# Defining Electronic Bureaucracy and Bureaucratism

Oleg Shovkovyy

*Adjunct Lecturer of Digital Marketing and Communication, MBA, STI University, Myanmar*

**ABSTRACT**

**Introduction**: The widespread adoption of information technologies and artificial intelligence (AI) in society and organizations reshapes management and decision-making processes, driving increased informatization and automation. Public administration is no exception. The transition to electronic government (e-government) aimed to enhance service quality, transparency, and efficiency, with the goal of reducing bureaucracy and bureaucratism. However, practical experience reveals that while information technologies were initially seen as tools to streamline bureaucratic processes, they often give rise to automated, electronic, or digital bureaucracy. This digital transformation has not necessarily simplified interactions with the state; instead, it has introduced new complexities, such as navigating intricate online forms and coping with system failures—frustrating experiences for users.

Consequently, the issue of bureaucratism has migrated to the digital realm, prompting the need for precise definitions of e-bureaucracy and e-bureaucratism. Despite extensive scholarly exploration, consensus remains elusive. For instance, e-bureaucracy is characterized as the automation of traditional bureaucratic actions using AI and algorithms.

This paper aims to bridge this gap by proposing clear definitions and examining how e-bureaucracy and e-bureaucratism manifest in the digital age, shedding light on their broader impact within public administration and governance.

**Content**: This qualitative study aims to define electronic bureaucracy and bureaucratism, identifying signs of bureaucratization in the e-governments of Russia, Ukraine, and Poland. Using grounded theory and autoethnography, the author's personal experiences in 2021 serve as primary data. Despite varying development levels, these e-governments share issues of complexity and user-unfriendliness. Common bureaucratic traits identified include specialization, strict rules, impersonality, and hierarchy. Duplication, rigid protocols, and impersonal interactions hinder efficiency. E-governments, mirroring traditional bureaucracies, show bureaucratic inefficiencies leading to bureaucratism, characterized by alienation, ritualism, and inertia. Signs of e-bureaucratism include duplicated actions, unfinished solutions, formalism, poorly designed interfaces, unnecessary procedures, irrelevant offerings, limited choices, lack of personalization, detachment from users, and excessive complexity. The study found that e-governments have not eliminated bureaucracy but transformed it digitally, necessitating improvements to align with Weber's ideal bureaucracy principles and enhance the overall user experience.

**Conclusion**: An examination of e-government services in Ukraine, Russia, and Poland reveals enduring bureaucratic traits, including specialization, strict rules, impersonality, and hierarchy. Despite the digital transformation, e-bureaucracies still inherit negative aspects from traditional bureaucracies. E-bureaucracy is defined as a rational-based management system that utilizes AI and computer-assisted data processing to enhance decision-making, service delivery, and communication. E-bureaucratism refers to practices within e-bureaucracies that hinder efficiency and effectiveness, such as alienation, ritualism, and inertia. These practices result in a loss of flexibility and weaken the connection with the external environment, ultimately leading to organizations failing to effectively meet their clientele's needs.

The findings suggest that merely digitizing bureaucratic processes is insufficient. A more effective approach involves leveraging modern technologies like blockchain and creating new systems through public-private partnerships, allowing digitalization and deregulation to coexist. This study underscores the need for modern organizational theories to focus on combating bureaucratization and e-bureaucratism, rather than solely adopting digital tools. The definitions for e-bureaucracy and e-bureaucratism aim to contribute to academic discourse and improve the efficiency of future bureaucratic systems.

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*∗Corresponding author*
*E-mail address: oshovkov@cmkl.ac.th*

**Introduction**

The widespread use of information and computer technologies and elements of artificial intelligence (AI) in the daily life of society and organizations leads to an indispensable transformation of management and decision-making processes, informatization, and automation of interactions between organizations and citizens. These processes have not bypassed the sphere of public administration. It was expected that the transfer of state and municipal services to an electronic form (so-called electronic or e-government) would make these services better, more transparent, bring their provision to a new, better level, and help overcome such eternal scourges of state institutions as bureaucracy and bureaucratism (Tagarov, 2012; Shabanov, 2018; Ponomarev, 2019; Udalov, 2020). Nevertheless, as practice shows, "traditionally viewed as a tool to reduce the bureaucratic component in organizations, information technologies fail to cope with this task and lead to the emergence of such a new phenomenon as automated, electronic or digital bureaucracy" (Bakhtairova, 2021, p. 2675, para. 1). There is a real danger that the so-called bureaucratism, or individual manifestations of bureaucracy, make the organization's work ineffective. For centuries, this has been one of the problem areas in the activities of management structures in general. The state apparatus, similar to bureaucracy, is also successfully transformed into its electronic counterpart.

It would seem that the electronic government that replaces the offline one should have become better than its predecessor, less bureaucratic, ensure the primacy of the rights and freedoms of citizens, be oriented towards them, and, by its very essence, exist for them. However, the everyday experience of communicating with the state via the Internet confirms the opposite - the very fact of transferring many of its services online did not make these processes qualitatively easier or more enjoyable. For example, instead of the offline queues we are used to, now we are forced to sift through pages of sites for hours, fill out dimensionless forms, repeat the same actions dozens of times, wait for days and sometimes weeks for answers to our requests, and sometimes for months to solve elementary questions. Along with the manifestations of traditional bureaucracy and bureaucratism that have successfully migrated to the online space, now we often must face new challenges associated with the need for computer and mobile literacy. We are not only told what browsers or software to use and on what hardware, but we are also required to study this.

We are practically excluded from the decision-making process and have no access to those who make the decisions. Transactional communications are practically impossible; this involves transmitting and exchanging messages and interactions. Thus, in the event of system failures or non-standard situations, we spend more time than before since, in addition to the time spent online, we still have to visit government agencies physically. Not to mention those half-hearted solutions when everything that was done online needs to be confirmed with our physical presence or our ink signature. With an eye to what has been said, it seems that the offline bureaucracy has simply migrated to the online, and around us is nothing more than the thoughtless digitization of the bureaucracy and the bureaucratization of online services initiated by the very same bureaucracy. If this is so, and everything we observe are signs of the emergence of a new type of bureaucracy - electronic bureaucracy, then the natural question is - how to define e-bureaucracy and its symptoms? Likewise, what is e-bureaucratism, and what are its manifestations? Without a clear definition of these concepts, the hope that digitalization of services will help to cope with such age-old problems of state institutions as bureaucracy and bureaucratism may be in vain, and the transformation efforts themselves may be ineffective.

Although various aspects of a new form of bureaucracy are the subject of close examination by the research community, the cursory review of the literature did not allow the author to identify the unequivocal definition of what e-bureaucracy or e-bureaucratism are. Perhaps this is because "this type of bureaucracy has not yet finally taken shape, and it is now

that all its elements are being formed and established" (Bakhtairova, 2021, p. 2675, para. 1). For instance, Paulin (2017) defines e-bureaucracy as "the electronic equivalent of Weber's objective and impartial professional." Similarly, Smorgunov (2024) assumes that digital bureaucracy is nothing but "replacing people with machines, the inability to get advice from a human specialist, interacting with a voice assistant, a chatbot when decisions are made based on the actions of algorithms and artificial intelligence systems that do not explain the course of their reasoning and conclusions" (p.129). On the other hand, Proskurina, et al. (2020) see e-bureaucracy as a tool to achieve a country's democratic goals. Likewise, Murashova (2019) defines e-bureaucracy as a tool for reforming the bureaucratic system. At the same time, Petrova and Sidorova (2021) characterize digital bureaucracy as a fact of increasing government services' availability. Against the background of such a variety of opinions, in the author's view, the closest to the definition of e-bureaucracy came from Bakhtairova (2021), who defines it as "replacement of actions that representatives of the professional bureaucracy traditionally carry out by algorithms, decision-making systems based on neural networks and artificial intelligence" (Bakhtairova, 2021, p. 2687, para. 4). One way or another, the question of an unambiguous definition of terms remains open.

**Objective**

The objective of this qualitative study is to clearly define the concepts of electronic bureaucracy and electronic bureaucratism and identify the signs that may help recognize the bureaucratization of services provided by electronic resources, particularly e-governments whose data were used in the study.

**Method**

Having had the chance within a relatively short time to communicate with the electronic governments in three different countries – Russia, Ukraine, and Poland – the author realized that his own experience could be used for analysis and generalization, providing data that could answer the objectives of this study. The possibility for such a conception was prompted by the fact that there are some shared features of electronic services provided by governments in these three countries. For instance, despite the different levels of development of electronic governments, their services often lack simplicity, intuition, and user-friendliness. Furthermore, the fact that the researcher spoke all three languages equally well and had to study the e-governments of each country from scratch within an approximately similar time frame (in just three to four months in 2021) made the initial prerequisites for observations equal and all the assumptions made here below especially relevant and meaningful.

Grounded theory-based qualitative research employs an evocative-analytic autoethnography based on the researcher's personal experiences as a data collection method. The study's subjective approach enables the author to gain a deeper insight into human affairs by exploring the intrinsic qualities that influence behaviour (Holliday, 2002).

Similarly, Wall (2008) suggests that this approach involves the researcher becoming an integral part of the phenomenon being studied, sometimes even playing a central role. Out of the two kinds of autoethnography – evocative and analytic, as defined by Anderson (2006), the author uses a mix of both. In contrast, the researcher's feelings and specific point of view (which represents evocative autoethnography) are being analysed and tested in different research settings (analytic). This study's correspondence to analytic autoethnography is confirmed by five key features, which, as per Leon Anderson, should be present for this kind of study. Namely, these are: (1) complete member researcher, (2) analytic reflexivity, (3) narrative visibility, (4) dialogue with informants, and (5) commitment to theoretical analysis.

The field notes and observations, two qualitative approaches most often used in ethnography, were employed for data collection. "Field notes are widely recommended in

qualitative research as a means of documenting needed contextual information" (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018, p. 381). Field notes are nothing more than "a collection of documents from a researcher's observed experience in a specific setting or environment" (Allen, 2017, p. 332).

**What is Bureaucracy and Bureaucratism?**

Vincent de Gournay, a French economist, is considered to be the first who, in 1745, introduced the term bureaucracy to describe the situation of the monarch losing real power to officials; verbatim, the French bureau (office) was gaining Greek Kratos (power). Since then, the term has been used with a negative emotional connotation and ideological undertones embedded into it by Marxist interpretation until German sociologist Max Weber demonstrated the virtues of bureaucracy. Weber (2012) describes bureaucracy as an organizational system grounded in professionalism. It is characterized by a clear division of functions, established rules and regulations, formalized relationships, and a hierarchical management structure. The scholar further notes that such apolitical, formally governed "ideal" bureaucracies can serve as an effective model for public administration. On the other hand, Marx (1927) argues that the negative aspects of bureaucracy emerge when the goals of the state become the goals of the bureaus, or the goals of the bureaus become the goals of the state. In other words, bureaucracy replaces public interest with the personal interests of government officials, or 'appropriation' of the 'state' by the bureaucracy has taken place. Therefore, in terms of how to relate to bureaucracy, the following two aspects are clearly distinguished: bureaucracy as a sound and structurally necessary system of management, especially of government organizations formed under the influence of Weber's theory of rational bureaucracy, and bureaucracy as a destructive, socially dangerous effect that arises from the process of functioning bureaucracy. These points of view have in common that bureaucracy is an organizational management system based on a vertical hierarchy. The only difference is that in the first case, this organizational system was designed to carry out the assigned tasks most efficiently to meet the needs of the public interest, whereas, in the second, the public interests were relegated to the background. Despite the interdisciplinary, multifaceted, and comprehensive nature of bureaucracy, as confirmed by the works of Weber (2012), Hegel (1821), Engels (1884), Marx (1927), Taylor (1911), Urwick (1943), and many others, the author considers bureaucracy only as a system of organizational management based on the civil service, carried out by a particular power apparatus, and including the same apparatus.

To recognize the presence of a bureaucratic structure, the author focuses on those proposed by Weber (2012) on general formal features of administrative systems, which, for convenience, can be reduced to the following four components: (1) the presence of explicit specialization and division of labor, in which the powers and responsibilities within the system should not be duplicated, (2) the presence of pre-established norms and rules developed to rationalize the management process at all levels, as well as to ensure the predictability of the actions of both any official and the entire organization, (3) the presence of a vertical hierarchy that allows controlling the activities of each official, and (4) impersonality of both relationships and management decisions to ensure the highest efficiency of the organization.

Depending on how effectively the bureaucratic organization and the bureaucrats in its service solve the tasks assigned to the organization, the term bureaucracy can be used positively and negatively. Usually, a negative connotation denotes an ineffective, overly formalized management system. A similar term, bureaucratism, is used to describe the dysfunction or problematic aspects of the state management system. Crozier (1964) defines bureaucratism as merely procrastination, cumbersomeness, routine, and procedural confusion, coupled with an inadequate response from bureaucratic organizations to citizens' requests. In general agreement with the previous points, Solovyov (2013) adds to the definition by highlighting the isolation of civil servants from the public and the self-sufficiency of the bureaucratic system. According

to Marx (1927), this system focuses on fulfilling its departmental interests at the expense of societal needs and "neglects content for the sake of formalities" (Yakovenko, 2010, p.49).

The same bureaucratism is a consequence of the bureaucratization of the functions of the administrative apparatus, which, according to Porayko (2017), is nothing more than a separation of the latter from reality and the needs of society, which it was created to satisfy. Scientists identify three challenging moments generated by a bureaucratic organization that contribute to the latter's bureaucratization: (1) alienation from man, (2) ritualism, and (3) inertia. Among the reasons leading to the bureaucratism of an organization, Atamanchuk (2006) singles out the irrationality of building state bodies with the presence of duplicate and parallel structures, untimely or insufficient legal regulation of the processes of power and managerial relations by substantive and procedural norms, and weak control over compliance with established professional training of politicians and officials. At the same time, all the cited sources agree on one thing: the consequence of the presence of bureaucratism, particularly in public administration systems, is disappointment, frustration, and mistrust experienced by representatives of institutions and citizens, both towards the organizations themselves and the state as a whole. In turn, this can lead to the social instability of society and block the action of motivational mechanisms. In this kind of social setting, the state becomes essentially unnecessary and even antagonistic towards the primary social groups (Andreev, 2003). From the so-called social aspect, the bureaucratization of the bureaucratic system reduces labor motivation, abandons innovations in favor of routinization, and redistributes risk to non-personified "creators" of rules and others. Bureaucratism permeates professional areas, resulting in the quality of services provided by the bureaucratic organization suffering greatly from this.

To understand what traditional bureaucracy and bureaucratism are and to understand whether their electronic counterparts exist, the author proposes to consider several examples of his communication with electronic governments in three countries.

**Settings**

Having lived for a long time in one of the developing countries of Southeast Asia, there was no need to communicate with the state authorities in either the author's country of residence or homeland. However, in 2020, everything changed, and the author had to, in less than a year, alternately get acquainted with the electronic governments of three countries: Ukraine, Russia, and Poland. The experience of such an acquaintance was precisely the material for writing this article. In each country, the author had to request practically the same electronic services, such as registration at the place of residence, execution of various kinds of documents, registration for vaccination, and numerous other coinciding tasks. Therefore, comparing the content and presentation of information by electronic resources of countries on similar issues allows the author to draw his conclusions based on a comparable evidence base, making the research conclusions even more relevant and credible.

*Case Study: Ukraine*

The author's close acquaintance with the electronic governments of the three countries began in Ukraine. Even though the author is a citizen of Ukraine and, accordingly, is quite familiar with the conduct of business and the organization of the provision of public services in the country, it did not save him from disappointment and frustration during his first acquaintance with e-government; the famous Chernyshevsky could best describe that - "What is to be done?" (Chernyshevsky, 1905, p. 1). So, by requesting in a search engine "online government services," you will most likely see at least two portals that resemble each other like twin brothers - diia.gov.ua and my.gov.ua. On both, one can find the sections "personal documents," "relatives," "property," and others. However, that is not all; there is also a portal,

my.gov.ua, known initially as poslugi.gov.ua, conceived as a "one-stop-shop" for receiving all public services for citizens and entrepreneurs.

Among valuable, at certain moments in life sites are the Unified State Web Portal of Open Data, a site for submitting electronic petitions, the Cabinet of electronic services from the Ministry of Justice, the Electronic Cabinet of Taxpayers, the site of Social Services from the Ministry of Social Policy, the Unified State Register of Declarations, sites of regional and city administrations and others. The result of such a variety of electronic services is that without some preparation, tips, or a detailed acquaintance with the resources of state bodies (impressive in terms of the amount of information offered), it is almost impossible to understand which site is needed. Thanks to the tips of acquaintances, the author managed to avoid the bitter fate of a seeker of public services on the vast expanses of the Internet. Still, even this cursory acquaintance was enough to draw one self-evident conclusion - it would seem that walking around the offices of officials that seemed to be a thing of the past was successfully transformed into walking through websites. Since there is no need to go anywhere, it seems comfortable; however, it is not any faster considering the time spent. Earlier, if one did not know what office to go to, they would go and ask an official. Now, one must wander through the pages of sites, browse, and sometimes study useless information, searching for the necessary services. Not only is there a lack of a well-thought-out and consolidated system for providing public services online, but a clear manifestation of bureaucratism is visible - when the system exists by itself, as if for itself, and not for why it was created; the situation when the bureaucratic system "does not increase but hinders the efficiency of its activities" (Latova, 2021, para. 9).

Further acquaintance with the websites of the state bodies of Ukraine ends with subsequent disappointment, with the understanding that most of the hundreds of services offered by these sites come down to simple downloading of questionnaires and application forms, as well as other materials for their subsequent processing in offline mode. Later, already filled in, all this will need to be brought to the nearest public service center; as it turns out, there are not so many fully electronic services in Ukraine. According to Zakharchenko (2016), as of 2016, only 349 services were provided electronically by various websites of state and municipal organizations. The same source informs that on the most complete portal of public services, which was iGov, it turned out to be only 45 of them. For fairness, it must be said that, for all their scarcity, fully automated electronic services, according to user reviews, do not cause any complaints and are popular.

Furthermore, although the given data refer to 2016, it may be well considered since, according to the report of the United Nations (2020), the situation with the development of e-government in Ukraine as of 2020 has not only not improved but even worsened. At the same time, the main reasons that not all public services are available in a completely electronic form are the unwillingness of the corrupt bureaucratic apparatus to part with the attributes of power, ossified thinking, and the fear of losing jobs. This also explains the presence of many half-hearted solutions when receiving online services ends in a mandatory visit to a government agency. It was in such a situation that the author found himself when, in the summer of 2021, to obtain an electronic certificate of vaccination (information that is transmitted electronically to the server of the Ministry of Health), he needed to receive a physical stamp from a family doctor, who, in principle, does not take any part in it. This example is nothing more than a clear illustration of bureaucratic red tape associated with the inertia of a bureaucratic structure created based on a bureaucratic organization striving for self-preservation despite its previously set goals. Such inertia, along with ritualism and alienation from a person, is singled out by scientists as the main problems generated by bureaucratic organizations, which inevitably lead to the bureaucratization of the latter (Latova, 2021). The further continuation of the story with the vaccination certificate also illustrates that the bureaucratic system is alienated from a particular person's problem.

After information about the author's vaccination became available online, he discovered that his name and surname in the international version of the certificate in English did not correspond to the entry in the passport. Furthermore, this occurred even though the passport data used during vaccination had not changed for decades. According to the support team of the government portal, the explanation for this is due to the recent change in the Ukrainian language transliteration rules. The discrepancy between the passport's data and the data from the international certificate creates difficulties for the author when crossing borders in a pandemic. Numerous appeals to the support of the portal or the Ministry of Health and any attempt to change the state of affairs have not led to the desired result. As one of the possible solutions, the author was asked to change the passport's data. Unfortunately, none of the bureaucrats cared that all documents issued to the author over the decades of living abroad were based on the current passport's data. It should also be noted that each call to the helpline or support center takes a lot of time and patience. As a rule, at first, one needs to talk to the chatbot or stand in line to meet with the first-line support staff, who are often wholly incompetent and thus cannot help, and only then, perhaps, one may be lucky enough to connect with a knowledgeable specialist. However, this does not mean a successful resolution to the issue.

At best, the staff immediately refused to resolve the issue; at worst, the author needed to write a lengthy statement that was eventually also neglected. Be that as it may, after two months of trying, the issue remained unresolved; the author concluded that a resolution is impossible without a physical visit to the government office. In this example, many of the bureaucratic costs of online services are visible. Most of them are based on complete alienation from a person through an impersonal approach to the latter. Any problem adapts to a single template designed for all occasions, which results in dehumanization and the transformation of a person into a standard 'case.' Deviation from the accepted norm and the lack of direct access to those who make decisions, as a rule, leads the situation to a dead end and hopelessness. A similar situation developed when the author tried to enter the data of an old-style driver's license (timeless) into his electronic profile on the government portal. So, having passed the verification procedure offered by the site, the author still received an order to undergo additional verification by contacting the department of the State Automobile Inspectorate.

It was suggested to sign up for an electronic appointment through the Inspectorate's website, which was done. The author, who arrived precisely at the appointed time at the state organization, was faced with a situation 'in the field' when asked to stand in another offline queue instead of being received by appointment. Being unprepared for this, the author rescheduled the visit to the office of this organization to another day, intending to spend more time on the process. Unfortunately, even a physical visit to the State Automobile Inspectorate's office did not help resolve the issue of not displaying the driver's license information on the government portal. From the employees' explanations, it followed that this situation had arisen due to poor coordination between the departments of the State Automobile Inspectorate on the ground and the portal, which manages electronic profiles of citizens. The fact that the data from the author's driver's license (also the data from his foreign passport) did not automatically appear on the website of state services indicates a complete lack of coordination between various government agencies, the absence of a unified program for the development of electronic services, as well as the presence of the so-called Merton's 'bureaucratic ritualism,' or an obsession with rules and regulations that leaves no room for fruitful cooperation (Merton, 1940).

### Case Study: The Russian Federation

In March 2021, the author had a chance to get acquainted with the e-government services of the Russian Federation. The first impression from communication with gosuslugi.ru (the

leading portal of state services in Russia) was quite positive. Being completely unfamiliar with the system of state administration in Russia, the author nevertheless was able to independently and rather quickly find everything he needed. The author especially liked the presence of the robot Max, who meets the visitor right on the first page. The AI employed by Max helps the user quickly find the information sought or provides links to a particular service. In the author's opinion, the portal's interface is not overloaded and is quite intuitive.

Furthermore, it is worth noting the excellent integration of the leading portal of public services with the websites of other government organizations, or at least those that the author had a chance to use. According to Rostelecom (2021), in the Russian Federation, in 2021, in electronic form, there were "more than 1,200 state services based on federal executive authorities, more than 7,700 regional services, as well as over 20,850 municipal services provided in the interests of individuals and legal entities" (Rostelecom, 2021, para. 1). All of this probably determines the higher position of the electronic government of the Russian Federation in comparison with Ukraine in the United Nations (2020) rating - E-Government Development (EGDI) and E-Participation Index: 37 versus 69.

Although the author could complete most of his objectives online without assistance, it was not without some bureaucratic difficulties. In particular, to obtain the social insurance number of an individual personal account (SNILS), the author had to visit a government agency more than once physically. At the same time, due to COVID restrictions, an appointment with the agency was only possible online. Since the author is not a Russian citizen, completing online registration without a physical visit to the office of a government agency was not possible. On the other hand, the office staff refused to receive visitors without online registration. Walking in a vicious circle could continue indefinitely if the author did not use cunning. In particular, he managed to register for an appointment using the personal data of one of his friends, a citizen of Russia. In this case, the author became an unwitting victim of both the traditional bureaucratic machine, which did not want to show a bit of quickness nor an individual approach to a non-standard situation, and the electronic bureaucracy, which, by and large, repeated all the mistakes of the traditional one. This case is the best illustration of the presence of at least two (mentioned above and most often cited by the scientific community) reasons for the bureaucratization of bureaucratic structures - alienation from a person and ritualism.

The second, undoubtedly the most explicit confirmation that traditional bureaucracy has migrated to the electronic space, is an example of how much time was spent by the author on developing an electronic certificate of vaccination - a total of about one and a half months. This is even though, according to the idea, the whole process should have taken no more than seven working days. So, after the allotted time, without seeing the electronic vaccination certificate in his electronic cabinet on the government's website, the author first contacted the site's support service and then went on to the site of the Ministry of Health; over and over, more than ten times. After hearing the complaints, the portal's support service forwarded the author to the hotline of the Ministry of Health's website. The support team of the Ministry, in turn, confirmed that the vaccination was complete and transferred the corresponding data to the government portal and, accordingly, advised seeking assistance there - the circle was closing. Even the author's physical appeal to the Center of Public Services of the district from the area of residence and the presentation of the paper certificate confirming the passage of vaccination did not help. Not to mention that the scanned copy of the same document was attached to every single support request on the government portal. The very drafting of these queries is also a prime example of online bureaucratism. The lack of access for the author from previous requests forced him to rewrite the same complaint in detail repeatedly. As a rule, the support team member would mechanically listen to the complaint, open a new case, and suggest waiting for further decisions on the issue. Each appeal was automatically considered resolved and

closed immediately after the Ministry of Health sent its subsequent response. Because the answer from the Ministry in no way solved the issue, the automatic closing of the case meant nothing more than the need to start the process anew. Since the author did not have access to the information from the previous complaint, he had to write a new one, providing all the same data as before. When compiling each subsequent request, the materials of the previous ones were simply not considered. The support center employees acted strictly within the prescribed instructions and did not try to delve deeply into the essence of the problem while ignoring the materials of previous complaints. Here is a classic example of bureaucracy on the part of the support service of the website of public services – indifference and disinterest in solving each specific issue, the absence of personal responsibility, and shifting it onto others (in terms of sending the author's requests to the Ministry of Health).

The last example of the cumulative negative impact of the mixture of electronic and traditional bureaucracy on the author's life is the situation with his immigration status during his stay in the Russian Federation. While performing his official duties, the author, from time to time, had to cooperate with the country's law enforcement agencies. In the course of one of such events, law representatives had questions about the legal status of the author's stay in Russian Federation territory. According to the Migration Service of the Russian Federation, it turned out that the author exceeded the permissible periods of stay in the country many times over and, accordingly, had to face the consequences. The reason for that was that the information on the website of the Migration Service contained outdated information about the author's previous visits to the country; the human factor - someone has entered erroneous information into a computer. Even though the author had all the necessary documents confirming the legality of his stay in the country, the author failed to change the migration service's online record, and the question remained open. This was not only because of the lack of time for repetitive physical visits to the Migration Service office but also due to bureaucratic ritualism and the inability of the bureaucratic organization to resolve the non-standard situation smoothly.

### Case Study: The Republic of Poland

Despite the highest position in the United Nations (2020) E-Government Development (EGDI) and E-Participation Index among the three countries, the impression of visiting the leading government portal www.gov.pl was, and remains, the most unpleasant. From the point of view of the author, who is also an expert in the field of digital marketing, the site is not only overloaded with unnecessary information, such as news or profiles of the personal composition of the country's governing bodies but has a rather dull design made on standard templates which are hard to perceive. In fairness, it should be said that, despite its shortcomings, the site presents a pretty good integration of all kinds of services. Unfortunately, most of them are only available to Polish citizens or legal entities. There are also several more targeted sections for citizens and legal entities from Belarus. For citizens of other states, the electronic government of Poland provides only three services: registration at the place of residence, obtaining a universal electronic population registration system number (PESEL), and filling out the search form for air passengers. A few more services become available only after registration with the site. In this context, it is not entirely clear how the website of the Polish government was able to bypass the ranking of the website of the electronic government of the Russian Federation, which provides services to foreigners in almost the exact quantities as to its own citizens. It was also surprising that the government site of a country member of the European Union does not offer the possibility of choosing a language other than Polish. The language can be changed only from the page intended for foreign citizens, which still needs to be reached through several Polish-language levels of the site. Visible here is the inertia of thinking of the bureaucratic

apparatus, which does not consider the modern realities of the multinational space of the EU and its alienation from the needs of the end-user, particularly the foreign visitor of the site.

So, as the author's experience of communicating with the universal electronic population registration system (PESEL) has shown, it is not electronic when it comes to foreigners. Analogous to the above-described electronic services in Ukraine, the user can only download the necessary application files from the website; everything else needs to be done offline, which is an excellent example of the manifestation of traditional bureaucracy, which has taken to its service some elements of automatization. There, everything was as it used to be before: instead of the previous 'live' queue, a thoroughly modern electronic one; instead of an unbiased and impersonal consideration of the application, everything is left to the discretion of a particular official. So, having the same set of documents on hand, the author received separate instructions on his case from different officials.

To encounter a genuine mix of e-bureaucracy with traditional bureaucracy, the author had a chance when he was trying to register himself at his place of residence. The initial attempt to register online did not bring the desired result. Instead of confirming the registration, the city administration requested additional documents. However, since the instructions were not clear and the information available online did not answer the question of what exactly was needed, it was decided to physically visit the office of the government organization to communicate with officials in person. As it turned out, most of what was demanded in the online instructions on the site was redundant and unnecessary. After clarifying it all with officials, the author submitted an online application again. Unfortunately, the final confirmation of registration at the residence did not happen either; this time, the system requested the presentation of original documents to the official. As a result, the author revisited the city office once again and this time applied for the paper certificate of residence. Proof of registration at the residence is necessary when acquiring other public services, such as an application for PESEL. As it turned out later, receiving a paper version of the document had its advantages - many public and private services do not recognize the electronic version; they still demand a written document with an ink seal in an old-fashioned way. This is a good demonstration of such a scourge of bureaucracy as ritualism, which denotes absorption in rules and regulations. The fact that an electronic document is not welcomed, and its paper equivalent costs money, may well also indicate the presence of a corruption component in the work of a state body.

In addition to examples of the ineffective work of state bureaucracy, the author also has an example of the unproductive work of private e-bureaucracy. For instance, the electronic system of one of the mobile operators in Poland has been sending monthly invoices with significant errors for three months. Online appeals through the website or calling the support center did not bear any results. As a rule, online consultants promised to sort out the issue; however, as time passed, the deadlines for paying bills approached, but nothing changed. A day or two before the payment due date, someone had to physically visit the operator's office to talk directly with the manager. Only his intervention in the system could bring the invoices in line with the contract. This example merely highlights the stagnation within the bureaucratic online support system, which eventually started operating independently of its original purpose of client service (Bakhtairova, 2021).

Unfortunately, the author did not have the opportunity to use other services of the e-government in Poland. Still, even this brief acquaintance was enough to understand that not everything is so smooth with the e-bureaucracy in this country, which occupies the highest position out of the three in the rating - Government Development (EGDI) and E-Participation Index.

**Discussion**

While comparing some of the services provided by e-governments in three countries, the author found the most typical signs of bureaucracy, highlighted by Weber (2012) as those that separate the bureaucratic structure from other forms of management organization. These are specialization and division of labor, strict rules and regulations, the impersonality of relationships, and hierarchy.

The first sign is that almost all government sites have explicit specialization and division of labor, with the presence of online platforms for solving distinct problems. The only exception may be the organization of the provision of electronic services in Ukraine, where many duplications occur. For example, the author's vaccination certificate mentioned in the text was available from both the government portal and the site of the Ministry of Health of Ukraine. Perhaps this duplication is precisely one of the reasons why Ukraine has the lowest level of e-government development among the three countries. Nevertheless, one way or another, for the solution of a specific issue, there is usually a particular place on the Internet, be it a separate page or a dedicated site.

The next sign that indicates the similarity of e-bureaucracy with traditional bureaucracy is pre-established (or non-flexible) rules for communication and business conduct by a government body, as can be seen from the organization of websites of state bodies. There is a particular order of communication between a citizen and the bureaucratic system, which is to provide a unified approach to solving similar problems and ensure the system's stability. In theory, clear rules should safeguard against bureaucratic arbitrariness and corruption. In practice, such an organization of the bureaucratic machine not only does not eliminate bureaucratism and corruption but also leads to the emergence of another sign of an ideal bureaucracy - impersonal relationships. This is where personal sympathies, feelings, and preferences do not play any role. Due to the lack of direct contact with the official in the dialogue, the recipient of public services does not have a listener or someone to whom to address such emotions to influence the resolution of the issue. The impersonality of relationships may be suitable for solving such ordinary problematic situations for which there are standard decision algorithms in place. However, in unclear cases, the system may malfunction or work ineffectively.

Another of Weber's signs of a bureaucratic organization, which is also inherent in e-bureaucracy, is the presence of a vertical hierarchy. It may not be as clear-cut as in a traditional organization, but it is undoubtedly there. For instance, the Max robot on the government portal of the Russian Federation, the chatbots of support services on other government sites, the automatic responders of telephone helplines, and messengers are nothing more than the lowest level of this very same hierarchy. When necessary, and sometimes as a matter of luck, the consumer may reach the first or even higher levels of this hierarchy. However, unlike the traditional hierarchy of a bureaucratic organization, the top positions of this pyramid are sometimes generally implicit or even hidden. For example, all the author's attempts to reach a higher-ranking official of the government portal in Russia to complain about the slow resolution of the issue with the availability of the vaccination certificate did not lead to any result. Instead, the author was asked to write an impersonal letter to the general email address of the support center, with the hope that the complaint would fall into the right hands. A similar situation is not uncommon for private electronic bureaucracies such as online banks, stores, and call centres of various service providers. Almost everywhere, where physical contact between citizens and an organization is somehow complicated or completely transferred online, communication with higher levels of the organizational hierarchy is practically impossible.

The examples considered in this article indicate that, in the form in which we know them, the electronic governments (or electronic bureaucracies) of the countries under consideration do not differ from the traditional bureaucratic model of governance. Thus, the bureaucracy did

not disappear but simply transformed into its electronic counterpart – e-bureaucracy. Moreover, as shown above, it also resembles the features of Weber's ideal bureaucracy. Accordingly, this indicates the ultimate goals of such an e-government organization: ensuring "the domination of generally binding regulated procedures, the implementation of which does not depend on who performs them or in relation to whom they are performed" (Elitarium, 2021, para. 3). Therefore, summing up all that has been said, the author defines e-bureaucracy as a rational-based management system of decision-making, service delivery, and communication that relies on AI and computer-assisted data processing, designed to improve and speed up these processes and make the organization's job most effective. In this context, the author references Turing's (1950) definition of artificial intelligence, describing it as systems designed to mimic human behaviour.

As noted above, high hopes were initially pinned on information technology to eradicate traditional bureaucracy. However, the bureaucracy here was understood not as the bureaucratic system of management itself but precisely the negative aspects associated with the ineffectiveness of its functioning. Another term used to describe a loss of competence and the bureaucratization of managerial activities within an organization, leading to its departure from initially set goals and a shift towards satisfying its own needs, is bureaucratism. Thus, bureaucratism is not something substantiated or described by a specific theory but rather what manifests itself in practice. This is precisely what the author's examples of communication with e-governments (or e-bureaucracies) in three countries show: the harmful practices that permeate the work of these organizations. According to Merton (1940), bureaucratization results in organizations losing their flexibility in dealing with external environments, consequently diminishing their intended effectiveness. Furthermore, this was also reported in the text.

Moreover, in each example considered in the text, the presence of at least one of the three primary practices that lead to bureaucratization, namely, alienation from man, ritualism, and inertia, can be easily found. Singly or in combination, these practices lead to the organization losing connection and flexibility in relations with the outside world, making the organization's work ineffective. Thus, the author defines e-bureaucratism as nothing more than features and practices of an organization within the e-bureaucracy system that make the work of an organization to meet the needs of its clientele ineffective and inefficient. Introducing a consumer of services of a bureaucratic organization (clientele) into the definition indicates potential ways and opportunities for solving one of the main tasks of modern management - bringing it into alignment with the principles of ideal bureaucracy developed by Max Weber (2012). After all, the bureaucracy will be ideal only when it effectively deals with the assigned tasks, and it is the customers who can assess this the best. Given that bureaucratic organizations are very different in their nature and the subjective character of customers' evaluations, it is impossible to compile an exhaustive list of all possible signs of e-bureaucratism; it will be different for each organization and society. However, based on the actualities set out in this article, it can be assumed that in the case of electronic governments, the apparent signs of bureaucratization of the organization include the following: (1) simply duplicating actions of officials, (2) offering unfinished or halfway solutions, (3) distinguished by formalism and clericalism, (4) proposing ill-conceived interfaces or the use of specific hardware or software, (5) forcing us to make unnecessary movements/learning, (6) offering things we do not need, (7) limiting our choices and preferences, (8) not offering an individual approach, participation, or feedback, (9) being outdated and parted from the clientele and life, and (10) bringing simple things to the point of absurdity.

**Conclusions**

Back in 1917, Weber (2012) wrote: "the future belongs to bureaucratization… because bureaucracy, in comparison with other historical carriers of the rational way of life of that time, is marked to a much greater extent by its inevitability" (Weber, 2012, p. 1401, para. 1). He also noted that "a feature of modern bureaucracy, which gives it an even greater inevitability, is rational professional specialization and training" (Weber, 2012, p. 1108, para. 3). Despite the initially inherent danger in the bureaucracy of a departure from the principles of idealism proposed by Weber, the loss of competence, and a slide into bureaucratization, this form of management today is considered the only workable and acceptable solution. Drawing analogies between the past and present, the search for an optimal managerial system in those days, and how the management system changes under the influence of information technology nowadays, taking into account the fact that more and more departments and organizations are switching to online mode, simplifying the forms of their interaction with consumers of services, and converting document flow into digital format, we can say with a great deal of confidence that electronic bureaucracy is our future. This is quite logical and normal, and this should not be feared or avoided; this is the trend of the times. Technologies have enormous potential for changing and transforming bureaucratic organizations into electronic bureaucracies. The ultimate goal of such a transformation could be building ideal bureaucratic structures that operate following the principles developed by Weber. Devoid of the main drawback of their predecessors - bureaucratism, or their electronic counterpart - electronic bureaucratism, adjusted for the current conditions, that is precisely what electronic bureaucracies could become. To achieve this, we all need to make our tiny contributions to this case, be critical, and have a civic position and political will. Every time, we should consistently question the necessity and impact of each bureaucratic procedure, asking whether it truly enhances our lives (Porayko, 2017). In this regard, the presence of clear definitions of two concepts given by the author can help us to develop its truly human-value and creative management component, which in turn, "will be the basis for the development of the creative essence of the individual, acting in the management structure of a humanistic society" (Volkov 2003, p. 375).

As for the electronic bureaucracies of Ukraine, the Russian Federation, and Poland, they are united by officialdom or over-regulation and, in the case of the first two, the lack of alternatives. This is most likely because the e-bureaucracies, founded on existing bureaucratic organizations, have adopted both good and bad features from the latter, such as beadledom, red tape, duplication of functionality, usurpation of power, and others. Perhaps, instead of painfully rebuilding existing systems by mechanically transferring the non-creative activities of civil servants into digital format, it would be more logical to create new ones based on modern technologies, such as blockchain, implemented in public-private partnerships. Something similar to how it is done in Canada, where some government functions are executed by private providers. This would allow the digitalization of public services to go hand in hand with deregulation. The consumer, in turn, would have the opportunity not only to have more choices but, with their voice, would help evaluate the activities of such decentralized autonomous organizations.

In any case, the common problem here, and not only for these three countries, is not the presence of e-bureaucracy but the ineffectiveness of its functioning. This is not only because of the often poor design of bureaucratic systems themselves, which inherited the shortcomings of their predecessors, but also the bureaucratization of the latter. This is explained not only by the dependence of electronic bureaucracies on human resources and, accordingly, on their vices but also by the imperfection of the AI systems, which are at the very beginning of their development. While the design itself, over time, can be brought to perfection, the solution to the problem of bureaucratization, in the context of its close connection with society, is not so straightforward. One such example is Ukraine, which took over the X-Road e-government

system from Estonia (the country with the third position in the United Nations (2020) ranking of e-government development) in the early 2010s and failed to rise above the 69<sup>th</sup> place in the ranking over the past decade, an excellent example of the situation when neither society nor infrastructure is simply ready to change.

In conclusion, the last thing to say is that one of the main tasks of modern theories of organization and management should be the fight not against bureaucracy and its electronic counterpart but against bureaucratization and e-bureaucratism.

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