The (Delicate) ART OF BUREAUCRACY

Playbook

THE WAY OF THE MONKEY

M1: Provoke and Observe
Provoke and observe is the ultimate monkey technique. It's the tactic of testing the bureaucracy by provoking it and seeing what happens.

M2: Be Curious
Once you know why a bureaucratic rule is in place, then you can be creative in finding better ways to satisfy its intent.

M3: Ban Learned Helplessness
Just as bureaucrats leave their biases at home, monkeys fight against inappropriate constraints.

M4: Repersonalize
No-sayers don't have enough accountability for growing revenues. They must be engaged in innovating and growing the company or they'll always pose a bureaucratic obstacle.

M5: Motivate through Stories
There's power in any change agent's stories about how unexamined bureaucratic bric-a-brac is cluttering the way of accomplishing the company's mission and frustrating customers.

M6: Accept Personal Risk
The key to taking risks is to not really take them. It's to assess risk better than the official process does.

M7: Create Urgency
To get bureaucratic change to happen, you need to inject urgency by showing that today's practices are unacceptable.

M8: Advertise the Cost of Delay
There's a cost to bureaucracy that should be weighed against the benefits of the controls it provides.

M9: Apply Servant Leadership
Red tape is an impediment. Whose job is it to remove the impediment? Yours and mine.

M10: Conduct Pilots, Get Exceptions
When the rules can't be changed directly, take advantage of any exception process allowed.

THE WAY OF THE RAZOR

R1: Step Out of the Circle
The less risk, the less oversight that's needed. Only do small projects.

R2: Shrink Everythings to Skunk Size
Don't just make projects smaller—make them smaller in a way that truly reduces risk, because that's what justifies a simpler oversight process.

R3: Shift Left
Shift left uses guardrails to create a framework within which delivery teams can be creative.

R4: Respect Diminishing Returns
The goal of 100% causes waste and bloat; a simple acknowledgement of diminishing returns is the key to trimming it.

R5: Promote Transparency
Disasters are often public; the costs of guarding against them are not. This difference allows blubbery bureaucracy to flourish, perhaps even incentivizes it.

R6: Apply Lean Techniques
Even within a bureaucratic structure, we can enforce lean practices around waiting times, handoffs, rework, over specification, learning the rules, and more.

THE WAY OF THE SUMO WRESTLER

S1: Refocus on Objectives
The Sumo Wrestler remedies bureaucracy's dysfunction of focus on the rules rather then the ends by realigning rules and roles to support real objectives.

S2: Never Waste an Emergency
The difference between what you can do in a crisis and what you can do on normal days is, more or less, your bureaucratic waste.

S3: Call and Raise the Bureaucracy
Fight bureaucracy with bureaucracy by using it's own rules against it.

S4: Read the Fine Print
If you become an expert in the rules, you'll find ways to be creative within their constraints, and you can bond with the enforcers over a discussion of the finer points of the law.

S5: Redefine Quality
Create your own definition of quality that you can map to any framework you must comply with—then enforce your definition rather than theirs.

S6: Show Success
When things are going poorly, the bureaucratic trolls come out of their caves. When things are going well, they stay home and barbecue spherical cows. A good way to escape costly scrutiny is to be successful.

S7: Listen to the Bureaucracy
Just as with any new product design, it is necessary to getfeedback from "customers" on how well something is working for them and adjust based on what they tell you.

S8: Reduce Risk and Increase Controls!
The Sumo Wrestler outbids bureaucracy by substituting lean controls that are even more risk mitigating than the old ones.

THE BLACK BELT BUREAUCRAT

B1: Move Incrementally
Figure out the MVB (minimum viable bureaucracy) necessary. Start small and add incrementally only when it becomes necessary.

B2: Do Marginal Doing
Your ultimate goal, is to maximize the amount of successful doing per dollar invested. So, a marginal dollar of watching had better increase the productivity or success of each of your doing dollars.

B3: Substitute Values and Principles
Use bureaucracy to provide minimal guardrails and then ask employees to use their judgement—guided by the organization's values and principles.

B4: Work Inside the Frame
The bureaucratic rules are a "frame," you might say, within which employee behavior is both free and managed.

B5: Make It Easy to Do the Right Thing
Instead of frustrating employees, make it easy for them to do the right thing.

B6: Build for Self-Service
With a self-service model, the security team makes available to the developers a vending machine full of software that's been pre-vetted and secured. The developers can serve themselves without asking permission.

B7: Automate Compliance
Wherever you need to enforce a control, either set up an automated process that enforces compliance or automate a test that checks to see if compliance is occurring. It's fast, easy, and doesn't involve personal impositions of authority or troll-keeping.

B8: Get Skin in the Game
When you're setting up your bureaucracy, make sure that it supports the behaviors you want to encourage.

B9: Redraw Organizational Charts
Changing the organizational chart can reduce the need for bureaucratic ceremony.

B10: Formalize Agility in Policy
Since what is set in policy will tend to win out against what is not, consider writing speed and agility into formal policy.

B11: Practice Occam's Centrifugal Whirl
In the tension between centralization and decentralization, centralization has a bureaucratic cost. It's sometimes the right answer; the benefits outweigh the costs. But the default should be decentralization; it's centralization that must be justified.

B12: Dashboard Your Successes
If you're going to continuously improve your bureaucratic controls, then the improvements you make can be represented on the dashboard. Doing so will help motivate those on your continuous improvement team and those on whom the bureaucracy is enforced.

B13: Hunt Monkeys
The best way to make sure your bureaucracy evolves is to find monkeys within your organization who'll keep pushing to make it better. Hunt for monkeys and support them.

B14: Bureaucrats Must Work Too
The overseers work for the executors, not the other way around. Making this clear is one way to give them skin in the game.

B15: ASAP Is Good
When managers want something as soon as possible, they're then committed to removing any waste or impediments that will slow their employees down.

B16: Everyone Owns the Rules
Rules should almost never be enforced, in the coercive sense. If every rule is there for a good reason, and if employees are motivated toward the success of the enterprise, then they should want to follow the rules.