

# Ethical Dilemmas of the Modern Bureaucracy and its Solution

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**Abstract.** In the 20th century, Max Weber's theory of modern bureaucracy had an important influence on the research of administration. As a rational and efficient form of organization and management system, modern bureaucracy embodies the characteristics of impersonalization and institutionalization that meets the needs of industrial production and organization management. However, in the post-industrial society, the disadvantages of modern bureaucracy are becoming increasingly prominent. There is a fierce conflict between value rationality and instrumental rationality, which caused ethical dilemmas. The key to solve the ethical dilemmas of modern bureaucracy lies in dealing with the relationship between value rationality and instrumental rationality. It's important to promote the institutionalization of public administration ethics, strengthen the sense of moral responsibility and administrative personality of public administrators.

## 1. Introduction

Modern bureaucracy embodies the spirit of scientific rationality, the core of its construction is the unity of the rationality of rule and the legality of technology. Max Weber expounded the theory of modern bureaucracy, which was proposed by comparison and correction of previous models. The ideal type of modern bureaucracy is the standard reference point in bureaucracy versus post-bureaucracy discussion. The ideal modern bureaucratic organization designed by Marx Weber has the characteristics of clear division of labor, clear responsibilities, reasonable hierarchical structure, and high degree of specialization, strict rules and regulations, and impersonality of the members of the organization. However, in this ideal modern bureaucracy system, liberalism and personal values are negated that raises the popularity of utilitarianism, technicism and positivism. The personality of members of the organization are repressed, eventually become slaves who are chasing rights with a series of immoral behavior. In order to solve the ethical dilemmas of modern bureaucracy, we must transcend instrumental rationality and consider moral values. The connotation and characteristics of the modern bureaucracy.

## 2. The connotation and characteristics of the modern bureaucracy

On the premise of instrumental rationality and value rationality, Max Weber puts forward three types of domination: the traditional domination, the charming domination, the regal and rational domination. The traditional domination and the charming domination are based on value rationality, the regal and rational domination is based on instrumental rationality. The bureaucracy is the purest mode of the regal and rational domination. According to Max Weber's theory, the modern bureaucracy is in line with the rationalization needs of the modern industrial civilization society, which has a specialized and comprehensive setting, a functional domination and an organization form. In addition, the modern bureaucracy eliminates irrational factors such as personal feelings, impulses and willpower. The organization of the modern bureaucracy is based on the authority of regal and rational domination, its rationality is mainly embodied in three aspects: the specialization of labor of the organization, the normative order that regulate the relations between the members, the incentive and sanction system for individual behavior. As Max Weber pointed out in the book *Economy and Society*: "It tends to prove general experience, the pure bureaucratic type of administrative organization—the autocratic form of bureaucracy—from a purely technical point of view, and it has

the ability to achieve maximum efficiency. In that sense, it is the most rational form of authority that has been added to the public.”

The modern bureaucracy has the following characteristics: the organization takes the official legal form as the theoretical principle stipulated; the organization is pyramid in shape which is composed of strong, orderly and strict hierarchy; the work task is based on the specialization of the division of labor, with the coordination and leadership through horizontal and vertical power lines; the main content of the work is in the form of written documents; the personal identity of civil servants is completely separated from their public identities, they are non-electoral generation with the life tenure system. From the perspective of science and technology, the modern bureaucracy can achieve maximum efficiency. From the perspective of instrumental rationality, the modern bureaucracy has the characteristics of accuracy, stability and discipline, it is the most reasonable means of social management. On the one hand, the modern bureaucracy embodies the rational spirit in the rational allocation of organizational form. On the other hand, the management activities of the organization have abandoned the factors of rule by man and the experience management, which are combined with knowledge and technology as well as reflect the spirit of the legal system and the spirit of science.

### **3. Ethical dilemmas of the modern bureaucracy**

The modern bureaucracy is a theoretical form and system design to avoid value rationality based on formal rationality. Compared to traditional domination, the modern bureaucracy has abandoned the rule by man, the abuse of power is avoided. The principle of instrumental rationality is respected, efficiency and technological possibilities are considered. From the perspective of social analysis, the capitalist system is the result of rational development. Therefore, as a rational and efficient management system and organizational form, the modern bureaucracy meets the needs of the development of capitalism. Firstly, the modern bureaucracy meets the needs of industrial production and complex management activities. In terms of accuracy, efficiency and predictability, it is impossible for other forms of social organization to achieve. Secondly, the modern bureaucracy is characterized by impersonalization and institutionalization, which is in line with the cultural advocacy in the age of scientific rationality. In the 20th century, to exclude the intervention of value factors and to publicize instrumental rationality is not a defect or contradiction. In a sense, it is a kind of progress and transcendence instead.

However, with the continuous development of the society, the modern bureaucracy shows unavoidable congenital defects and defects. Robert Morton points out that the bureaucracy tends to turn itself from means to purpose, “In the operation of the bureaucracy, the difference between means and purpose in Weber mode becomes blurred. The longer the bureaucracy is in existence, the more serious the tendency to put the cart before the horse. From the beginning of its birth, the bureaucracy is a means to improve the external social purpose. But because of the role of organization inertia, the interest of bureaucracy itself tends to replace the improvement of external goals. The bureaucracy itself has become the purpose of its operation.” Thus, it will lead to bureaucratic production as a rule organization beyond the original organization as a tool. Undoubtedly, the instrumental rationality of bureaucracy can bring high efficiency to the organization. However, the institutionalization and instrumentalization of bureaucracy are naturally endogenous, which leads to reduce the efficiency of the bureaucracy. The bureaucracy is similar to industrial capitalism and formalism, it is rational only at the level of pure instrumental rationality. Once over this level, it is likely to be irrational that contradicting the reality of the operation of public power. It is easy to incur self-denial.

Meanwhile, the bureaucracy is the pursuit of maximization of utility. Downes put forward this point of view: Bureaucrats are not all self – selfish, even all of the officials have a partial tendency to egoism, but that does not mean that they never consider the interests of others in their actions. Nevertheless, the officers act at least in part for personal gain, they are driven solely by their personal interests, which is an objective fact. People are shaped by social conditions, what’s more, they are shaped by his influence on others and his feelings. It is generally true that a person's perception of things that directly affect him is more indirect than others' influence on his feelings. In other words,

his direct or personal feelings are much stronger than his sympathies and social feelings. Personal interest is the premise and foundation for individual survival and development, everyone will instinctively pursue and try their best to satisfy their own interests. Everyone is inevitably concerned about their own safety and happiness, also pursues its own interests and needs. They concern for their own interests far exceeds the concern for others' interests as well. Officials with self-interest have multiple goals, some of these goals will enable them to sacrifice their short-term interests under certain circumstances to make others profit. At the same time, in general, people also accept certain constraints when pursuing personal goals. These constraints come from the common moral values recognized in their own culture and the acceptance of legal norms. Therefore, the general personal selfishness in our theory does not completely exclude other types of behavior or that people will pursue their personal interests without moral condemnation or other constraints.

William A. NiSkannenn pointed out that for the empirical theory of the bureaucracy, the starting point of their wisdom is to recognize that bureaucrats are not, or at least not entirely, driven by universal welfare and the country. Therefore, the bureaucracy emphasizes the publicity and bureaucratic selfishness, and the contradiction between the infinite rationality of the bureaucracy and the limited rationality of the bureaucracy, which is bound to lead to the effective functioning of bureaucracy. Weber also point out that the bureaucracy is committed to building the shell of future slavery. For this kind of slave in the future, if with a pure, technical means, that is, the rational bureaucratic management and its maintenance are the last and only values for determining the way in which people's affairs are guided Then people may be forced to obey one day because of their softness, just like the peasants of the ancient countries had obeyed. This profoundly reveals the paradox of the modern bureaucracy itself, it is tend to face with the ethical dilemma. The main manifestation is the contradiction among purpose and means, efficiency and fairness, instrumental rationality and value rationality.

#### **4. The solution to ethical dilemmas of the modern bureaucracy**

Initially, it is necessary to actively promote the system construction of public administration ethics. The moralization of administration is the transcendence of modern bureaucracy and the important direction of the reform of public administration in China, it constructs the service administration mode characterized by service and moralization. As a way to safeguard public interest and coordinate various interests, the modes of governance, public administration is not only different from authoritarian rule of power, but also is different from the management of one-sided pursuit of science and technology.

There are ethical relations and moral values in public administration. The system is the sum of rules that restrict human behavior and value, which is constructed of public administration morality that requires the government to be based on the coordination and unification of value rationality and instrumental rationality, meanwhile, it is required to formulate a series of rules and regulations for moral restrictions on public administrative organizations and public administrative personnel. The system construction of public administration morality must accurately grasp the ethical and ethical relationship of public administration, in accordance with the requirements of public nature as the primary premise. By means of arrangement and design for public administration system, procedure and behavior standard, give full play to the moral initiative of the main body of public administration, conscientiously maintain public interests and serve the people. It further reflects the spiritual guidance of value rationality to instrumental rationality.

The system construction of public administration morality can be discussed in the following three aspects: Firstly, through the institutional arrangement of moral norms, in order to reshape the public morality of public administration. The purpose of ensuring that the government manages social affairs is not to pursue the efficiency of public administration organizations, but to maintain social fairness and stability.

All of the public servants should hold positions of public trust. Concededly, it is necessary to formulae corresponding professional ethics. According to the requirements and characteristics of

different posts and positions, we should work out codes of conduct and ethics that are operable, positive and feasible. The ethics of public trust is a public policy. As a policy, public trust is a conscious way that a democratic society sees that the most fundamental human interests depend on the future free actions of others. Secondly, we should turn the administrative moral responsibility into legalization and norm, perfect the mechanism of inspection, establish a valid mechanism of moral responsibility reward and punishment, and especially perfect the mechanism of pursuing negative administrative moral responsibility. Through the statutory procedures, the public administrative ethics norms should be fixed in the form of legal provisions, and the public administrative morality will be promoted to the legal level. This is the most effective measure to promote the institutional construction of administrative ethics. The formation of morality is a process from heteronomy to self-discipline. Through legislation, moral responsibility can be effectively internalized and externalized. Thirdly, it is important to strengthen the strength of social supervision and moral public opinion. The external supervision includes administrative supervision and social supervision. "Let power run in the sunlight" is the consensus of power supervision in today's society. Public administration moral self-discipline will not form spontaneously, so rigid legal protection and extensive social supervision are essential. It is required to accelerate the moral and legal construction process for mass media, strengthen social supervision and self-discipline of intermedium, and enhance social supervision on the information disclosure. Meanwhile, pay attention to publish relevant information in time, improve the reporting system and strengthen social supervision.

Meanwhile, it is important to strengthen the sense of moral responsibility and the cultivation of administrative personality of public administrators. Administrative personnel are the basic components of the administrative system, and also the important foundation for the operation of the administrative system. The sense of moral responsibility of administrative personnel plays a crucial role in public administrative activities. Public administrators should not only perform their duties in accordance with relevant job responsibilities, but also publicness in the process. The pursuit of fairness and justice is the eternal theme of humanity. This requires public administrators to cherish the moral belief of safeguarding public interest and serving the people. Nowadays, in the pluralistic society, faced with different moral values, public administrators need to constantly sharpen moral will and internalize moral responsibility into moral responsibility.

Public administrators should not only stick to the bottom line of morality, but also pursue a higher moral level. Moreover, the perfect administrative personality is the foundation. As a product of moral internalization, administrative personality is manifested as a unified inner spirit possessed by administrative personnel which plays a guiding role in the moral behavior of the administrative personnel. It reflects the development level of civilized behavior, moral standard and moral responsibility of administrative personnel. With the continuous sublimation of moral consciousness of public administrators, internalization of administrative morality into administrative personality will have a dominating effect on the behavior of public administrative personnel. Motivation deriving logically from ethical or moral principles that govern a person's thoughts and actions. The basic distinction between the human and animals is moral sense, moral concepts and moral life. In the process of heteronomy to self-discipline, the shaping of administrative personality is influenced by the external environment and the ability of individual moral cognition. We should pay attention to internalize the core values of laws, regulations, social expectations and professional ethics. By virtue of moral cognition and moral practice, we integrate excellent virtues and qualities into ourselves. In order to shape a regular administrative personality, enhance the moral self-discipline of public administrators, enhance their rational judgment and autonomous decision-making ability in the process of public administration. Meanwhile, actively taking the public will as the standard of behavior, pursuing the highest moral ideal of safeguarding public interest and serving the people.

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