On Two Types of Bureaucracy*
Enabling and Coercive

Yosuf Haydary
Software Engineering
University of Amsterdam
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People tend to remember the "bad" rules, but take the "good" rules for granted and rarely notice them. Adler and Borys "proposes a workflow conceptualization that helps reconcile the contrasting assessments of bureaucracy as alienating to employees or as enabling them to perform their tasks better" [1]. They have identified two types of formalization - enabling and coercive.

Their literature study reveals that attitudinal effects of formalization has both negative and positive assessments. Formalization can function coercively because it abrogates autonomy. At the same time it is associated negatively with job satisfaction. It is weak in generating innovation and it undermines commitment. However, the positive assessments state that the employees might welcome the potential contribution of formalizations if at least some overlap exists between their goals and those of the organization. It reduces role conflict and ambiguity. Also, it might facilitate innovation when they capture lessons from prior experience.

They see a strong parallel between formalization and the design of organizational technology. In one technology rationale the users are seen as the source of the problem, while in the other view the user is a source of skill

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*This article is written on the work of Paul S. Adler and Bryan Borys[1]. All the citations originate from their paper unless otherwise mentioned.
and intelligence to be supported. In one case the system is foolproof made, while in the other case the system is designed such to enable the user to deal more effectively with its inevitable contingencies.

Based on lessons from technology, Adler and Borys make a contrast between the enabling and coercive types of formalization in three dimensions. The features of the system, the process of designing it and the implementation.

The deskillling and usability features of a system is distinguished by four approaches: repair, internal transparency, global transparency, and flexibility. The repair feature enables the users of a system for example to solve a problem while in a deskillling system, the panels will be locked. In a deskillling system the internal transparency only gives the user any event information if something goes wrong while in a user enabled system all the internal steps of the system is displayed to user. Global transparency refers to the intelligibility for the employees of the broader system within which they are working. A flexible system enables the users to learn from opportunities.

The design of a deskillling system is left to the technical experts. However, in enabling systems the employees also participate in the design process. The external and internal implementation of a system is seen as the organizational equipment and the technology equipment. An organizational equipment is implemented in an organization for itself. A technology equipment is implemented for a broader audience. It is later imported by the organizations.

Adler and Borys identify a two dimensional framework typology of organizations: the type of formalization and the degree of formalization. The two degrees of enabling type of formalization is low (organic) or high (enabling bureaucracy). The low degree of formalization for coercive type of formalization is autocratic, and its high degree is mechanistic.

So, in short coercive formalization results in negative attitudinal outcomes, and enabling formalization into positive. Enabling procedures help committed employees do their jobs more effectively. The features of formalization, its design process, and how it is implemented play significant role whether an organization is enabling or coercive.

**Failed Case analysis:** TAX-i was meant to be used as a central system for 24 Dutch water boards. As also mentioned in the report [2], taking part in such a centralized system leads to less autonomy and thus coercion.
However, the process of designing the system were enabling since workshops were organized to collect user requirement [3].

References

