

Examining the interplay between positive and negative bureaucracy characteristics and job satisfaction

The moderating role of resistance to change for neo-managerial approaches

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Abstract

Traditionally, literature considers public administration as a bureaucratic institution where managers and employees must adhere to rigid structures and procedures. However, a bureaucratic organizational culture can either support employees (e.g., enabling practices) or conversely exerts control (e.g., coercive practices), thus influencing various psychosocial and organizational outcomes, including job satisfaction. Despite the well-recognized features of this bureaucratic structure, few studies have examined its dual effect on job satisfaction. A cross-sectional study was conducted with a sample of 414 managers in the public sector. The results of the hierarchical regression analysis revealed that enabling bureaucracy positively affects job satisfaction, while coercive bureaucracy has a significant and negative impact on job satisfaction. Furthermore, resistance to change moderates the impact of bureaucracy's coercive aspects on job satisfaction.

Keywords: bureaucratic culture, job satisfaction, public administration, resistance to change, JD-R model

Introduction

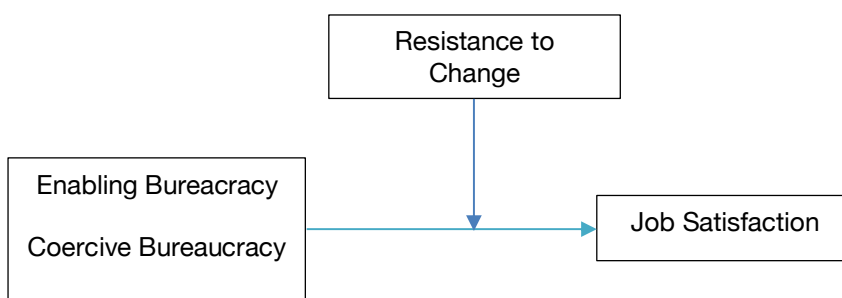
In recent decades, there has been a growing emphasis on identifying organizational structures that attract employees and enhance their satisfaction and performance (Kruskovic, Ilic, and Andjelic 2023). Despite this, rigid regulations and hierarchical organizational structures persist within public services, often characterized by bureaucratic red tape (Monteiro and Adler 2021). These models are known to negatively impact the quality of public services (Lapuenta and Van de Walle 2020). In contrast, less bureaucratic structures that meet individuals' needs are associated with increased efficiency (Bergman and Fredén 2022). This dual perspective on bureaucracy posits that it can either support employees through enabling practices or control them through coercive practices, influencing psychosocial and organizational outcomes including well-being, job satisfaction, performance, and responses to change (Pascoe, Waterhouse-Bradley, and McGinn 2023). Although these insights, managerial practices have predominantly focused on mitigating the adverse effects of bureaucratic red tape rather than investigating the positive impacts of enabling bureaucracy on work outcomes.

Additionally, the interaction between organizational models, work environment, and individual characteristics significantly influences the potential for organizational change and the achievement of organizational goals. One of the most substantial barriers to organizational change is employees' reaction to these changes (Khaw et al. 2022, for a review). Negative reactions to change can diminish commitment within the public sector (Suzuki and Hur 2019) and adversely affect employees' health (De Jong et al. 2016). Conversely, positive reactions to change can enhance job satisfaction and performance (Khaw et al. 2022). Employees are more receptive to changes perceived as necessary and aligned with their expectations (Warrick 2023). Openness to change, characterized by lower levels of resistance, can mitigate the negative effects of bureaucracy (Sverdlik and Oreg 2022). Given the paucity of studies examining the dual characteristics of bureaucratic models and their subsequent positive and negative outcomes, this study concurrently investigates the possibility that enabling bureaucracy positively affects job satisfaction, whereas coercive bureaucracy negatively impacts job satisfaction in the public sector. Moreover, we investigated different levels of resistance to change along a continuum.

Specifically, a lower level of resistance to change may reduce bureaucracy's negative effect on job satisfaction, balancing its impact. While past research has studied resistance to change, it has not fully explored varying levels of resistance and their interaction with enabling and coercive bureaucracy in job satisfaction. This study addresses these gaps by exploring these relationships within the framework of the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Bakker and Demerouti 2017), using data from 414 managers in the Italian public sector.

The conceptual model is depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Conceptual Model



Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

Bureaucracy in a dual perspective: enabling and coercive practices and their positive and negative effects, within the job demands-resources (JD-R) model

Organizations must coordinate individuals and establish efficient processes to achieve their goals. Various organizational structures can be adopted to accomplish these aims, with bureaucracy being a prevalent choice in public sectors. Organizational structure refers to the arrangement of job roles and administrative processes, forming a network of activities that oversee operations and maintain control (Albert 2024). Organizations often rely on high levels of standardization and formalization to achieve control. Standardization establishes procedures and rules that subordinates must follow, limiting their decision-making scope and defining tasks. The higher the standardization, the easier it is to exert control and authority, as decision-

making autonomy is reduced, increasing power distance—the acceptance of unequal power distributions within the organization. Formalization, on the other hand, refers to the extent to which rules, procedures, instructions, and communications are documented in writing. Both increased power distance and reduced autonomy, especially when shaped by written procedures, can be seen as constraints, potentially leading to job stress (Zeuge et al. 2023) and negative outcomes such as reduced job satisfaction (Daouda et al. 2021). Traditionally, bureaucracy is seen as pathology characterized by paperwork and unnecessary or redundant procedures. However, bureaucracy can be viewed from two contrasting perspectives and dimensions: enabling (a positive view) or coercive (a negative view) (Hoy and Sweetland 2000).

Enabling bureaucracy involves formalization that supports employees by clarifying tasks and organizational goals, creating a structured environment that fosters autonomy and competence. In contrast, coercive structures emphasize control and compliance, representing the negative side of bureaucracy (Kaufmann, Borry, and DeHart-Davis 2018) and are linked to the rigid application of procedures and authority (Pandey and Scott 2002). These structures can increase stress, reduce well-being (Sievert et al. 2020), and hinder organizational goals (Pascoe, Waterhouse-Bradley, and McGinn 2023). The impact of bureaucratic models on employees depends on how well they align with organizational needs, with satisfaction increasing when employees perceive such alignment (Jin, McDonald, and Park 2016).

These dual perspectives can be encapsulated within the Job Demands-Resources (Bakker and Demerouti 2007) model. The JD-R model is a theoretical framework used to explore the interplay between organizational and individual resources and demands. Previous research within this model has outlined how job resources (i.e., aspects of the job necessary to achieve work aims) prevent exhaustion and fosters the development of additional resources. Job resources moderate the negative effects of job demands on work outcomes, enabling employees to cope with these demands, thereby improving person-job fit and facilitating the achievement of work goals (Tims, Derks, and Bakker 2016; Demerouti et al. 2021). Conversely, job demands negatively impact work outcomes and other resources, increasing stress and impeding the achievement of

employee aims. Both job resources and demands are antecedents of various organizational outcomes that affect employees' well-being (Kaiser et al. 2020).

Consistent with the JD-R model, coercive bureaucracy may be seen as a job demand that limits autonomy and satisfaction of needs, hindering employees' ability to achieve work and personal goals. Conversely, enabling bureaucracy acts as a job resource, guiding employees in their tasks without obstructing satisfaction related to learning and autonomy. Both demands and resources can influence work outcomes, such as job satisfaction, considered an emotional response stemming from positive job evaluations and linked to factors like commitment, communication, innovation, flexibility, and productivity (Culibrk et al. 2018; Wright and Davis 2003). Centralization and formalization, common in coercive bureaucracies, may reduce autonomy and negatively affect job satisfaction (Cantarelli, Belardinelli, and Belle 2015; Langer, Feeney, and Lee 2017). Conversely, enabling bureaucracies can foster a supportive environment that enhances work outcomes.

In line with the aforementioned literature, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1: Enabling bureaucracy positively affects job satisfaction

H2: Coercive bureaucracy negatively affects job satisfaction

Moderating effects of Resistance to Change: positive reactions viewed as Job Resource and negative reactions as Job Demand

Organizational models can become obsolete over time, creating barriers for employees and necessitating change. Change within organizations can elicit varied reactions from employees, including acceptance or resistance. Resistance to change defined as the psychological disposition toward change (Oreg, Vakola, and Armenakis 2011), involves cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aversion responses (Amarantou et al. 2018). Managers and employees should understand how to overcome such responses. However, resistance to change may manifest as a reaction to change, specifically regarding acceptance or openness to change (Di Fabio and Gori 2016). This study focused on the positive or negative reaction toward change due to the bureaucratic structure. Bureaucratic structures can either

facilitate or hinder the introduction of change. For instance, bureaucratic structures can introduce incentives, modify levels of control and related expectations, promote supervision, or reduce the clarity of aims and define confused rules. These characteristics influence employees' evaluations of their jobs, leading to either positive or negative reactions. On the other hand, employees themselves are instrumental in realizing change within a bureaucratic structure. In both coercive and enabling models, employees may exhibit different levels of resistance to change, which can impact job satisfaction. Depending on their level of resistance to change, employees will decide whether to maintain or modify their initial evaluation of job conditions (Alnoor et al. 2022). This decision is influenced by employees' expectations.

A lack of alignment between employees' expectations (van den Heuvel 2020) and organizational change can negatively impact their well-being and satisfaction (Nery, Franco, and Neiva 2019; Khaw et al. 2022). To moderate these negative reactions, employees should understand the reasons behind the change and its relevance (Warrick 2023). The alignment between employees' expectations and organizational change may depend on various factors.

Khaw et al. (2022) identified factors such as communication, openness to change, and leadership style as influential in organizational change. Other studies have linked resistance to change with acceptance (Piderit 2000; Cheraghi et al. 2023). Acceptance, as a positive reaction or lower resistance to change, enhances job performance and engagement (Zahari and Kaliannan 2023; Alfes et al. 2019). Without positive reactions, the control from coercive bureaucracy can lead to stress. However, lower resistance enables employees to handle job demands more effectively. A lower resistance to change reflects openness (Rehman et al. 2021) and may serve as a resource to reduce negative work context effects. According to the JD-R model, lower resistance, seen as a resource, can moderate the negative impact of coercive bureaucracy or enhance the positive effects of enabling bureaucracy, improving job satisfaction.

Based on the JD-R model, the following hypotheses are developed.

H3: Resistance to change (for lower levels) moderates the negative effect of coercive bureaucracy on job satisfaction, such that the relationship will be weaker.

H4: Resistance to change (for lower levels) boost the positive effect of enabling bureaucracy on job satisfaction, such that the relationship will be stronger.

Materials and Methods

Participants and Procedure

The study was conducted in Italy in 2023 in a sample of 414 managers employed in Public Administration. Data were collected using a convenience sampling method. Participants completed a questionnaire during an online survey, providing their informed consent beforehand. Anonymity was ensured through the online process. Out of all managers, 266 were men (64.3%) and 148 were women (35.7%). The average age of participants was 49.1 years ($SD = 9.74$). The average length of employment in their public organization was 15.2 years ($SD = 10.5$). Among managers, nearly half (49%) had experience ranging from 0 to 13 years of experience in organizations, while 36.7% held between 14 and 27 years of organizational experience. The remaining of them (14.3%) had accumulated organizational tenure spanning from 28 to 42 years.

Control variables

Questions referring age, gender, and organizational tenure in public administration were included as control in hierarchical regression. Gender was categorized into three categories (1 = male; 2 = female; 3 = other) age in three categories (1 = 18-34; 2 = 35-54; 3 = > 54) and organizational tenure in public administration in three categories (1 = 0 – 13; 2 = 14-27; 3 = 28-42).

Measures

The measures utilized in the present study have previously been applied in work contexts, demonstrating good reliability and validity.

Bureaucracy was measured using the 12-item Hoy and Sweetland (2001) scale, which consists of two dimensions: coercive and enabling bureaucracy. Examples of items for coercive bureaucracy include: “The administrative hierarchy obstructs employees’ achievement”. For example, enabling bureaucracy, an example is “Administrative rules help rather than hinder”. Participants rated

their agreement with each item on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from completely disagree (1) to completely agree (5).

Resistance to change was assessed using the Italian version of Oreg's (2003) scale, adapted by Bobbio, Manganelli, and Filippini (2008). The original scale consisted of 15 items divided into four dimensions: emotional reaction, cognitive rigidity, routine seeking, and short-term focus. Examples of items include routine seeking, "I prefer having a stable routine to experiencing changes in my life"; for emotional reaction, "When I am informed of a change of plans, I tense up a bit"; for short-term focus, "Changing plans seems like a real hassle to me"; and for cognitive rigidity, "I do not change my mind easily". Participants expressed their agreement based on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from absolutely false (1) to completely true (7). Cognitive rigidity refers to individuals' difficulty in altering their perspectives, while routine seeking reflects their tendency to follow established routines. Emotional reaction refers to the degree to which individuals experience negative emotions, such as anxiety and lack of enthusiasm when faced with imposed change. Short-term focus pertains to how much individuals focused on the immediate negative effects of change. In this study, the dimensions of routine seeking and cognitive rigidity were utilized.

Job satisfaction was evaluated using the Work-Related Quality of Life scale (WRQLs) in its Italian version (Garzaro et al. 2020). The scale included eight items related to job satisfaction. An example item is: "The working conditions are satisfactory". Participants indicated their level of agreement with each item on a 5-point Likert, where 5 represented "complete agree" and 1 represented "completely disagree".

Data analysis

At first, exploratory factor analyses were conducted, and the measurement model was validated with SMART PLS4 to determinate the contribution of each item to the latent variables. Composite Reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) were calculated for the constructs in this model to examine the convergent and discriminant validity of each variable in this study. Additionally, scale reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha values. Harman's

single-factor test was performed to investigate the potential effect of the common method bias (CMB) arising from the use of the self-report instruments. A hierarchical regression was conducted into two steps using IBM SPSS 20 to test the study hypothesis. The regression analysis included the examination of the potential effects of control variables (i.e., gender, age, duration of employment) on job satisfaction. Furthermore, the PROCESS macro was used to test moderation effects.

Results

According to the exploratory factors analysis, bureaucracy encompassed two factors: coercive bureaucracy and enabling bureaucracy. Likewise, resistance to change consisted of two factors: cognitive rigidity and routine seeking.

As shown in Table 1, the reliability values (Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability) for all the constructs were above 0.7, indicating higher scale consistency. Moreover, the average variance extracted was above over 0.5, representing acceptable convergent validity. The AVE root square was calculated to examine the discriminant validity, showing that these values were greater than its correlation with other constructs, as reported in Table 2. With regard to the measurement model, the fit indices showed a good fit ($\chi^2 = 1197.633$ $df = 591$, $p = 0.000$, $\chi^2/df = 2.026$; CFI = 0.945; TLI = 0.938; RMSEA = 0.046; SRMR = 0.047). As regard the common method bias (CMB), the Harman's test showed that a single factor explained just 26.43% of the variance (less of the 50%). Therefore, the potential effect CMB is not a concern in this study.

Table 1. Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability, and Average Extracted Variance Values.

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted
Coercive Bureaucracy	0.829	0.838	0.505
Enabling Bureaucracy	0.893	0.861	0.523
Job Satisfaction	0.894	0.886	0.515
Cognitive Rigidity	0.909	0.878	0.515
Routine Seeking	0.899	0.900	0.749

Table 2. Average Extracted Variance Root Square Values (on the diagonal) and Correlations Coefficients.

	Coercive Bureaucracy	Enabling Bureaucracy	Job Satisfaction	Cognitive Rigidity	Routine Seeking
Coercive Bureaucracy	0.711				
Enabling Bureaucracy	-0.369	0.723			
Job Satisfaction	-0.373	0.645	0.718		
Cognitive Rigidity	0.246	-0.080	-0.184	0.717	
Routine Seeking	-0.225	0.073	0.200	-0.750	0.866

Descriptive Statistics

Correlations, means, and standard deviation among variables under study are reported in Table 3. Enabling bureaucratic was positively correlated with job satisfaction, and negatively correlated with resistance to change (cognitive rigidity), resistance to change (routine seeking), and coercive bureaucracy. Coercive bureaucratic was negatively correlated with job satisfaction and positively correlated with resistance to change (cognitive rigidity) and resistance to change (routine seeking). Referring to the control variables, gender, age, and duration of employment were not significantly correlated to bureaucracy sub-dimensions and job satisfaction.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations (N = 414).

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Gender	1.36	0.48	1							
2. Age	49.14	9.75	-0.076	1						
3. Duration of Employment	15.21	10.50	-0.004	0.632**	1					
4. Enabling Bureaucracy	3.00	0.79	-0.037	-0.059	-0.022	1				
5. Coercive Bureaucracy	3.14	0.86	-0.003	0.015	0.017	-0.272**	1			
6. Cognitive Rigidity	3.61	1.20	0.001	-0.151**	-0.062	-0.038	0.201**	1		
7. Routine Seeking	3.47	1.52	0.055	-0.087	0.034	-0.049	0.227**	0.664**	1	
8. Job Satisfaction	3.19	0.85	-0.029	-0.027	-0.001	0.552**	-0.314**	-0.178**	-0.175**	1

Note: ** $p < 0.01$;

Hypothesis testing

The regression analysis results in Model 2 (Table 4) revealed a significant positive impact of enabling bureaucracy on job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.507$; $p < 0.001$) and a significant negative impact of coercive bureaucracy on job satisfaction ($\beta = -0.145$; $p < 0.01$). Cognitive rigidity and routine seeking dimensions were negatively related with job satisfaction but their effects were not statistically significant. Regarding the control variables, neither age, gender, tenure in organization had a significant impact on job satisfaction in both Model 1 and in Model 2.

Given the high impact of enabling bureaucracy on job satisfaction, this independent variable could serve as a control variable in the hierarchical regression analysis when examining the moderation effect of resistance to change dimensions on the relationship between coercive bureaucracy and job satisfaction. Therefore, to properly assess this relationship, according to the study hypothesis, a linear regression analysis was conducted to test the moderating effect of resistance to change dimensions on the relationship between coercive bureaucracy and job satisfaction, excluding the potential confounding effect of enabling bureaucracy.

Regarding the moderation effects, the results from the linear regression analysis, conducted using macro process, indicated that resistance to change (cognitive rigidity dimension) moderates the negative effect of coercive bureaucracy on job satisfaction. The Beta interaction coefficient was 0.083 with confidence Interval (CI) ranging from 0.0330 to 0.1342. Particularly, the simple slope test revealed that the negative impact of coercive bureaucracy on job satisfaction was not statistically significant at higher level of cognitive rigidity ($\beta = -0.125$; CI = -0.258 to 0.008), but significant at mean and lower levels ($p < 0.001$).

Furthermore, routine seeking moderates the negative impact of coercive bureaucracy dimensions on job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.083$; CI = 0.024 to 0.143). Specifically, the negative impact of coercive bureaucracy on job satisfaction was higher at lower level of routine seeking ($\beta = -0.346$; CI = -0.448 to -0.245) compared to higher levels of routine seeking ($\beta = -0.144$; CI = -0.280 to 0.007).

The results did not confirm the moderation effect of resistance to change dimensions on the relationship between enabling bureaucracy and job satisfaction ($p > 0.05$).

Table 4. The hierarchical regression results of the association of age, gender, duration of employment, enabling and coercive bureaucracy, cognitive rigidity, routine seeking with job satisfaction (N=441).

Job Satisfaction							
	Model 1			Model 2			
Model 1	β	t	p	β	t	p	
Gender	-0.028	-0.564	0.573	-0.006	-0.145	0.884	
Age	0.002	0.028	0.978	0.013	0.280	0.780	
Duration of employment	-0.042	-0.729	0.466	-0.024	-0.515	0.607	
Model 2							
Enabling Bureaucracy				0.507	12.183	0.000	
Coercive Bureaucracy				-0.145	-3.379	0.001	
Cognitive Rigidity				-0.095	-1.746	0.081	
Routine Seeking				-0.053	-0.969	0.333	
Adjusted R^2	-0.005			0.341			
Omnibus test of the regression		$F(3, 410) = n.s$			$F(4, 406) = < 0.001$		

Discussion and Conclusion

The study examined the dual perspectives of bureaucratic structures, enabling and coercive dimensions, and their effects on job satisfaction among public sector managers. Additionally, we investigated the moderating role of resistance to change, focusing on lower levels of resistance as a positive reaction toward change. Our findings confirm that enabling bureaucracy positively impacts job satisfaction (H1), while coercive bureaucracy negatively affects it (H2), consistent with prior research (Hoy and Sweetland 2000; Kaufmann, Borry, and DeHart-Davis 2018) and the Job Demands-Resources model (Bakker and Demerouti 2007). Enabling bureaucracy supports employees, enhancing competence and autonomy, thus improving job satisfaction. Conversely, coercive bureaucracy imposes control and rigid rules, increasing stress and reducing satisfaction.

Moreover, our findings reveal the moderating role of resistance to change between coercive bureaucracy and job satisfaction. Specifi-

cally, lower resistance to change indicating a positive reaction toward change, through routine seeking behaviors, helps mitigate the negative impact of coercive bureaucracy on job satisfaction, thereby confirming our hypothesis (H3). Lower levels of routine seeking serve as a job resource, helping managers adapt operation rules and overcome bureaucracy's negative effects (Warrick 2023), leading to higher satisfaction. These findings align with the JD-R model, which posits that job resources can buffer the negative effects of job demands. Interestingly, higher levels of resistance to change, in terms of cognitive rigidity indicating a negative reaction to change, also help reduce the adverse effect of coercive bureaucracy. Managers who are less open to change appear to manage bureaucratic demands more effectively, experiencing less negative impact on job satisfaction. Cognitive rigidity acts as a coping strategy, facilitating compliance with norms and expectations and fostering a stable cognitive environment where managers maintain the status quo.

The study found no interaction between enabling bureaucracy and resistance to change, not supporting H4. Enabling bureaucracy significantly impacts job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.507$; $p < 0.001$), while resistance to change has a low, non-significant effect ($\beta = -0.095$ and $\beta = -0.053$). The correlation between enabling bureaucracy and resistance to change is not significant, suggesting enabling bureaucracy impacts job satisfaction independently of resistance to change, encouraging adaptability.

This study engages with the ongoing debate triggered by Weber's foundational work on bureaucracy as a rational organizational model. Weber's model is defined by an efficient division of labor, clear hierarchy, norms, and impersonal relationships to ensure the proper application of laws and procedures based on legality and equality. The contrast between enabling and coercive bureaucracy highlights the gap between Weber's ideal type and the negative aspects of bureaucracy, such as rigidity, inefficiency, and excessive regulation. The rise of new Taylorist approaches, driven by advanced technologies, emphasizes efficiency at the expense of purpose and employee motivation, potentially undermining efforts to create meaningful work environments and balanced organizational processes.

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