

[MUSIC PLAYING]

Hello. Welcome to Sociological Studies. In this lesson, we're going to take up some problems associated with bureaucracy and bureaucratic organization. Now if you haven't watched the tutorial called Characteristics of Bureaucracy, you might be a little lost when it comes to this one. So I would encourage you to watch Characteristics of Bureaucracy, then followed by this tutorial problems, The Problems With Bureaucracy.

Bureaucratic organization has dramatically increased efficiency in American capitalism and in American society. But it does have some associated problems. So we're going to take up those problems in this lesson.

First is this idea of bureaucratic alienation. You might feel that you here, dealing with a bureaucracy leaves you feeling disempowered, that you're powerless to fight or go against what the bureaucracy wants. So every time you deal with a bureaucracy, in the eyes of the bureaucracy, you are dealt with as a case. It doesn't matter about your personal situation or your personal needs. The bureaucracy has to deal with everyone in the same fashion and by the same standards. This is part of this idea of efficiency, of predictability, of control.

So dealing with a bureaucracy this way then can make you feel dehumanized or alienated. And alienation is a vast sense of powerlessness that can induce emotional responses like isolation, sadness, and anger. Bureaucratic alienation then is a feeling of powerlessness as a result of dealing with a formal bureaucratic organization in society. I'm sure you're familiar with what this feels like.

Think about times when you've been so frustrated and felt so powerless, like there was nothing you could do. You had to produce that document, and you had to give it to this office at this time. Otherwise, you wouldn't get that driver's license. Or if you fall behind on your home payments and a bank comes to foreclose your home. You might feel like a human, like you're entitled to this home and that you can make the payments later if they just give me a little bit more time.

But in the eyes of the bureau, it doesn't matter. You're powerless. You're a case. You're not a human with its own idiosyncratic situation. There's nothing you can do. You are powerless against the bureaucratic organization. And this is one of the negative side effects of it, bureaucratic alienation.

The second problem of bureaucratic organization is what we call bureaucratic ritualism. Bureaucracies are steadfast rule followers. And bureaucratic ritualism is an adherence to rules, codes of conduct, and processes at an almost dogmatic level-- that it becomes possible to lose sight of the goals of the organization in getting bogged down in just following the formal rules. So the steadfast application of processes and rules can, in fact, then

undermine the efficiency and the mission of the organization itself.

Rules should be means to ends. The process and the rules should not be the ends of themselves. And when this occurs, we say bureaucratic ritualism occurs.

I get frustrated with this all the time in dealing with bureaucracies or formal organizations. You think, look, hey, if you would just break this one rule this one time, everything would work out so much simpler, easier, and better for everybody. But no, it doesn't work like that.

Bureaucratic ritualism says, this can't happen. And bureaucratic ritualism then is what is behind this common idea of red tape, getting bogged down in the process of maintaining, upholding the rules. That's what we mean when we say, oh, there's just so much red tape with doing that activity.

The third problem with a bureaucratic organization is what we call bureaucratic inertia, which is the idea that once a bureaucracy is created, it tends to stay in motion. It tends to be very difficult to destroy, because bureaucratic organizations help to perpetuate themselves. They're often implemented and designed to achieve goals, but once those goals are achieved, the bureau just doesn't go away.

It's filled with people who work there, who have jobs, that want to keep their jobs and keep working there. So the bureau tends to shift its goals a little bit and try to remain relevant after its initial purpose has been met. This is bureaucratic inertia. And it's why so many people say they're frustrated with big government and what they see as wasteful government spending, because bureaucratic inertia keeps these organizations going, maybe after they're not useful anymore. So this is the underlying sentiment when people say they're frustrated with wasteful government spending-- bureaucratic inertia.

The fourth and final problem is oligarchy, which is when a few people rule the masses. Bureaucratic organizations are oligarchies. There's a hierarchical ranking of authority in bureaucracies, in a pyramid shape such that there's a very few people at the top who rule masses at the bottom.

This is a problem when people higher up are distanced from the public. They might feel privileged when all of that power is concentrated at the top. And in this fashion, it can be damaging for society. Politicians get this complaint a lot, that they're disconnected and removed from the needs of the people. This can happen with oligarchical organization.

I hope you enjoyed this overview of the problems of bureaucracy, designed to complement the tutorial The Characteristics of Bureaucracy. Have a great rest of your day.