offers lots of room for politics. Bureaucrats participate in the planning and formulation of strategies through their expertise and experiences in a certain policy area and their highly relevant knowledge of planning processes in the politico-administrative system. Planning itself, while instrumental in character, is not a neutral practice, but is “indivisibly part of social reality. As such, planning is in politics, and cannot escape politics, but is not politics“ (Albrechts, 2003, p.251). The strategy process leads to a plan to improve the organization itself and its services. It is on the one hand an intentional process based on formal, transparent and recorded decisions, but on the other hand also an ongoing implicit process. The implicit process includes the legitimization to participate in the process and the emergence of strategic content through the process. The legitimization results from the power relations of individuals and groups, i.e., who is allowed to participate in decision-making and who determines which topics receive attention (Pettigrew, 1977). For instance, active representation and, thus, participation of minorities, is decisive for political influence of public administration in various policy fields. The key question in participatory processes is how all voices can be included in a legitimate way (Turnhout et al., 2020, p.17). Because too little attention has been paid to power and politics, participation processes often fail for several reasons (Turnhout et al., 2020, p.16). First, there are unequal power relations between the actors. Second, knowledge, scientific arguments and the rational best solution often dominate as visible power although there are many other needs among the involved parties. Lastly, actors often lack the power dimension of consciousness, and, thus, fail to create a shift from "power-over" to "power-with" in participatory processes (Turnhout et al., 2020, p.17). The latter involves a pro-social rather than a utility-maximizing perspective of politics (see section on individual perspective). Bureaucrats and their units are in charge of the strategic content and how and with whom to plan in the strategy process (Albrechts, 2003). Thus, strategic management and planning in bureaucratic organizations is

highly dependent on implicit and explicit processes, but also on the participative processes of power and influence.

A second area of bureaucratic politics is the design and rope-pulling around the *budget process* (Peters, 2001; 2019). It is budgetary processes that affect administrative units the most. All public offices need resources to accomplish the tasks assigned to them. Ultimately, these resources (infrastructure, personnel, knowledge, etc.) are all of a financial nature: “Success in getting money is one means for agencies to demonstrate their political clout and their importance to the remainder of the political system” (Peters, 2001, p.262). Through power and influence, the individual units try to secure as much of the financial cake as possible for their department and tasks (Hart & Wille, 2012, p.332). At the same time both, political actors and administrations are under pressure to keep taxes as low as possible and reduce expenditure. Thus, budgets are the starting point for politics for either increasing or downsizing administrative capacity. For this reason, bureaucratic (sub-)organizations are in competition with each other when it comes to the budgetary process. Nevertheless, the broad silence spiral of bureaucrats in incremental budgeting due to their fear of losing resources in competitive and politically influenced allocation processes is common knowledge. This allows politics to be kept out of the budgetary process. As in strategic management, the question of who participates in the budgetary process and which budget input is considered is highly political. This might be one reason why administration-wide cost saving programs necessitated by fiscal stress lead to equal and non-politically influenced cost-cutting actions across ministries and agencies rather than to measures that differentiate between and prioritize tasks and resources of units (Pfiffner et al., 2020).

Thirdly, politics can be found in *public personnel processes*. Common politics in the personnel area are personnel selection, performance evaluation, and inter-organizational mobility processes (Ferris & Judge, 1991, p.466; Ritz & Thom, 2019, p.453). These processes are linked to the career, reward, and status systems of the bureaucratic organization. For example, in the recruitment process, political influence takes place on the side of the job applicant, as well as on the side of the recruiter. Applicants try to manage the impression in the interview through “projecting a strong image”, “excuse-making and rationalization” (Ferris & Judge, 1991, p.458). Often, decision-makers prefer individuals similar to themselves, because of the political motive that it allows them to build coalitions and contribute to their own power base (Ferris & Judge, 1991, p.458). Thus, whether a person gets a job or is even promoted to a position of higher status depends not only on their individual qualification and performance, but also on political intentions, influence, and networks of power. In addition, personnel policies are often highly political when it comes to questions of equal opportunities or decisions in regard to representative bureaucracy. Finally, but crucially, power and influence play a role in the daily leadership process and related in- and outgroup phenomena, the provision of information for and participation of followers as discussed in relationship-oriented leadership theories (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995).

<c> Individuals and Politics

From an individual perspective on bureaucratic politics, it is important to establish how and why public employees decide the way they “behave in political efficient ways” towards other staff, politicians or citizens in order to win support (Ferris & Treadway, 2011a; Kapoutsis, 2016, p.40). Such political behavior can be categorized as either formal (role-bound interests), informal (personal interests) or illegal (Drory & Romm, 1988, p.166). Politics in organizations is more associated with informal than with formal or illegal behavior, because it strays

from the formal job routine and because illegal behavior is outside the accepted range. However, the space between formal job routine and the borders of illegality is narrow. That is why individuals need both political will and skill.

Political will characterizes the motivation to enter the political game at work and select one course of action over another (Kapoutsis, 2016). Buchanan (2008) points out that typical political behavior includes “networking, using 'key players' to support initiatives, making friends with power brokers, bending the rules, and self-promotion” (p.56).

The role-bound and personal intentions and interests of the individual to politically behave are based on utility-maximizing and pro-social oriented behavior (Ellen, 2014; 2016). Utility-maximization of politics is shaped by motives like the desire to defend personal interests, impression management, maintaining or expanding interesting work, and attraction to politics and policy (t Hart & Wille, 2012; Ritz, 2015). The pro-social orientation characterizes behaviors such as finding good solutions for citizen and community oriented tasks, exerting public-value-oriented influence in the sense of commitment to the public interest, altruism, compassion, and civic virtue (Ritz et al., 2020).

In addition to political will, there are abilities, like *political skill*, that are not innate and are acquired and expanded through training, practice and experience. In this sense, Ferris et al. (2007) see political skill as abilities that show up in work-relevant situations and refer to the individual political capabilities of perceiving and dealing with daily situations. Thus, four political skill dimensions can be distinguished:

- *Social astuteness*: Individuals possessing political skill are astute observers of others. They understand social interactions well and accurately interpret their behavior and the behavior of others. They are keenly attuned to diverse social settings and have high levels of self-awareness.

- *Interpersonal influence*: Politically skilled individuals have an unassuming and convincing personal style that exerts a powerful influence on others around them. Interpersonal influence allows people to adapt and calibrate their behavior to different situations to elicit the desired responses from others.
- *Networking ability*: Individuals with political skill are adept at identifying and developing diverse contacts and networks of people. People in these networks tend to hold assets seen as valuable and necessary for successful personal and organizational gains.
- *Apparent sincerity*: Politically skilled individuals appear to others as having high levels of integrity and as being authentic, sincere, and genuine. They are, or appear to be, honest and forthright.

These four dimensions of political skill exemplify a politically skilled personality. However, the extent to which these abilities are most effective depends on the concrete situation and on the other actors at work. Thus, skill flexibility is of great importance when various stakeholders and competitors in different contexts need to be influenced. Nevertheless, and even more so in collaborative settings, bureaucrats should learn to use the dynamics of power and influence to convincing others in order to further the interests and ultimately achieve the goals of a public entity.

** Effects of Politics**

Mostly dysfunctional effects are ascribed to the conception of politics in bureaucratic organizations (Child et al., 2010; Ferris et al., 2002; Ferris & Treadway, 2011b). Typically, politics is connoted with (role-bound and personal) self-interest and seeking the maximization of utility and personal advantages (Ellen, 2016, p.95; Ritz, 2015). Since the majority of politics are described as dysfunctional, organizations need to prevent their work environment against politics (Fedor et al., 2008, p.77). Some researchers therefore call for a more balanced concept of politics that integrates positive and functional effects of politics (Ellen, 2016; Ferris et al.,

2002; Gotsis & Kortezi, 2010; Kapoutsis & Thanos, 2016). Fedor et al. (2008) for example investigated whether positive and negative effects of politics differ. They found that it is less the use of politics itself that is perceived as positive or negative than whether it is perceived as just and fair to the organization and the individual (Fedor et al., 2008, p.89).

<c> Dysfunctional Effects

The frequently mentioned dysfunctional effects of politics in bureaucratic organizations are divisions, contradictions, intrigues, coercion, political games and self-interest (Child et al., 2010, p.108). Thus, power structures harm, benefit or disadvantage persons or groups and are judged to be immoral and unethical (Ellen, 2016, p.95; Ferris & Treadway, 2011a). Ferris et al. (2002, p.237) report empirical evidence that processes of power and influence have negative effects on job satisfaction and increase job anxiety, work stress and organizational withdrawal.

<c> Functional Effects

In contrast to dysfunctional effects, politics can also work as an enabler of organizations and individuals to find solutions to problems more quickly and to increase the impact and reputation of an organization through strong networks and knowledge brought together in these networks. According to Kapoutsis and Thanos (2016, p.1), positive effects include higher productivity, decision making consensus, higher levels of innovation, and career advancement. In their study of public sector innovation Crosby et al. (2017, p.656) state that public servants have to leave the formal framework and linear thinking of bureaucracy in order to become innovative and think out-of-the-box. This call to take informal paths to be innovative shows today's relevance of politics in bureaucratic work. Politics is necessary to make things happen and to clear gridlocked situations in modern bureaucracies.

As part of structures, processes, and behavior, politics is neither good nor bad. Only the effects of processes of power and influence can be assessed as dysfunctional or functional in relation to the organization's goals. The key question is: "who benefits from the outcomes[?]" (Fedor et al., 2008, p.78). Therefore, the legitimacy of politics lies in the eye of the beholder and is person-dependent, organization-dependent, and above all context-dependent (Gotsis & Kortezi, 2010, p.511).

** Summary**

Politics is commonplace and exists in every organization (Buchanan, 2008). It is found in the gaps and spaces in between as well as within bureaucratic organizations, and between people in different units and hierarchical positions. The formal processes regulate how power and influence can, and should, normally be used. However, since formal rules and structures cannot pre-determine everything, informal networks are also used. As a result, we present an analytical framework of sources of politics in bureaucratic organizations (see Fig. 2). Processes of power and influence develop either at the individual level or at the structural level. At the structural level, either formal elements such as organizational structures (e.g., need for coordination, budgetary process) or informal elements such as network-like relationships between units are the primary sources of politics. At the individual level, politics emerges either from formal, role-bound interests or from personal interests as an informal source of individual politics. In reality, politics most often inherits several facets of the four sources.

`Insert Figure 2 here`

The impact of politics on organizations and individuals depends on the role-bound and personal intentions and interests of those involved, and on the moral framework for whether or not the politics used are considered permissible for a decision. Actions bordering on illegality

represent a particular challenge. There are many subtle aspects to discretionary and effective decision-making. The intent behind an action may be pure, and the process may be within the realm of what is legally possible yet the consequences are unfair. Politics during the course of the process may give rise to negative outcomes. Ignorance, lack of diligence and time pressure may lead to malpractices, which, on the one hand, override the original objective and damage the reputation of an organization or person. On the other hand, however, discretion and "service by the book" can be equally damaging.

If public managers act in their role exclusively according to formal rules and precisely by the book, this can render bureaucratic organization too rigid and inert, which is just as damaging to the organization as informal and illegal politics. There always needs to be a balance between observing formal processes and structures that provide orientation and informal, sometimes network-like or even personal relationships, which help to increase bureaucracies' responsiveness and innovativeness.

Because politics is omnipresent in the work of bureaucrats, many researchers have begun to view politics as a fact, depict its positive effects, and promote allowing a more differentiated perception by organization members. As outlined in this chapter, politics in bureaucratic organizations is highly complex, nested in multi-layered contexts, relations, dependencies, intentions and interests. Therefore, the challenge for future research will be to describe and better understand the 'what' and 'why' behind actors' behaviors in what we have come to think of as bureaucratic politics.

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Politics between and within Bureaucratic Organizations		
<p><i>Requirements</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Context • Relationship • Dependency • Intention & Interest 	<p><i>Perspectives</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structural • Procedural • Individual 	<p><i>Effects</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dysfunctional • Functional

Fig. 1: Requirements, Perspectives, and Effects of Politics in Bureaucratic Organizations

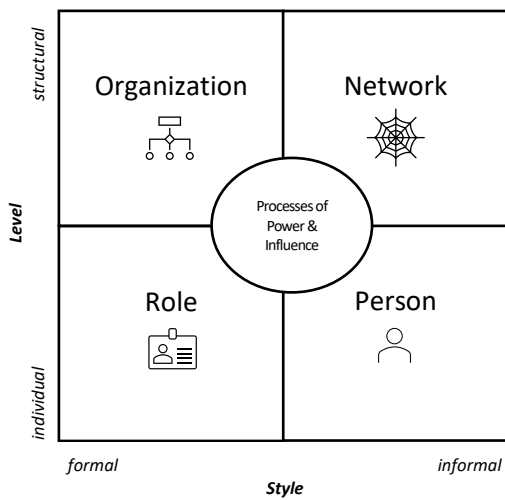


Figure 2: Sources of Politics in Bureaucratic Organisations