

Upgrading the Philippine Civil Service —(1)

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The Philippine civil service today is perceived to be characterized by waste, backwardness, insensitivity to public needs and idleness. To rectify this prevailing culture, the first remedial step starts with improving the present quality of government personnel. Without efficient, honest and competent civil servants, no further remedies are feasible.

There is a subtle and rapidly increasing decline in the country's civil service system. Over the past two decades, this deterioration in the structure and operation of the government bureaucracy has continued almost unabated. The downfall of the Marcos regime, has revealed the full extent of this breakdown in the system. Its deterioration will continue unless concerned parties adopt urgent measures to reverse this unfavorable trend.

The Civil Service System Today

The deplorable conditions of the bureaucratic structure can be viewed at almost all levels of the government hierarchy. For instance, documented evidences have been revealed about the various anomalies committed at some of the highest and most responsible positions of government during the Marcos administration. High level bureaucrats and civil servants have been implicated in such shady undertakings, acting wittingly or unwittingly as conspirators, facilitators, conduits, robotons, or silent witnesses.

The system has also proved to be rather ineffective as a means for instituting the necessary restructuring or reorganization of the bureaucracy. For example, it was considerably difficult to make a smooth transition between changes in government at the middle and lower management levels. The Aquino administration, through its various Officers-in-Charge (OICs) and new ministers, demanded the resignations of senior and middle-level personnel. Consequently, there was massive resistance on the part of the incumbent officials, particularly among local public servants, who cited different interpretations of the civil service laws and related policies on tenure in office. The lack of preparation for the wide-scale dismissals or resignations of personnel, both contractual and appointees, further compounded the problem.

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In other instances, there was the sorry scenario of mediocre and poorly-paid public servants of the old dispensation replaced with other patronage appointees of no greater competence or experience in their tasks. In worse situations, two or occasionally more appointees viciously fought over a particular position, each waving his own appointment papers and political connections.

There is also a perceived standstill in the movement to enhance the prestige and dignity of holding a government post in the career service. The experience of the graduates of the Career Executive Service Development Program (CESDP), Junior Executive Training — Supervisory Training for Effective Administrative Management (JET-STREAM) and other government training programs, have not significantly added to this desired image of the public official.

Perspectives for Upgrading the System

The waste, backwardness, insensitivity to public needs and idleness of many public agencies and state corporations need immediate rectification. The first remedial step in this process begins with the quality of government personnel. Without efficient, honest, and competent executives, no further remedies are feasible.

Essentially, whatever means are adopted to strengthen the system of civil service in the country must address several basic needs. This include the following measures:

- (1) Strengthen the administration of the merit system;
- (2) Improve the various functions of the civil service system in providing qualified people for government agencies and state corporations. This covers the recruitment, examination, training, and promotion of people on the basis of skills, knowledge, and interests regardless of political influence, regional origins, or other non-merit factors;
- (3) Integrate all human resources development programs for all kinds of levels and ranks, to allow a flexible, productive, and comprehensive range of training/educational opportunities across the entire range of the government bureaucracy;
- (4) Institutionalize a management climate in government rooted to a genuine sense of and commitment to public accountability;
- (5) Upgrade the cultural-technical environment in public office, particularly an increase in the use of incentives and other positive motivation schemes, to promote integrity, progressiveness, efficiency, and courtesy in service; and

(6) In selected areas and positions, increase the comparability of compensation for work considered to be on the same level of difficulty as in the private sector.

Implementing Administrative Reforms in the Civil Service

What are the courses of action required to meet these pressing needs? Within the short term, the following broad program areas may be considered for design and implementation:

First is the formation of a Civil Service System Council which will oversee the rationalization and implementation of reforms in the Civil Service Commission, Professional Regulations Board, Career Executive Service, and in the personnel policies of State Corporations and Semi-Public Agencies.

Second is a reinforcement of the Merit and Rewards Systems in government. This includes both the monetary and intangible aspects of inducing public officers to conform to the highest standards of service.

Third, all management information systems utilized to track operations of various government agencies must be upgraded in terms of their coverage and delivery of relevant and timely information to the responsible parties. A manpower information system on the entire government structure should also be developed for use in personnel planning and placement.

Finally, there must be an assessment and improvement of the performance of the regional offices of all public institutions. The professional working environment of such offices should be upgraded as soon as possible since these provincial offices interact with a large proportion of the population.

Generally, the specific measures which will be designed to implement the preceding program areas will pertain to the different activities involved in the placement, development, and motivation of the members of the bureaucracy. While such details may be beyond the scope of this paper, it may be possible at this point to briefly delineate the nature of such desired reform measures.

Recruitment and examination of personnel. Reforms in this area will center on the nationwide efforts to recruit and examine personnel for positions in the government civil service for both the competitive and non-competitive levels. This should include procedures for those in the private sector who desire to be integrated or mobilized for government.

Personnel Investigation. Investigation is needed to support the selection and appointment process. A system similar to the British computerized Cen-

tral Management Staff Record (CMSR) should be developed to provide personnel history, experience, and qualifications of senior staff. This includes an information-retrieval program useful in filling vacancies, manpower planning and statistical analysis.

Employee Development and Training. The CESDP, JET-STREAM, and other professional training programs should all be reviewed. A year-round calendar of courses must be prepared. This is intended to further encourage government-wide programs for development and training of career employees, to give technical assistance to trainers and managers on training matters. Standards should also be improved for agencies to follow in giving developmental assignment to employees.

Reward System. A reward system should be institutionalized throughout government. It should provide guidance and assistance to ministries and agencies in encouraging employees to submit and implement useful suggestions, inventions, and give generally superior performance.

Employee Benefits. Assessment on present government policies relating to health benefits, life insurance, occupational health schemes, retirement and other benefits should be immediately undertaken. If warranted, such items must be revised or updated to reflect current needs and conditions. A system of appeals for an orderly settlement of complaints as well as an effective system to protect employees from undue political interference must also be instituted.

Intergovernmental Personnel Programs. These include relationships between the government and cultural minorities, the handicapped, state corporations, state colleges and universities and other agencies which have separate programs but linked to civil service system. A review of the current structure of linkages, budgetary and otherwise, should be done and improvements must be designed.

Professional Regulations. The lead agency for such policies, the Professional Regulations Commission, should be reassessed with regard to its thrust of operations and the required resources for its programs. This covers the different policies, decision-making system, and management configuration of the Commission. The end objective is to ensure that the Commission performs its role as the regulatory arm for maintaining the standards of professionals in the country in a sustained, effective and honest manner.

Upgrading of Physical Facilities. Specifically, this concerns the Civil Service Commission, whose facilities require substantial improvements to support its expanding activities. Examples of such physical areas for upgradation are reading rooms, library, and informational training materials like films and publications.

The above measures and programs should be undertaken immediately. Such reforms should be carried out in the light of serious dislocations in our civil service system.

After initial implementation of such reforms, a reorganization of the Civil Service Commission may prove productive. Provisions should be made to establish, or strengthen an Appeals Board, an Office of Incentive Systems, a Bureau of Manpower Information Systems, and uplift the regional offices' capabilities.