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## THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF BUREAUCRACY IN JAMES QUINN WILSON'S VIEW

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the characteristics of James Quinn Wilson as one of the fathers of Administration and Organization. This study uses a qualitative approach with a narrative-descriptive type of research. Wilson managed to provide a different view of the concept of bureaucracy which has been very Weberian in practice. Some of Wilson's phenomenal contributions such as organizational culture, and a bottom-up approach to running an organization will be an interesting discussion in this study.

### INTRODUCTION

The study of bureaucracy from the past until now is still interesting to do. Several studies related to bureaucracy were carried out from various aspects such as institutional (Denhardt, R.B., Denhardt, 2000; Osborne & Gaebler, 1993), economics (Niskanen Jr,

2007), public services (Bowornwathana & Poocharoen, 2005; Fritzen, 2007), and aspects of philosophy (Aboalmaali et al., 2016; Buchanan, 1996; Cochrane, 2017; Jackson, 1986; Liebich, 1982; Tweney, 1991; Ventriess, 1995).

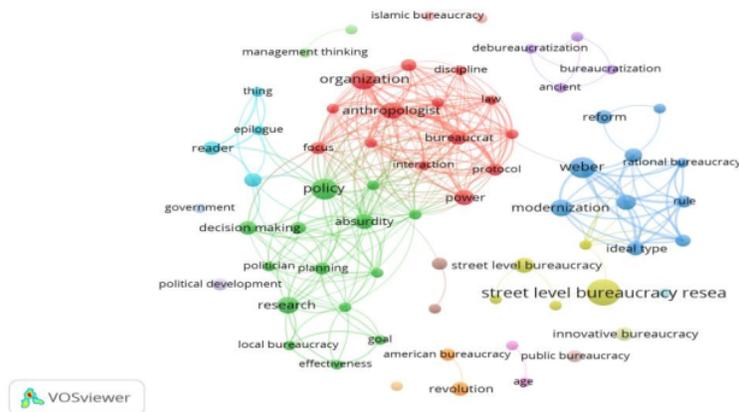


Figure 1. Bureaucracy and Philosophy Research Cluster  
Source: processed by the author with the Vosviewer application, 2021 .

Research themes that have been published are related to philosophy and bureaucracy, it appears that there are several

large research clusters of which are related to organizations (red clusters), policies (green), weber bureaucracy (blue clusters), street level

bureaucracy (yellow clusters), bureaucratic revolution (orange cluster), de-bureaucratization (purple cluster), and introduction to bureaucracy (sea blue cluster).

While the largest cluster is the organizational philosophy cluster, which means that organizational philosophy is still often or mostly practiced by philosophy or administration/political experts.

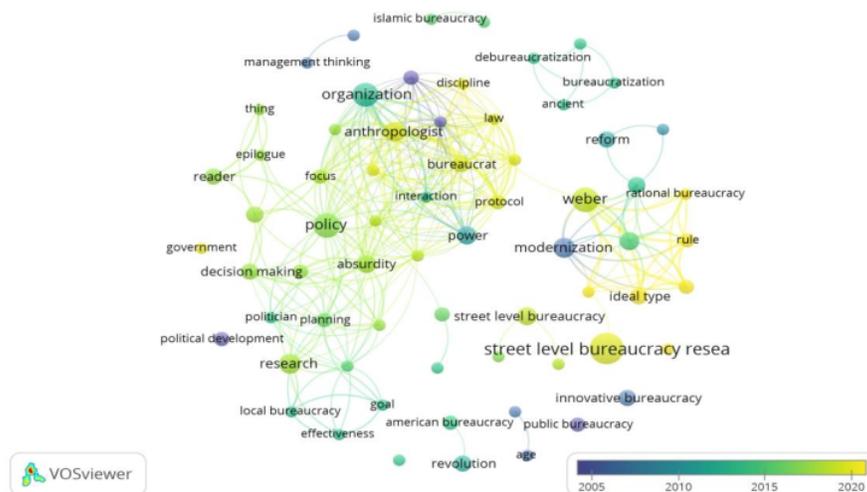


Figure 2. Novelty of Research on Philosophy and Bureaucracy  
Source: processed by the author with the Vosviewer application, 2021.

Figure 1 shows a study of organizational philosophy which is the study that is most often carried out. Figure 2 shows that the study of bureaucratic philosophy, especially on the street level bureaucracy, has become a contemporary study that has recently been carried out. In connection with this, Wilson's view of bureaucracy and street level bureaucracy will be viewed philosophically. Wilson's view is still related to contemporary bureaucracy as expressed by Marquis that "...still uses Wilson's classic 1989 textbook *Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It* when teaching doctoral students today" (Marquis, 2018). Therefore, it is necessary to explore Wilson's view in terms of the philosophy of science. This article begins by describing a brief profile of James Q. Wilson, including his academic and structural career, then continues with a discussion based on his primary book on bureaucracy, namely *Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It*. The discussion will be divided into three main sub-sections, namely the narration of the cases experienced by Wilson, the interpretation of these cases then their epistemic analysis, and closed with the

contribution of Wilson's thoughts to contemporary bureaucratic experts.

#### METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with the type of narrative research. Narrative research is more about telling a character in depth by synthesizing the views of other writers who wrote the same character. The data collection technique used is documentation by collecting scientific journal articles that discuss the figure of James Q. Wilson from various perspectives. The choice of James Q. Wilson as the unit of analysis is because James Q. Wilson is one of the great thinkers of modern administration and organization. In addition, several of his works have become the main reference in studying bureaucratic and organizational behavior for students and scholars of administration in various parts of the world.

#### RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the contribution of Wilson's thought in shaping the epistemological body of knowledge of the bureaucracy. Several cases of Wilson's observations in many of his books will lead to

the discovery of the epistemic of bureaucracy, namely how bureaucracy works. Some of these contributions can be seen from aspects of organizational culture and bureaucratic behavior. In addition, the impact of Wilson's thinking on the development of the concept of bureaucracy will be explained.

### Wilson's Bureaucratic Concept

Wilson in his book *Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It?* (Wilson, 1989) is the only book written specifically dealing with bureaucracy. But what is strange is that there is no specific definition from Wilson regarding the bureaucracy itself (Gormley, 2016), the bureaucracy itself is embedded in a complex network of organizations (Gormley, 2016). Bureaucracy can be said to exist when it has a response to public problems and provides useful services in improving the quality of people's lives (Ventriss, 1995). This is what Wilson describes in his book where several cases such as the condition of the army during the war between Germany and France, the situation of prisons in Texas, the condition of Carver Atlanta High School, the Organizational Structure of the Ministry of Defense, Government Innovation, and Bureaucratic Attitudes in its position among the executive, legislative and judicial.

#### 1. Armies

The main difference between the German army in 1940 and its French adversaries was not in grand strategy, but in the tactics and organizational arrangements suited to implementing those tactics. Germany drawing right. By the end of the war, it was evident that all major frontal attacks by infantry against deep-rooted soldiers armed with machine guns and supported by artillery would not work. The French decided that in this situation the advantage was on the side of the defense, and so organized their troops around a force of twelve men whose duties were to fire, serve, and support the machine guns.

This means that the best soldiers should be placed in the squad, especially the stoss truppen, not assigned to the base or other rear elements. The officers and non-commissioned officers who command these small units should be given substantial freedom of action. Officers and men alike should be incentivized

to reward fighting prowess, especially one that requires them to take risks. What resulted was a system that completely contradicted the stereotypical view of the German army of fanatical soldiers who blindly obeyed the orders of the Prussian general staff. Discipline is tough, but it is a commitment to independent action in the name of fighting goals. "Believe in his brilliant analysis of Germany's combat strength as a "mission-oriented command system." Commanders must tell their subordinates exactly what to achieve but not necessarily how to achieve it. "The mission must "express the will of the commander in an unmistakable manner," but the method of execution must be limited "only where it is essential for coordination with other orders". The German army, compared to its rivals, had very few documents. Punishments are often harsh. It is estimated that more than eleven thousand German soldiers and officers were executed during the Second World War, many for "damaging the war effort".

#### 2. Prisons

Guards can use weapons to deal with hordes of convicts, just as a nation can use war to defeat an enemy. We try to show respect to inmates and expect it in return. We are more willing than Texas to give them air and then hold them accountable. In many cases, verbal counseling or brief action should be the first response to an apparent error. Security problems are exacerbated by the amount of personal property prisoners are allowed to receive and keep, property that is often used to make weapons or hide contraband. Because some inmates are stronger or have more valuables than others, Dilulio observes a class system of convicts, with certain inmates being able to exercise authority over or take advantage of others. Given the detailed rules governing prisoners' rights, discipline, appeals, and complaints, administrators are inundated with a lot of paperwork. The Texas Department of Corrections, under the leadership of its former executive, George Beto, developed a very different solution to the problem of keeping order.

#### 3. Schools

The dramatic changes at Carver Atlanta High are brought about by the dynamic new principal, Norris Hogans. As Sara Lightfoot described the process, Hogans announced a

dress code, banned radios and stereos from hallways and playgrounds, removed graffiti from walls, and insisted that hallways and restrooms be kept clean. The managerial system is authoritative, even authoritarian. He created a new work study program in which students would spend half their time in school and the other half working in the city. To help acquaint them with business and job opportunities, Hogans designed the Explorers Program in which students, wearing white uniform jackets, visited Atlanta companies to meet with their executives. Hogans' experience at Carver High is not unique. There is currently substantial literature on effective schools and the processes by which schools are improved. Unlike Hogans at Carver, however, the principal of this school tried to share educational leadership with the faculty committee, but soon the teachers attempted to remove the principal for having exceeded his authority. Instead, the principal ensured that several dozen teachers were transferred. Kenneth Tewel was the principal of Franklin K. Lane High School in Queens, New York, at the time, like Carver, seen as a leper in the city's school system. He has to get teachers once again to make education his main goal and this requires him to address their safety and security concerns. There is disagreement among scholars about the extent to which "good" schools actually improve students' educational achievement regardless of their original ability and family background.

#### 4. Culture

Culture for organizations is the same as personality for individuals. Like human culture in general, it is passed down from one generation to the next. "The theme has been picked up by scholars who have begun to propose competing definitions of organizational culture and are looking for ways to describe it more precisely." Although now widely in fashion, the concept is at least half a century old. OPERATOR" in the organization and the "moral factor" in leadership. Morally he meant not simply obeying the law or following the rules, but "the process of inculcating a point of view, a fundamental attitude, loyalty, to the organization. The culture of the United States Navy differed greatly depending on whether You are assigned to a submarine, aircraft carrier, or warship. The most famous studies

that draw attention to what we now call culture greatly overstate the influence of trust and understate the influence of money payments, surveillance controls, and prevailing economic conditions. They have created organizational culture that is appropriate to the challenges of their critical environment and arouses enthusiasm among operators to take the culture seriously. When faced with changing environmental conditions, some organizations persist with traditional ways of behaving and others will adopt new ways of behaving. All organizations have one or more cultures just as everyone has personalities. Institutional culture is produced in part by the factors discussed in the previous three chapters. We can summarize it by saying that member tendencies, organizational technology, and situational imperatives that agencies have to deal with tend to give organizations a different way of seeing and responding to the world. This is especially the case when the stated goals of the organization are not clear. When, is often the case, these factors result in different definitions of core tasks for different people, the organization will have multiple cultures.

When one culture is widely shared and warmly supported, it is a mission. A big advantage of missions is that they allow agency heads to have more confidence that the operator will act in certain cases in the way the chief would if he were in their position. This may be due to the arrival of a group in the organization that has a different work or professional culture, or it may be the result of a new leader's decision to intentionally or unintentionally destroy the old mission or try to replace it with a new one. which may not be adapted to the needs of the organization or may not arouse the enthusiasm of the operator.

#### 5. Site of Decision Making

During his seven years as secretary of the Ministry of Defense, Mac Namara managed to drastically increase the defense budget from 195 billion dollars in 1961 to 225 billion dollars in 1968. But this made Mac Namara the most unpopular Ministry of Defense official since the founding of the Secretary's office. Defense in 1947. While his successor, Melvin R. Laird actually cut the defense budget by 28 percent from 243 billion dollars in 1969 to 175 billion dollars in 1973. Troops lost several battalions, the navy lost

ships, and the total troop size decreased. by one third. But with this policy, Laird became the most popular secretary in the military's internal service. The question is why did Mac Namara with his policy of increasing the defense budget become an unpopular official at the Defense Secretariat, while Laird, who actually cut the budget, became a popular official?

Some of the answers that are considered are related to autonomy in decision making. As stated by Halperin, the bureaucracy in defense prefers a small budget with greater control than a large budget with less/small control. This relates to autonomy or territory. Mac Namara didn't really like the autonomy of sharing military services, while Laird was quite the opposite. Mac Namara in making decisions, especially in crucial decisions such as buying weapons, often uses experts or what is referred to as Whiz Kid (a military intellectual who specializes in quantitative analysis). While Laird chose to cut the defense budget, he paid great attention to the considerations of the generals and admirals for strategic decisions affecting their service. Each Armed Forces under Laird focus on their own control over their duties.

#### 6. Innovations

The structure of the United States military at the end of the second world war underwent a fundamental change. In 1958, changes occurred in the war division structure where the traditional structure was built since the war in Europe where 17,460 troops were organized into 3 war regiments. Each war regiment was organized into battalions. The division had a large number of vehicles and artillery troops and the result was centralized surveillance, a massive force in suppressing opposing forces. But after the war, restructuring was carried out with a different model. It was a smaller structure consisting of 13,748 men and organized into 5 war groups rather than 3 war regiments, and there was no battalion commander. The number of vehicles was reduced and artillery divisions were abolished. The new format is designed to facilitate the decentralization of defense-related decision-making by semi-autonomous units. The reason is that there is atomic technology which no longer requires direct warfare. Lack of communication equipment makes controlling the new style division

difficult in the best of circumstances and nearly impossible in practice. The reduction in vehicles made it difficult to deploy battle groups. So in the early 1960s a new doctrine was approved: the Army Division of Reorganization Purposes (ROAD). ROAD restores the previous emphasis on the previous mechanization and structure of three brigades as opposed to five battle groups.

We should not be surprised that organizations reject innovation. They should have rejected it. The reason an organization is created is largely to replace the uncertain expectations and haphazard activities of volunteer effort with the stability and routine of organized relationships. Standard operating procedures (SOPs) are not the enemy of the organization; it is the core of the organization. Stability and routine are essential in government institutions where demands for justice (or at least the appearance of equality) are easy to enforce. When, as in the United States, constituent groups can easily ask for an explanation as to why case B is not treated in the same way as case A, there will naturally be a strong tendency to avoid any action that might set a controversial precedent. Thus the famous bureaucratic proverb: "Never do something the first time."

Whether changes are core or peripheral, externally imposed or internally generated, understanding why they occur at all requires one to understand the behavior of agency executives. As the person responsible for maintaining the organization, it is the executive who identifies the external pressures to which the agency must respond. As individuals who must balance competing interests within the agency, it is they who must decide whether to protect or ignore managers who want to drive change. Almost every important study of bureaucratic innovation points to the importance of the executive in explaining change. For example, Jerald Hage and Robert Dewar studied change in sixteen social welfare institutions in a midwestern city and found that the beliefs of top executives were a better predictor of change than any structural feature of the organization. If John Russell had not been commander of the Marine Corps or William Moffett had not been head of the Bureau of Aeronautics, the Navy's Fleet and carrier-based naval aviation would not have appeared when and as they did.

3  
For this reason, I think, little progress has been made in developing theories of innovation. Not only are innovations so different in character that trying to find one theory to explain them all is like trying to find a single medical theory to explain all diseases, but innovation relies heavily on executive interest<sup>3</sup> and beliefs to make opportunities arise. Change-oriented personality is very important in explaining change. It is not easy to construct a useful social science theory from "chance occurrence.

### Interpretation of Bureaucracy

The interpretation of bureaucracy expressed by Wilson is based on the concept of Hermeneutics. Wilhelm Dilthey said that something has not been able to fully explain the author's life, but the work only reveals what is in life, so an interpretation method is needed to objectively reveal the author's thoughts. This method is then called hermeneutics (Sholikah, 2017). Dilthey asserts that the principles of hermeneutics can illuminate ways to provide a general theoretical basis for understanding. Thus hermeneutics becomes a theory that is not only about text interpretation, but how life reveals and expresses itself in works. Therefore, the expression as a whole is not personal, but is a historical social reality that is revealed in experience, the historical social reality of the experience itself (Wisarja, n.d.).

From this method of interpretation, Wilson's approach is even more different from that of neoclassical economics. Unlike economists who view bureaucrats as utility maximizers (Aboalmaali et al., 2016; Cochrane, 2017), Wilson believes that bureaucrats have diverse motives, including material incentives, solidarity, and purposiveness (Wilson, 1989). Wilson also criticizes William Niskanen's "bureaucracy" namely bureaucratic imperialism (Wibisana, 2017). Wilson says that "If bureaucrats are so committed to increasing their budgets and agency size, then why is the Department of Agriculture trying to ditch the Food Stamp program? And why did the FBI reject the recommendation to include narcotics in its jurisdiction? (Wilson, 1989). Moreover, what explains much bureaucratic behavior, according to Wilson, is "organizational culture", which he defines as "a persistent and patterned way of thinking about the main tasks

and human relationships in an organization". This can be seen from the position of the bureaucracy in managing the interests between the executive and the legislature in its influence on the bureaucracy (Tweney, 1991).

### Epistemology of Bureaucracy

This section is a continuation of the interpretation of the cases that have been disclosed in the previous section. With this interpretation, an epistemic answer is found, how does the bureaucracy work? Therefore, it is hoped that the answers presented in this paper will become a distinct characteristic of James Q. Wilson's version of Bureaucracy. Epistemology from the Greek episteme (knowledge) and logos (science) is a branch of philosophy that deals with the origin, nature, character and types of knowledge. Poespowardjo and Seran say that Epistemology is a theory about the nature of science; What are the assumptions behind the claim that humans can have true knowledge, by what means humans obtain that knowledge, and what are the methods (Poespowardjo & Seran, 2015). It has also been revealed in Wilson's profile that Wilson's character is a conservative, pragmatic and empirical person. Empiricism is one of the epistemological methods which means that the method that talks about the true source of knowledge is sensory experience where all theoretical concepts can be traced to their source or origin in sensory experience, so what cannot be empirically proven is outside the category of knowledge (Poespowardjo). & Seran, 2015). This aspect is one of the most debated and discussed in the field of philosophy, for example about what knowledge is, what are its characteristics, types, and the relationship with truth and belief. For this case, the bureaucratic epistemology found by Wilson is as follows.

#### 1. Organizational Culture

From Wilson's point of view, every bureaucracy has a distinctive culture, which plays an important role in shaping the behavior of individual bureaucrats. The Department of State's culture places a high value on "caution." The Army Corps of Engineers places a high value on dam construction and harbor dredging. While admitting that the concept of culture can be a little "soft" (Wilson, 1989, p. 92), Wilson argues that organizations have a culture similar to that of

people with personalities (Wilson, 1989, p. 93). According to Wilson, some organizational cultures are more functional than others. Successful bureaucracies have succeeded in creating and maintaining a culture that all or most of its members are happy to live in. Wilson reveals that “When an organization has a culture that is widely shared and warmly embraced by operators and managers alike, we say the organization has a sense of belonging” (Wilson, 1989, p. 95). As shown in the FBI organization, the Texas Prison under the leadership of George Beto, and the German Army.

Wilson, however, has explained how organizational culture is formed, why organizational culture is important, and why bureaucracies are so difficult to change/resist change over time. Of great importance are professional norms, which are becoming firmly entrenched in many organizations. For example, engineers have dominated the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), the Forest Service has been dominated by professional foresters, who are committed to “progressive conservation”. For many bureaucrats, their loyalty is not just to an organization but rather to a set of norms they learned in college or graduate school. One wonders what Wilson will make of his recent attempts to change bureaucratic culture. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) was reinvented to be more agile and responsive in the event of a natural disaster. Under the Ministry of Home Affairs, FEMA failed to weather Hurricane Katrina. But when FEMA stood alone, it responded to Hurricane Sandy very well.

## 2. Accountability

In some countries today, it is not new for civil servants to be accountable to managers and executives. What is new is that bureaucrats not only exist to follow instructions and obey the law, but also to produce results (outcome based). This emphasis has been embedded in the Government Performance and Result Act of 1993 (in the United States) and the Civil Service Act (in Indonesia). It has been in a movement to produce “organizational report cards” (Gormley, 2016).

Long before this happened, Wilson developed a framework for thinking about accountability—how easy or difficult it is to

hold different types of institutional accountability and what forms of accountability might take. Wilson started by distinguishing between outputs and outcomes. Then it asks whether the output and/or results are directly observable. If the outputs are observable but the results are not, it means a Wilson organization as a “procedural” institution (Wilson, 1989). There are also organizations whose output cannot be seen while the results can be seen. This organization is termed by Wilson as a “craft” organization (Wilson, 1989). For example, the Forestry Service or armed forces during wartime, feature bureaucrats whose actions are very difficult to observe but whose success or failure can be measured (eg by focusing on the amount of logging that took place in the forest or on land acquired in war).

## The Impact of Wilson's Thought on Later Bureaucracy Experts

Wilson's Bureaucracy has been cited by many scholars since its publication in 1989 (more than 3,000 times, according to Google Scholar). But the quote only hints at the depth of Wilson's impact on the field. In fact, Wilson's book has helped shape scientific thinking about bureaucratic politics in a number of ways. This is especially true for scientific studies (both books and articles) that lie between public administration and public order. Despite his many ideas and insights, Wilson has encouraged the expression of consent and application to specific cases, four of his contributions being particularly influential: his bottom-up approach to the study of bureaucracy; its emphasis on organizational culture; typologies of policy proposals that differ in the extent of perceived benefits and costs; and its typology of administrative bodies that differ in the ease with which outputs and results can be observed.

### 1. Bottom-Up Approach

The bottom-up approach in Wilson has actually been adopted by a number of experts such as Working, Shirking, and Sabotage (Brehm & Gates, 1997), reinventing government (Osborne & Gaebler, 1993), and others. The expert said that Supervisors at all levels of the public bureaucracy face obstacles that managers in private companies do not dream of (Brehm & Gates, 1997). Based on

this, several experts conducted research to see the relationship between leaders and subordinates and then concluded that bureaucrats actually have to respond to the direction of their leaders but bureaucrats are good predictors who have certain considerations. These considerations by Gromley are called functional considerations and solidarity considerations (Gormley, 2016). Functional consideration means that a subordinate has a job on a predetermined task. Meanwhile, solidarity considerations relate to tasks carried out based on the relationship between fellow workers.

If Wilson's bottom-up approach draws our attention to the Street Level Bureaucracy, it also draws our attention to the tasks they perform. In *Teaching, Tasks, and Trust*, Brehm and Gates compile the entire book around the central premise that tasks are essential. "Our premise is that bureaucratic subordinates should choose a variety of discrete activities, tasks, and allocate effort accordingly" (Brehm & Gates, 2008, p. 63). Their main insight is that the supervisor's ability to assign tasks to subordinates depends on the level of trust between superiors and subordinates, which in turn depends on how successful the supervisor is in protecting subordinates from threats to their autonomy. This is as expressed by Liebich as a Class of Civil Servant (Liebich, 1982) and even said that let the bureaucracy work as a bureaucracy (Gormley, 2016).

## 2. Organizational Culture

In the 1980s, hundreds of savings and loan associations went bankrupt, despite the regulatory system that was supposed to prevent this from happening. In *Public Spirit in the Thrift Tragedy* (Mucciaroni, 1998) Wilson uses the concept of organizational culture to understand the Federal Home Loan Bank Board, Federal Savings and Loan Insurance Corporation (FSLIC), and the Federal Reserve Board. He found that inadequate expertise weakened FSLIC, making it difficult for the institution to acquire and maintain a culture of competence. In discussing organizations and organizational culture, Wilson emphasizes the important role played by professions that infiltrate bureaucracies and often dominate them with the virtues of strong intellectual norms that guide and unite professional practitioners.

Dan Carpenter addresses the organizational culture of the Postal Service, the Forest Service, and the US Department of Agriculture in an important study of the growth and transformation of bureaucracies (Carpenter, 2001). A key theme, which builds on Wilson's work, is that each of these departments has a distinctive organizational culture. Agencies with more functional cultures (eg Department of Agriculture) are better able to be efficient organizations than agencies with more dysfunctional cultures (eg Department of Home Affairs).

R. Kent Weaver has used some of Wilson's insights into organizational culture to develop an "implementation analysis" to guide policy makers (Weaver, 2009). The point is that there is often a mismatch between bureaucratic culture and the new tasks of the bureaucracy that legislators expect. This can lead to neglect, subversion, or other bureaucratic pathologies. The solution is for legislators to think strategically about the type of organization that is best suited for carrying out (or not carrying out) a particular task (Weaver, 2009). In some cases, the organization may not be an existing bureaucracy but a new one. In other cases, new leadership or structural changes may signal to the existing bureaucracy that new ways of thinking and behaving are needed.

## CLOSING

In his monumental work in the United States, the conservative, empiricist and pragmatic Wilson did not provide a clear definition of the meaning of bureaucracy. But based on the analysis and interpretation of the cases shown, it was found that in fact bureaucracy according to Wilson is the behavior of individuals, or organizations that are in complex systems (bureaucratic behavior). In addition, bureaucracy is also related to organizational culture that prioritizes organizations that are able to define and distinguish between outputs and outcomes. So that the achievement of the outcome can be done by reaching the output first.

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