

ASTON STUDIES

1961 Industrial Administration Research unit Univ. of Aston in Birmingham, England, undertook a seven year study of the factors affecting behavior in organizations.

Conducted comparative studies across organization to explore meaningful, stable relationships in organizations in order to find which organizational problems are specific to particular kinds of organizations, and which are common to all organizations. This was significant undertaking for up to that time most research on organizations were case studies with little applicability beyond the specific organization studied.

Participants:

Derek S. Pugh	Sr. Research fellow, a psychologist
David Hickson	Research Fellow, administrator
Bob Hinings	a sociologist
Graham Harding	a psychologist
	Research assts.

Their major areas of research were investigations into:

1. Dimensions of organization structure
2. Context of organization structure
3. Empirical taxonomy of structure of work organization
4. Operations technology and organization structure

The level of analysis is, therefore, at the organizational level.

The sample was 52 work organizations around Birmingham, England. The conclusions of the four phases of the study are as follows:

- I. Four dimensions of structure were developed structuring of workflow, centralization of authority, line control of workflow, and relative size of supportive components. They concluded that organizations can vary differently in all of these so bureaucracy is not a unitary concept, for organizations may be more or less bureaucratic on any one of these dimensions.
- II. The context of the organization is related to its structure specifically size with structuring of activities; dependence with concentration of authority and the charter-technology-location nexus. Furthermore, these relationships may be two way.
- III. Further substantiated that bureaucracy was not a unitary concept by identifying four types of bureaucraties structures: workflow, personnel, implicitly structured, and full bureaucracy. Furthermore, bureaucracy may take different forms in different settings, and the workflow bureaucracy

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may represent a developmental sequence in development as the organization grows.

- IV. The broad technological imperative related to structure is not supported. Variables of operations technology are related only to those structural variables are centered on the workflow. The smaller the organization the wider the structural effects on technology.

The Aston Group believed they had established the beginnings of a paradigm of organization theory which relates to organization structure, to its context, its performance, and to the behavior within.

Source. Pugh, D.S., et al. Organizational Structure in its Context: Aston Program I. Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath, 1976.