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## Introduction: Bureaucracy in the Age of Enterprise

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Social and organizational analysis has been dominated by a ‘discourse of endings’ for much of the last two decades. For many social scientists and social commentators, we seem to be living at a time when the core values and institutions defining ‘modernity’ are in serious trouble, if not terminal decay. Thus, Gray (1999: 8, emphasis added) reflects the contemporary *Zeitgeist* when he asserts that ‘we live amid the ruins of the projects of the modern age and at an historical moment when the dissolution of modern societies’ most distinctive beliefs and practices is *immutably under way*’.

Organization theory and analysis has made a highly significant contribution to this ‘discourse of endings’. Since the early 1980s the former’s research agenda, as well as the wider intellectual milieu in which it is located, has been focused on radical discontinuity in institutional forms and organizational practices. Of course, social and organizational theory, like any other intellectual practice and the accumulated body of knowledge that it generates, passes through various alternating phases or cycles of pessimistic critique and optimistic celebration of ‘the way we live now’ (Reed, 1996). Yet, by the mid-1980s, the radical critique of the core institutions and values of modern industrial society, offered particularly, but not exclusively, by postmodernist organization theory, had metamorphosed into something further-reaching and potentially destructive of the institutional status quo. A much more apocalyptic vision and discourse of ‘endings’ came to dominate contemporary intellectual and political debate. Revolutionary change, sweeping away outmoded values and obsolete institutions, rather than piecemeal social engineering and incremental organizational reform, became the defining feature of our time and condition.

The putative ‘demise of bureaucracy’, as well as the phoenix-like emergence of the ‘post-bureaucratic or network organization’ out of its ashes, is a crucial, indeed an axiomatic, component of this discourse of



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endings. It anticipates, if not predicts, the disintegration, or more accurately implosion, of Weber's 'iron cage' of bureaucratic domination and control under the multi-layered and disjunctive pressures exerted by globalization, entrepreneurialism and informationalism. The combined effects of economic, cultural and technological transformation generate a configuration of underlying structural mechanisms and extant social conditions in which the fate of bureaucratic organization is indelibly sealed. The optimistic and rather naive '1960s-style' critique of bureaucracy as, to invoke Bennis (1966), 'a prosthetic device, irrelevant to a brave new world of dynamic technologies, markets and values', gives way to a much harsher and apocalyptic '1980s/1990s-style' critique identifying irrefutable and irresistible secular movements that will necessarily overwhelm any remaining vestiges of bureaucratic rationality and practice. If the 20th century, to invoke Wolin (1961), was the 'age of organization' and bureaucracy was its core symbolic value and institutional mechanism, then the 21st century, contemporary social theorists and organizational analysts (Castells, 2001; Sabel, 2003) tell us, will be the 'age of networks' and the socio-technical infrastructure that make them indispensable as the new modes of collective cognition and governance required in revolutionary times.

If we seriously engage with the broad historical sweep, and at least some of the core sociological propositions, of this 'post-bureaucratic/network organization' thesis, then a range of substantive problems and difficulties are presented to contemporary social and organizational theorists. First, since Weber, if not before (e.g. Saint-Simon), bureaucratization and bureaucracy have been recognized as *the* central process and structure characterizing 20th-century 'organization' under the generic rubric of 'rationalization'. In short, the latter has been the compulsory point of departure for any analysis of modern organization in any kind of social context, whether it be the lecture theatre, the television studio or the democratic assembly. If that Archimedian-style point of departure is now erased, what is to replace it as the critical point of reference in any subsequent search for alternative organizational paradigms and forms to the established bureaucratic ideal-type? Second, if we are indeed at least entering a new age of network-based forms of organization, and the entrepreneurial or enterprising modes of governance associated with them, then what is to succeed the 'ethic of institutional scepticism and responsibility' inherent in Weberian-style bureaucracy? The latter played a pivotal role in producing and protecting a 'civic ethic' in which core values such as duty, fidelity and pluralism could flourish and infuse both the theory and practice of modern governance (Selznick, 1992; Heckscher and Donnellon, 1994; du Gay, 2000). Will the entrepreneurial or enterprising modes of governance that are putatively replacing modern bureaucracy be sufficiently concerned to maintain any residual elements of this 'ethic of disinterestedness'? Or will they, in their headlong rush to 're-enchant the world of organization', sweep the 'ethic of disinter-



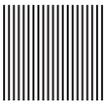
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estedness' aside and directly impose a neo-liberal ideology of competitive consumerism and possessive individualism? Third, does the passing away of the old bureaucratic order and the birth of the new age of entrepreneurial networks and enterprising 'organizational selves' have any costs, or at least costs that are sufficiently important for us to slacken, if not defer, the pace of this headlong rush to embrace the project of self-realization and empowerment through 'knowledge work'? Weber warned us that when modern, rational capitalism was 'fully in the saddle', it would no longer need the ethical imperatives and moral verities of traditional religious doctrines and their supporting value systems. But he may have seriously underestimated the need and capacity of network-based or 'informational/ knowledge capitalism' to rework the latter in such a way that they became re-adapted to the new, 'softer' forms of domination and control now emerging in contemporary organizations (Barker, 1999; Reed, 1999; Courpasson, 2000). The wider implications of these new, 'softer' forms of surveillance and discipline are now beginning to be seriously considered by organizational researchers (see 'Themed Section on Foucault, Management and History', *Organization* 9[4], 2002). But they also raise very practical and perplexing political questions about the more complex, flexible and hybridized regimes of accountability and control taking shape in 'post-bureaucratic/network organizations' and their longer-term impact on whatever is left of workplace democracy.

It is within this broader context of continuing debate and controversy over the 'crisis of bureaucracy in the age of enterprise' that this special issue of *Organization* has been developed. Insofar as the 'post-bureaucratic/network organization' thesis is open to multiple, and often internally inconsistent, interpretations, then this special issue of *Organization* has been constructed with the aim of developing a more nuanced reading and evaluation of its coherence and validity. If the move towards the post-bureaucratic/network organizational form signals the emergence of a new 'organizing rationality or logic' clustered around core principles and rules that are fundamentally different from those characteristic of Weberian ideal-type bureaucracy, then this putative paradigm shift raises a series of fundamental questions about the 'future of organization' in the 21st century.

The seven articles included in this special issue of *Organization* on 'Bureaucracy in the Age of Enterprise' arose out of a sub-theme/group on this topic/debate convened by the editors of the special issue at the European Group for Organizational Studies Colloquium in Lyon, France, July 2001. The seven articles selected for inclusion in this special issue of *Organization* engage with different, but complementary, aspects of the 'post-bureaucratic/network' thesis. The first three papers, by, respectively, Kallinikos, du Gay and Casey, focus on a set of wide-ranging issues concerning the inherent logic of bureaucratic organization and its problematic relevance in a contemporary socio-political context that



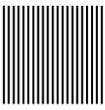
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seems to be dominated by, broadly speaking, 'anti-bureaucratic' discourses and ideologies. For Kallinikos, much of the entrepreneurial and managerial critique of bureaucracy is based on a neo-romantic and neo-liberal ideology 'marked by an astonishingly naive functionalism devoid of historical awareness'. This, he argues, leads to a gross misinterpretation of bureaucracy through an overconcentration on secondary characteristics of organizational order under modernity. In its place, Kallinikos develops an analysis of bureaucracy as a highly innovative, indeed unique, organizational form and practice in which the separation of the role from the person, through standardized and non-inclusive social relations transcending the contingencies and limits of particular contexts, continues to dominate the 'landscape of modernity'.

Du Gay takes up the theme of 'entrepreneurial governance' and the 'economic politics of enterprise' that have shaped the anti-bureaucratic or neo-liberal discourse so robustly critiqued by Kallinikos. In du Gay's view, the discourses of entrepreneurial governance and enterprise culture have generated a deep-seated crisis in central governmental authority and control, such that contemporary policy elites and managers, across a whole swathe of substantive work domains that span the 'public/private sector divide', no longer have the confidence or capacity to rule or govern through traditional bureaucratic means and mechanisms. As a result, a range of hybridized systems of governmental rule and conduct have emerged that coalesce around the generic regime of 'regulated autonomy' in which the promise of liberation from centralized control is simultaneously matched by the practice of internalized manipulation and self-surveillance. In turn, this transforms the very nature of 'public service' from a pluralistic ordering of competing, and often conflicting, domains, that Weber would have clearly recognized and approved of, into a monotheistic value system and monolithic governance regime in which dissent, much less opposition, becomes illegitimate and dysfunctional. Thus, the 'disciplined tolerance' of value conflict and policy disputation facilitated by, indeed protected by, rational bureaucratic organization and administration is, in du Gay's opinion, pushed onto the margins of contemporary political discourse and public life by an ideology and practice of governance formally legitimated by an ethic of decentralized participation and control.

Casey develops an analysis of the wider cultural context in which contemporary organizational innovation and change has been embedded. She undertakes this analysis with particular regard to the 'culture of individual re-enchantment and empowerment' that has provided an alternative, and pervasive, source of legitimacy and authority to the rationalistic and instrumentalist ideologies underpinning Weberian bureaucracy. This analysis of the 'New Age' critique of rational bureaucratic authority and control (see 'Themed Section on Spirituality, Management and Organization', *Organization*, 10[2], May 2003) suggests that it is part of a wider 'crisis of modernity' in which the rise of new



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forms of self-expression, sense-making and spirituality necessarily entails a direct challenge to the scientific functionalism and economic rationalism that have dominated organizational life for most of the 20th century. Indeed, Casey raises the possibility that the 'New Age' critique of bureaucracy may provide the basis for a new form of 'critical organizational practice' in which organizational analysts, and the knowledge-claims that they generate, become much more open and responsive to the new 'social movements of opposition' identified by the French thinker and sociologist, Alain Touraine. Relocated with this kind of wider socio-political context, the issue of the role of 'organization theorist as public intellectual' becomes much more germane to any consideration of longer-term possibilities and developments within the field of organization studies as a whole.

The following four articles are all empirically-based case studies in 'knowledge-intensive organizations' that help us to reflect on the extent to which these kind of organizational locales and settings necessarily move us towards 'post-bureaucratic' forms and practices. Indeed, it is in exactly the type of conditions prevailing in 'knowledge-intensive sectors' that we might expect the 'post-bureaucratic/network organization' thesis to be at the zenith of its explanatory powers. It is here, if anywhere, that the inherent limitations and debilitating failings of bureaucratic organization should be most evident and the conditions for the emergence and institutionalization of 'post-bureaucratic/network-based' organizational forms at their most favourable.

Hodgson's article provides a classic case study in the micro-politics of re-bureaucratization consequent upon the discursive reconstruction of a telephone bank through 'project management' theory and techniques. He focuses on the political games and tactics followed by various interest groups to legitimate socio-technical change within the organization and to cope with the 'emergent tensions' between bureaucratic and post-bureaucratic organizing logics unavoidably encountered in the move towards project-based team working and management. Far from entailing a radical break with bureaucratic forms of organization and control, the move to project-based team working and management, Hodgson contends, re-intensified bureaucratic surveillance and discipline by means of 'new' programmes and practices officially represented as entailing a dramatic shift to much more decentralized and flexible forms of self-organization and management. In particular, the development and implementation of *generic models* of project management enhanced the visibility and calculability of individual behaviour by incorporating 'it' within more highly routinized, but indirect and unobtrusive, control mechanisms.

This focus on project management as an extremely powerful discursive tool in the 'new', post-bureaucratic/network-based organizational forms emerging in the 'knowledge-intensive' sectors of the information economy is continued in Räsänen and Linde's article. They suggest that project



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management may be most appropriately viewed as a configuration of textual and discursive practices that are re-engineered by experts ('discourse technologists') to enrol and colonize as many organizational members as possible. They develop Fairclough's (1995) concept of 'the technologization of discourse' as a theoretical lens through which to analyse the strategic role played by the Erickson (PROPS) model of project management in the re-engineering of subject positions and processes in a wide range of organizations. This generic project management system, Räisänen and Linde argue, can be seen as a conscious and strategic attempt on the part of senior management to control the discursive genres and practices through which organizational life is collectively understood and sustained under increasingly complex, fluid and ambiguous conditions. This is made possible through the *re-bureaucratization* of 'projectified activities' and the means by which they are to be made transparent and accountable to powerful intra-organizational and inter-organizational stakeholder groups.

The final two articles in this special issue of *Organization* are concerned with the 'new' forms of organizational control emerging in 'knowledge-intensive firms'. Robertson and Swan provide a detailed analytical account of organizational restructuring and cultural re-engineering in a UK-based high technology, scientific consultancy as it moves through various developmental phases. As this organization's growth and development becomes increasingly constrained by the logic of market competition and its accompanying financial imperatives, so its capacity to sustain a more open, collegiate and pluralistic professional and managerial culture atrophies. In its place, a form of bureaucratic governance eventually takes hold that substantially modifies the original commitment to 'negotiated order' between interest groups to a point where strategic power and control effectively become centralized around a senior management elite primarily driven by the need to maximize shareholder value.

Kärreman and Alvesson explore the construction of social identities in a large, multinational IT/management consultancy that relies heavily on cultural/normative modes of control but combines these with strong bureaucratic ordering systems within an 'iron cage of subjectivity'. This combination of control logics facilitates a sophisticated mix of formal, structural components and more flexible, processual elements that can be re-adjusted to the changing needs of an organization that is operating within a highly competitive market environment in which 'the capacity' to deliver is paramount. Yet this hybridization of control logics and forms generates a series of structural and cultural tensions that are reflected in the patterns of social identification created through processes of 'sense-giving' and 'sensebreaking' within 'Big'. Bureaucratic control structures and systems are retained because they provide a basis for collective meaning and identification within an organizational milieu driven by an ideology of individual 'excellence' and a culture of 'delivery'.



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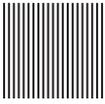
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Underpinning each of the articles included in this special issue of *Organization*, there is a recurring theme or leitmotif: the need to develop a more realistic and grounded appreciation of the inherent flexibility and durability of contemporary bureaucratic organization. Much of the 'post-bureaucratic/network-based organization' thesis has been framed within a highly simplistic, optimistic and deterministic reading of the 'fate of bureaucracy' under the cumulative impact of economic, social, political and cultural changes that 'the bureaucratic dinosaur' cannot understand, much less control. Perhaps it is time to remind ourselves of the continued, and extremely ambivalent, relevance of bureaucracy to our understanding of the contemporary organizational world and our role within it?

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