

Bureaucracy, managerial disorganization, and administrative breakdown in criminal justice agencies

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Abstract

This article presents a novel way to explain managerial collapse in criminal justice agencies by analyzing traditional organizational perspectives. While recognizing the advances of human relations and contingency management theories, most criminal justice agencies in the twenty-first century remain hierarchical Weberian organizations characterized by mechanistic and formalistic operations, with specialized tasks and division of labor that create a narrow range of duties. Along with Weber, Fayol, and more recently, DiIulio and Wilson have argued that managerial quality determines organizational performance. This article extends that focus by using the theoretical perspective called managerial disorganization and administrative breakdown, hypothesizing that management is responsible for well-functioning and/or dysfunctional organizations. Through a series of examples from case studies where criminal justice agencies have failed, the article concludes that agencies experiencing administrative breakdown and managerial disorganization are not implementing their basic mission and inappropriately utilizing the organizational principles of division of labor, unity of command, span of control, accountability, hierarchy of authority, and communication.

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Introduction

With the ascendancy of science, Taylor (1911/1947) merged managerial concepts and the application of empirical methods to organizational control of factory workers. Taylor advocated for efficient managers to analyze, predict, and control behavior of employees in complex organizations. Efficacious managers define laws, rules, and principles that incorporate first-class workers within the organizational framework (Freedman, 1992).

Another theorist from the traditional school, Max Weber (1946/1992) argued that bureaucracy was “the

core of modern government” (Stillman, 1992, p. 37). From an idealistic organizational perspective, pure bureaucracy relates to Weber’s functional, impersonal, and hierarchical system based on legal authority that operates under a system of abstract rules and pursues legitimate organizational goals (Albrow, 1970). Weber saw rationalization of bureaucratic structures as essential to social process and embraced rationality as the central ideal of organizational life (Maier, 1991).

Weber’s bureaucratic organization follows a structured chain of command, which facilitates accomplishment of organizational objectives (Wren, 1994), with a rigid hierarchy of offices, and formal rules that govern agency action (Stojkovic, Kalinich, & Klofas, 2003). Weberian organizations are characterized as mechanistic and formalistic, with specialized tasks, and division of

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labor that creates a narrow range of duties. Organization matters because bureaucratic success is related to implementation of efficient and effective organizational systems (Wilson, 1989). In the Weberian tradition, organizational systems are important because they define performance standards, outline a proper chain of command, specify the hierarchy of authority, and establish lines of communication.

Breakdown/disorganization theory was developed from numerous managerial and organizational theories and concepts. Elton Mayo's (1945) human relations school and the contextual approaches of situational leadership (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969) and contingency management (Blake & Mouton, 1964; Fielder, 1998) have made considerable scientific improvements over the basic traditional theories of Taylor and Weber. Absence of these modern theoretical perspectives within modern criminal justice agencies reflects more on the intransigent institutional nature within criminal justice institutions, rather than on the efficaciousness of contingency and situational management. Most criminal justice agencies are rigid, old-fashion, bureaucratic, paramilitaristic organizations that stick to the traditional views of DiIulio, Fayol, Taylor, Weber, and Wilson. For better or worse, criminal justice agencies remain hierarchical organizations, which is the primary focus on this article.

While there is no perfect organizational system, bureaucratic organizations can function appropriately. Fayol (1949), for example, identified several essential elements of organizations that are necessary for operational success. Well-run organizations effectuate these elements, including possession of explicit rules that control the behavior of front-line personnel, a hierarchical system of authority resulting in a chain of command, a system for delegation of authority, coupled with a proper span of control to ensure that procedures are consistently and absolutely followed, maintenance of employee expertise through continual in-service training, and a system of communication that specifies organizational roles and enumerates tasks and duties.

Failure among paramilitaristic criminal justice agencies can be traced to failure to implement human relations and/or contingency management perspectives, failure to follow Fayol's organizational elements, failure to apply the functional aspects of Taylor's scientific management, and failure to adopt Weber's legitimate bureaucratic model. Dysfunction within criminal justice agencies occurs because managers do not adhere to the traditional elements of the organization, resulting in administrative breakdown and managerial disorganization.

Not surprisingly, managers do not consider leadership the major cause of organizational breakdown and

disorganization (Kappeler, 2001; Tuchman, 1984). Supervisors routinely underestimate their contribution to organizational failure (Kraska, 2004). Mundane situational factors are often overlooked by management as a cause of organizational collapse as dysfunction becomes systemic and results from years of neglect, routinization, and normalization of deviance within organizational subcultures (D. Vaughn, 1996). Many criminal justice managers reject research that shows the benefits of human relations management and situational leadership in criminal justice organizations, while sticking to the outdated and heavy-handed leadership of tradition.

Too often critics of bureaucracy confuse unworkable, bloated organizational dysfunction and collapse with bureaucracy per se (Mieczkowski, 1991). The real problem resides with poor managers within criminal justice agencies that foster a dysfunctional organizational system that is rigid and reluctant to change (Bayley, 1994), with vague and inconsistent goals, broken lines of communication (DiIulio, 1994a), and a wide span of control with an undefined hierarchy of authority (Wilson, 1989). While an extensive literature on organizational failure and collapse existed (Anheier, 1999), it had not been applied to the criminal justice workplace. Criminal justice had an abundance of case studies, however, from which the dysfunctional organizational literature was applicable (Casamayou, 1993). By analyzing over a dozen case study examples in criminal justice, this article enhances a novel theoretical perspective by combining several traditional theories of administration. What emerges is the perspective of managerial disorganization and administrative breakdown, which molds preexisting organizational perspectives into a new integrative theoretical entity.

Although the word bureaucracy is reviled in the popular culture as representing the epitome of inefficiency, red tape, turf-battles, excessive government entanglement, and waste (Johnston, 1993), properly implemented bureaucratic agencies have theoretical legitimacy (Crouch & Marquart, 1989; DiIulio, 1991; Wilson, 1989) and can function exceedingly well in post-modernistic society (Hassard & Parker, 1993). Despite the negative characteristics of bureaucratic organizations, bureaucracy remains the rule rather than the exception within criminal justice organizations. According to Johnston (1993, p. xvi), "the bureaucratic organizing model is the most common organizing model for private and public sector organizations throughout the world." When properly implemented, bureaucracy provides a positive organizational framework from which to organize criminal justice agencies. Within an open systems perspective, the agency's structure should be centered on Weber's (1994) principles and

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