Bureaucracy/McDonaldization

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Bureaucracy

Max Weber argued that bureaucracies were becoming the organizational model of the 19th Century

- Bureaucracy: large hierarchical organization governed by formal rules and regulations and having clearly specified work tasks (p. 295)

Weber saw bureaucracy as leading example of rationalization, the most important social development of modernity; decisions should be based on efficiency, not tradition

Elements of bureaucracy

- Impersonality: Decision-making criteria that ignore personal characteristics not related organizational goals
- Division of labor: Subdivision of different people or groups in different tasks, characteristics of most bureaucracies (p. 295)
- Hierarchy of authority: Ranking of people or tasks in a bureaucracy from those at the top, where there is a great deal of power and authority, to those at the bottom, where there is little power and authority (p. 295)
A non-bureaucratic organization

What does a non-bureaucratic organization look like?

Gypsum plant described by Alvin Gouldner (1950)

- Half of workers related to other workers
- Little paperwork; things handled on case-to-case basis
- Workers could try different jobs until they found one they liked; rhythm determined by workers
- Workers used plant materials and services
- Workers were happy, but customers and company managers were not
Max Weber argued that bureaucracies were becoming the organizational model of the 19th Century.

George Ritzer argues that McDonalds is becoming the model for organizations in the 21st Century.

- McDonaldization: “the process by which the principles of the fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as of the rest of the world”

“McDonaldization is an extension of Weber’s theory of rationalization. For Weber, the model of rationalization was the bureaucracy; for me, the fast-food restaurant is the paradigm of McDonaldization.”
Four elements of McDonaldization

1. **Efficiency**: the search for the optimum means to a given end
   - Includes streamlining processes, simplifying goods and services, and using customers to perform work

2. **Calculability**: emphasis on things that can be calculated, counted, and quantified

3. **Predictability**: emphasis on things being the same from one time or place to another
   - Achieved through offering uniform products, replications of settings, and scripting of employee behaviors

4. **Control** (of people) through replacement of human with nonhuman technology
   - Nonhuman technology includes machines, architecture/interior design, and limited options

Irrationalities of rationality

Ritzer claims that although McDonaldization is supposed to be rational, it can lead to results that are irrational. These include:

- Inefficiency and higher costs: McDonaldization isn’t efficient for everyone, especially customers, and may cost extra.
- The illusion of fun: Fun has become a guiding principle of many McDonaldized institutions.
- False Friendliness: Genuine fraternization is restricted or eliminated and replaced with either no human relationships or “false fraternization.”
- Health and environmental hazards: Includes health risks of fast food, food poisoning, litter, environmental hazards of factory farms.
- Homogenization: Similar products are offered through the U.S. and world.
- Dehumanization: McDonaldization offers low-skill jobs, treats customers impersonally, minimizes contact between human beings, and has negative effects on families.