

# Introduction to Sociology

## Lecture 11 - Max Weber and Bureaucracy

Phua Kai Lit, PhD (Johns Hopkins)

ADTP

Sunway University



# Learning Objectives

- Bureaucracy
- Ideal Type
- Max Weber's views on bureaucracy



# Bureaucracy

- Rule by officials
- Officials rule through holding positions (posts) in formal organizations (often backed by the power of the State)
- Famous example of a bureaucracy: the mandarins of ancient China



# Weber's Ideal Type

- Select the central features of a social phenomenon
- Exaggerate these
- Use for social analysis (including comparative analysis)



# Weber's ideal type bureaucracy

- Max Weber on bureaucracy.
- Weber argued that bureaucracy is the most technically superior way of organising work. It is characterised by the following:
  - 1. Hierarchy of authority
  - 2. Clear division of labour and task specialisation
  - 3. Behaviour is rule-bound
  - 4. Records are kept in the form of written documents



# Weber's model of bureaucracy

- 5. Impersonal relations exist between bureaucrats and clients
- 6. Recruitment is carried out on the basis of qualifications
- 7. There is long-term employment
- 8. Promotion is on the basis of seniority and merit
- 9. Staff are paid fixed salaries
- 10. There is separation of private and official income



# Hierarchy of authority

Hierarchy of authority: This refers to the structure of authority within the organisation. In bureaucratic organisations, there is a chain of command whereby persons higher up have the authority to give orders to lower ranking people to carry out. There is clearly circumscribed areas of command and responsibility. The top person in private sector organisations is usually called the General Manager or the Chief Executive Officer.



# Division of Labour

- Division of labour and task specialisation: Work done within the organisation is divided up among specialised staff, e.g., the finance department handles matters dealing with money and the budget, the marketing department deals with the challenge of attracting customers and so on. Theoretically, this division of labour will increase efficiency and productivity.





# Rule-bound behavior

- Rule-bound behaviour and the use of written documents:  
Rules governing behaviour within organisations together with the use of formal, written documents will enable predictability and prevent arbitrary behaviour.



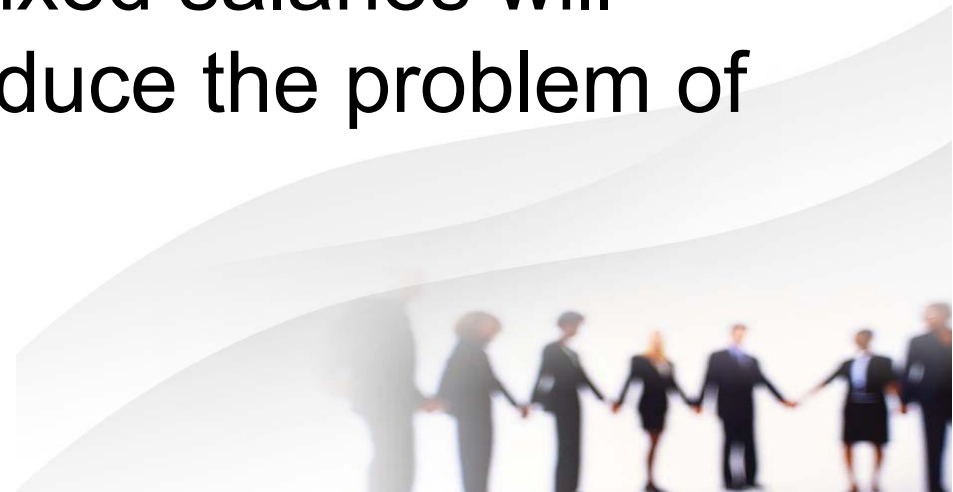
# Impersonal relations between staff and clients

- Impersonal relations between bureaucratic staff and their clients: This impersonality or "arm's length" relationship is designed to prevent favouritism and unequal treatment of clients.



# Objective recruitment and promotion

- Recruitment on the basis of qualifications, promotion on the basis of merit and seniority together with long-term employment on fixed salaries: Recruitment and promotion on the basis of merit is designed to ensure that the "most qualified" person is chosen to fill a particular bureaucratic position. Long-term employment on fixed salaries will ensure career stability and help to reduce the problem of corruption.



# Private versus official income

- Separation of private and official income: The equipment used by the bureaucrat in the course of carrying out his or her official duties belongs to the organisation and not to the employee. In other words, the bureaucratic staff do not own the tools which they use while carrying out their duties.



# Criticisms of Weber's model



# Thank you

- Think of weaknesses/shortcomings in Weber's model

