The Face of Democracy

Video Transcript

Those who work for the public bureaucracy are nearly always citizens, much like those they serve. As such, they typically seek similar long-term goals from their employment; namely to be able to pay their bills and save for retirement. However, unlike those who seek employment in the private sector, public bureaucrats tend to have an additional motivator: the desire to accomplish something worthwhile on behalf of their country. In general, individuals attracted to public service display higher levels of public service motivation (or PSM). This desire, which most people possess in varying degrees, drives us to seek fulfillment through doing good and contributing in an altruistic manner.

Bureaucrats must implement and administer a wide range of policies and programs as established by congressional acts or presidential orders. Depending upon the agency’s mission, a bureaucrat’s roles and responsibilities vary greatly; from regulating corporate business and protecting the environment to printing money and purchasing office supplies. Bureaucrats are government officials subject to legislative regulations and procedural guidelines. They play a vital role in modern society, holding managerial and functional positions in government, and forming the core of most administrative agencies. Although many top administrators are far removed from the masses, many interact with citizens on a regular basis.

Given the power bureaucrats have to adopt and enforce public policy, they must follow several legislative regulations and procedural guidelines. A regulation is a rule that permits governments to restrict or prohibit certain behaviors among individuals and corporations. The bureaucratic rulemaking process typically creates procedural guidelines, or more formally, standard operating procedures. These are the rules that lower-level bureaucrats must abide by, regardless of the situations they face. Elected officials are regularly frustrated when bureaucrats do not follow the paths they intended. As a result, the bureaucratic process becomes inundated with red tape. This is the name for the procedures and rules that must be followed to get something done. Citizens frequently criticize the seemingly endless networks of red tape they must navigate in order to effectively utilize bureaucratic services, although these devices are really meant to ensure the bureaucracies function as intended.
Regardless, it is not a competitive system, though it certainly feels that way at times. There is no us vs. them. Instead, it should be us and them, as the people and the government both focus on making forward progress.

About this transcript:

- Transcript title: The Face of Democracy
- Corresponding Lesson: The Models of Bureaucracy and Bureaucrats
- Author and curator: Jay Reynolds J.D. for The TEL Library
- Creative Commons License: [CC BY NC SA](CC BY NC SA)