

Chapter 6

Co-Existence of Bureaucracy and Post-Bureaucracy: The Case of a Contract Research Organization

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ABSTRACT

A contract research organization within fine chemicals is described as for its main characteristics between 1972 and 2012 while identifying drivers pulling towards bureaucratic and post-bureaucratic traits within organizations. The drivers are in the form of three dimensions: Presence versus relative absence of centralized control, presence versus relative absence of specified targets, and presence versus relative absence of formal monitoring and reporting of performances. While identifying and analyzing these dimensions, the contexts in which they occur are conceptualized according to prevalent frameworks on a firm's evolutionary stages or event tracks. The analysis shows that the firm has been through four distinct stages or event tracks during its 40 year period, and three of these stages had seemingly contradictory co-existence between bureaucratic and post-bureaucratic organizational principles.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years there has been a stream of literature discussing the emergence of a new type of organizations referred to as post-bureaucratic organizations. Some of this literature heralding the new and flexible structures have a normative and deterministic overtone, suggesting that traditional bureaucracies are doomed to failure due to their inherent contradictions when confronting new circumstances such as intensified competition and the advent of the knowledge society (Heckscher & Donnellon, 1994). Compared to such early and normative literature heralding an overarching new epoch dominated by such organizations, a more sober view has dominated the discourse in recent years presenting the possibility of alternative trajectories consisting of various new and somewhat flexible forms of bureaucracy (Styhre, 2007) or of “hybrids” between bureaucratic and post-bureaucratic ways of organizing (Clegg, Harris, &

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Höpfl, 2011). Regarding the latter perspective, the view is that there may indeed be cases of significant movement from one organizational form to another, but such a shift may nevertheless be more readily conceived of as a “hybrid” form of organization which contains significant elements of bureaucracy rather than as a pure-bred new form of post-bureaucratic organization (Alvesson & Thompson, 2005; Josserand, Teo, & Clegg, 2006).

This chapter is situated within this latter type of literature, and is intended as a contribution at two levels. Firstly, the chapter is intended as a methodological and theoretical contribution by way of being a longitudinal, tentative application of a framework for studying post- bureaucracy versus bureaucracy first launched in a somewhat rudimentary form by McSweeney (2006). Much of the literature on post-bureaucratic organizations has naturally been focused on specific, observable organizational arrangements, such as e.g. decentralization in the form of teamworking and the implementation of flexible employment relations (Heckscher & Donnellon, 1994; Iedema, 2003). Oftentimes the very definition of post-bureaucracy seems to lie in the perceived existence of a rather long chain of organizational arrangements (Hill, Martin, & Harris, 2000). As much as such inquiries may be part of studies into post-bureaucracy, this approach may also contain weaknesses such as difficulties in distinguishing between managerial intentions and actual organizational practice, and problems in explaining theoretically how all the organizational arrangements are inter-related. There can also be potential problems in explaining why some seemingly bureaucratic or post-bureaucratic organizations appear to have some specific arrangements, albeit lack others. The McSweeney (2006) approach suggests some crucial dimensions for analyses, and focuses on deciphering the driving forces:

- Behind centralization and decentralization,
- Between specification and flexibility, and
- Between formal and informal monitoring and reporting.

This approach is thus more abstract than the approaches starting with the observable arrangements. Provided that the forces between bureaucratic and post-bureaucratic traits are interpreted with references to their specific historical and evolutionary context, however, such an abstract framework might be useful when it comes to explaining issues such as why some seemingly bureaucratic or post-bureaucratic organizations appear to have only some of the respective, specific arrangements. For this purpose, the chapter links the McSweeney (2006) framework of fluctuating drivers with the way van de Ven (1992) has adapted the general organizational evolution model as originally proposed by Greiner (1972, 1998), namely theorizing how various categories of events or “event tracks” within a firm’s evolution may be seen as related to:

- Creativity,
- Leadership,
- Organizational direction,
- Delegation of responsibilities,
- Top management control,
- Coordination of decentralized units,
- Resistances towards bureaucracy, and
- Collaboration.

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