

Bureaucracy and the Bureaucratic Mind

Prof. Mohamed Rabie

Bureaucracy is a system of management invented in previous times to handle state affairs and organize state relationships with its citizens. Further developments of the system have enabled it to provide much help to business concerns, most organizations, and many independent institutions in managing their internal and external affairs. Standardization of most procedures, keeping records of transactions, and organizing decision-making processes have become a part of every management system. Though the West is often credited with the development of the bureaucratic system, the Chinese claim that they used this system thousands of years ago. In fact, China has the best and most detailed records of state affairs of all ancient nations.

Bureaucracy as a system of management has many advantages and disadvantages. The system's advantages include facilitating the management of people and most complicated situations and, in most cases, predicting the outcomes of actions, which in turn reduces the chances of unpleasant surprises. However, the disadvantages of the bureaucratic system are many; they include undermining the ability of employees to take the initiative and be creative. While subordinates normally perceive the taking of initiatives as risky endeavors; superiors often see such actions as a challenge to their authority. But despite the many disadvantages of the bureaucratic system, the degree of control it gives superiors over subordinates is very serious; it limits the capacity of everyone to excel and feel free to think.

Bureaucracy, while giving bosses or superiors almost total control over subordinates, demands that subordinates follow given instructions without questioning. Consequently, the control and subordination have become the core of the bureaucratic system, the organizing principle that guides the decision-making processes and determines outcomes. Every employee is supposed to follow the instructions of his boss; every boss is given the authority to guide and control his subordinates. As a result, bureaucratic practices have created minds that lack curiosity and are allowed to function only according to prescribed rules and regulations.

The bureaucratic mind, being in control, uses his authority to limit the ability of the system to reform itself; it gives no employee enough authority to initiate change, and no one has enough courage to propose change and disrupt the peace. Bureaucracy in the West is still strong; it

continues to develop slowly and be subject to criticism that calls for reform. In the Third World, however, bureaucracy is an alien system of management and control; it did not emanate from local traditions or come in response to national needs. It was often imposed by a colonial power or borrowed from a former colonial power to meet the needs of a government trying to model itself after a foreign state and give an elite the means to rule without much challenge.

In fact, I believe that the institutionalization of the bureaucratic system in the Third World has given the state enough control to substantially reduce the possibility of “revolutions” occurring as frequently as they did decades ago. Since bureaucracy was not an indigenous system, it did not benefit Third World nations as much as they expected and hoped for. And though it was imposed or borrowed from the outside, indigenous forces capable of reforming it and voices critical of it continue to be weak and ineffective. While the shortcomings of bureaucracy are evident everywhere, they are nowhere as evident and harmful as they are in educational institutions and business concerns.

Putting the bureaucratic mind in control hinders the ability of universities, research institutions, companies, and organizations to be creative and innovative. Control tends to convince superiors that it is their responsibility to know all details, allow no surprises, delegate little or no authority to subordinates, and have all situations under control. And since no boss can obtain the knowledge he needs to control everything and guide everyone and influence every situation, the dominance of the bureaucratic mind has become a threat, undermining critical thinking, free speech, creativity, and institutional transformation.

The enlightened bureaucrat that certain people try to promote is a fiction; his existence is as real and good as that of the benevolent dictator that many misguided Third World intellectuals promoted in the 1960s to imprison their nations and confiscate their rights. Subordination requires that employees should follow the instructions of their superiors without much thinking, because subordinates are not supposed to think; only superiors are supposed to do so. But since every superior, with the exception of the very few on the top, is also a subordinate, very few in a bureaucracy are in a position to think, take initiative, and be creative.

In an entrenched bureaucracy, new ideas and initiatives are rarely encouraged and seldom appreciated; and violators are often considered trouble-makers deserving punishment. All employees, with the exception of those sitting on the top of the management ladder, have

become mercenaries whose primary objective is to preserve their jobs, and whose primary job is to observe regulations and follow instructions without much thinking. When control and subordination become the organizing principles of an institution, they undermine the institution's ability to respond positively to the growing needs of its clients and to adapt in a time to the changing circumstances of its environment. And when people in control are busy or lack the ability to think, no change takes place, causing most subordinates to become lazy and develop mindless minds.

To reform any system, ideas should be allowed to go from the bottom up, and all instructions going from the top down should be subject to review and criticism by subordinates before being implemented. In addition, all employees should be encouraged to think, make suggestions, and propose new ideas; and every constructive suggestion and applicable idea should be recognized and rewarded financially.

Since my motto is, "Knowledge not shared is Knowledge wasted, and the more we share, the more we gain people of knowledge" I ask all readers to recommend every article and book they like because it will help inform others. We all share the responsibility to make our world more hospitable to peace, social justice, and freedom; a lofty goal we cannot reach without spreading knowledge and awareness in every corner of our mother earth.

Prof. Rabie is a distinguished professor of International Political Economy; he attended 5 universities and taught at 11 others on four continents. He has published 58 books, about 200 scholarly papers, and over 2000 newspaper articles. Books are 16 in English, one in Albanian, and 41 in Arabic. English Books include *Saving Capitalism and Democracy; Global Economic and Cultural Transformation; A Theory of Sustainable Sociocultural and Economic Development; The Global Debt Crisis and its Socioeconomic Implications.* (Palgrave Macmillan 2013-2017) One of the English books, "History of Racism", was translated and published in six other languages: German, French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and Polish. Arabic Books include 3 poetry collections, 2 novels, and a story; the rest is mostly academic books and collections of ideas and reflections. Prof. Rabie is president of the Arab Thought Council in Washington, DC, a member of the Arab Thought Forum, and a fellow of the Alexander Von Humboldt Foundation since 1992. Grants and scholarships financed his education from high school to receiving his Ph.D. in 1970 from the University of Houston; grants covered studies in Jordan, Egypt, Germany, and America. He is the winner of the State of Palestine Lifetime Achievement Award for scholarly publications and several other awards. His writings and positions reflect a strong

commitment to peace, social justice, freedom, human development, as well as social, cultural, economic, and environmental sustainability.

www.yazour.com

Links to Google Scholar and ResearchGate.

https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=evo_c4QAAAAJ&hl=en&citsig=AMD79op143N3h2Qo7R_hDsZtzBuYxsGi6g

<https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Mohamed-Rabie-2>

<https://www.encyclopedia.com/arts/culture-magazines/rabie-mohamed>