Introduction

Hierarchy is one of the most significant principles of organization and it occupies the prominent place in the writings of classical thinkers. The first part describes the meaning of hierarchy. The second part includes its application and features. The third part explains the advantages and disadvantages of hierarchy. The fourth part explores the measures to overcome the disadvantages of hierarchy and attempt of some organization to introduce newer form of governance by replacing hierarchical organisation.

Keywords:
Formal organisation, Network, Matrix organisation, Participative authority system, Team building.

Text:
Hierarchy is composed of the Greek like an article of faith in a religious creed, hierarchy is a symbol of belief in mythic form of administrative organization. Words hieros (Sacred) and archein (rule or order) originally referring to an order of angels, the term came to signify an order of clergy like an article of faith in a religious creed, hierarchy is a symbol of belief in mythic form of administrative organization. So it derives from the Greek term for the ruling structure of religious organizations. In modern societies, hierarchical organizations have pervaded all aspects of life. Classical organization theorist emphasized the hierarchy as the central feature of organization. Hierarchy is basic structural feature of Organisation in Max Weber’s bureaucratic model. There are two views about the concept of hierarchy. Conventional view, epitomized by Max Weber’s analysis of modern bureaucracy, highlights legal-rational authority in formal organisation. This view holds that hierarchical organisation is bound together in a chain of command. Authority is gradually transferred from top to bottom and relationship between units at different level is that of superior and subordination and each unit is accountable to one superior at next level. Hierarchical organisation is based on division of labor. Each unit is functionally differentiated and specialized in the performance of specific functions assigned to them. These units are also entrusted with requisite authority and sanctions. Rules and regulations are impersonal and objective and
decide the role, behaviour and relationships among the members of organisations. It, however, also implies inequality in power structure and is not conducive to team work and it creates artificial relationship among the members of organisation.²

The second view known as instrumentalist view is held by Herbert Simon who provided notion of hierarchy in his analysis of complex system. Simon believed that instead of defining hierarchy in terms of authority relationships, it needs to be seen by its role to reduce complexity of organisations and making the arrangement or division of organisational units or sub-units in such way as to best achieve the organisational objectives. This view is based on voluntaristic view of authority. Authority according to this view is not imposed; rather it is based on mutual consent. But it has also created some problems like those arising from delegation of decision making authority and span of control which affect the overall organisational management.

Meaning

Literally, hierarchy means rule or control of higher over the lower. Concretely, hierarchy means a graded organization of successive steps or levels in which each of lower level is immediately subordinate to the next higher one and through it, to the other higher steps right up to top.

Oxford English dictionary defines hierarchy as “a body of person or things ranked in grades, orders or classes, one above another”.

In the words of L.D,White, “Hierarchy consists in the universal application of superior – subordinate relationships through number of level of responsibility reaching from top to bottom of the structure.

Paul H.Appleby defined hierarchy thus “it is the means by which resources are apportioned, Personnel selected and assigned, operations activated, reviewed and modified”.

According to Weber, “the organization of offices follows the principle of hierarchy, that is, each lower office is under the control and supervision of higher one”.

J.D. Millet defined hierarchy as a method whereby efforts of different individual are geared together.

Hierarchy creates pyramidal structure which Mooney and Reiley calls the ‘Scalar Process’.⁴ In the words of Mooney, scale means a series of steps, something graded. Thus it creates ladder like structure of organization. This principle is strictly followed in organization where discipline is primary requirement like police, army. Hierarchy of police administration in state is shown below:
In organization it means grading of duties, not according to functions, but according to degree of authority and corresponding responsibility. Hierarchy usually develops out of qualitative changes in the nature of work whereby at each higher level, the nature of work becomes different and demands a higher order of supervision.³

The structure and functioning of hierarchical organization may be illustrated by following diagram:-

In the diagram shown above A is head of organization and is expected to exercise control and supervision over the entire organization but he cannot do all himself. Therefore intermediate levels are created to by delegating authority achieve this purpose. B is A’s immediate subordinate. C is B’s immediate subordinate but is also immediately subordinate
to A through B. D is immediately subordinate to C but mediately also to B and A. In the same way E is immediate subordinate to D, but mediate subordination through D to C, and B to A. Finally F is immediately under E, but mediately also under D, C, B and A. The same applies to the letter shown along the other arm of the angle. If A issue order to F, it must descend to F through all levels i.e. B, C, D and E to finally reach to F. If F addresses a communication to A, it will pass though all the channels of EDCB to ascend to A. Similarly if F has to communicate some proposal to K, it must travel upto A through EDCB and then descend from A to K through G, H, I and J. F, A, K represent the line of authority linking the whole organization together.

FEATURE OF HIERARCHY
1. It functions on the principle of ‘Through Proper Channel’. Every proposal or paper has to pass through all channels. No intermediate level in the hierarchy is skipped over in transacting transcending official business either in upward or downward directions.
2. Unity of command is essential feature of hierarchical organization.
3. Authority is distributed at various levels in organization.
4. The superior has the right to issue order, commands, instructions and subordinate have obligations to carry out the same. They put suggestions, request and permission regarding work or programmes.
5. Hierarchical organization is broader at base and goes on tapering towards the top.
6. Authority vested in an official at every level should be commensurate with the responsibility entrusted to him.
7. Status, authority, salary and other privileges go on increasing at successive higher level.

ADVANTAGES OF HIERARCHY
1. This Principle keeps the various units of organization integrated or linked together. It clarifies the unity of purpose and fix the responsibility of various units for the work assigned.
2. It makes the process of communication easy. Everyone in the organization know from where the order and instructions will come and who will report to whom.
3. It distributes authority and responsibility at various levels. Consequently various decision making centres are created. It makes the process of delegations of authority easier.
4. There is division of labour among the various units of organization which bring the specialization among the members of organization and increase the efficiency of organization.

5. It helps to clarify the relative position and responsibility of each post in the organization.

6. In a hierarchical organization policy matters are decided at higher level. The middle levels exercise control and supervision over lower levels to ensure that they function to achieve the desired purpose and lower levels perform the operational work.

7. This Principle clearly specify the authority and responsibility. Consequently there is no conflict of jurisdiction among the member of organization.

8. In a hierarchical organization every communication takes place through proper channel. It keeps the members of organization informed and saves time.

9. Hierarchy facilitates detailed examination of papers and helps the Chief Executive through the process of filter and funnel. Only the essential information reaches the higher level while the non essential and unnecessary remain at lower levels. It saves the time of Chief Executive.

10. Hierarchy enforces discipline in organization. Officials are duty bound to follow the orders and directives of their immediate boss. It keeps the organization disciplined.

11. It is built in device to achieve consensus in organisation.

12. This principle helps to fix the duties and responsibility of each official at different levels of organization.

DEMERTS OF HIERARCHY

1. The Principal defects in the hierarchical organization is that is causes considerable delay in the disposal of work. A file, proposal or communication has to pass through all the channels. In this process, it may cause delay of days weeks or even months.

2. It promotes superior- subordinate relationship among the members of organization which is neither conducive for team work nor development of dynamic human relationship among its members.

3. Confirm to rigid procedure and formalities involve red tape.

4. It promotes corruption as it involves delay in disposal of work.

5. It discourages the initiative and participation of lower participants in the organization. They have to follow and carry out orders & instructions of their superior in a mechanical manner.
6. It has the tendency to make the organization ‘Tall’ and in consequence the men at top lose touch with the men at bottom.

7. Specialization and formalization of roles in hierarchical Organisation can ensure stability and predictability of behaviour of their members, but it can also hinder flexible and adaptive governance.

8. Hierarchical organisations are controlled and organized in top-down manner; it may be indifferent to the diverse interests of their stakeholders and against the spirit of participative governance.

9. The perceived inaptness and its inherent weaknesses to respond to different demands and pressure may erode its legitimacy as effective governing mechanism.

Therefore, there are inherent dangers of conformity to hierarchy. In order to overcome these defects, Fayol has suggested a bridge across formal line of authority of the hierarchy so that subordinate officers in one department, division or section may contact directly their counterparts in another departments or section. This he termed as Gangplank. Thus delay caused can be avoided without violating the essential principle of hierarchy. Such a bridge is shown in the diagram by the dotted line between F and K. The only condition to recourse to Gangplank is to take authorization from their immediate supervisors (in the shown diagram E and J) and keep them well informed of what transpired between them. The system works perfectly well so long as officers making such contact are in agreement with their counterparts and enjoy the confidence of their superiors.

The other device to overcome red tape is level jumping which involves bypassing one or more intermediate steps in the vertical line of authority, so that direct contact is established between officers. The officers skipped over may be informed of the action proposed or taken. In this respect, it is worth mentioning that Government of India has started file jumping experiment so that files, directly reach the decision making authority.

So with proper confidence and loyalty between superior and subordinates, the delay of scalar organization can be very much reduced if not altogether eliminated. In modern times (paragraph enclosed). Doubts have been raised about the efficacy of hierarchical principle to respond to diverse challenges and problems in contemporary scenario in Public Administration. Its features like centralization of authority, rigidity and formalization of roles are unsuitable for team building and participative governance. Measures have been taken to respond to these concerns and challenges. First attempt in this direction is to restructure authority by reducing the number of hierarchical levels. The second measure is
market based solution, government privatize the public services and outsource its operations and activities to other agencies. Thirdly, Newer modes of governance have been tried and experimented upon by some organisations like Networks, partnerships, projects etc to replace hierarchical organisation. The current concern in discipline is on changing authority structure, enhancing capability and ensuring accountability by making it more participative of Public organisations.

Summing up:

Hierarchy occupies a central theme in the discussion on organisational structure. Classical theorist emphasized the significance of hierarchy in their writings on organization theory. This principle helps to fix the duties, authority and responsibility of officials at different levels of organization. However it has also been subject of criticism due to redtapism and delay in the transaction of officials business. Newer modes of governance are tried by organization by replacing hierarchical system to ensure participative governance, team building and for development of better human relations.