

Civil Service Reform in comparative perspective: the case of local government change in Mexico and the United States

Cecilia Cadena

El Colegio Mexiquense / ccadena@cmq.edu.mx

Raymond Cox

The University of Akron / rc Cox@uakron.edu

Ramona Ortega-Liston

The University of Akron / ramona3@uakron.edu

Abstract: This case study compares civil service reform efforts in the State of Mexico and Summit County, Ohio. In the case of Mexico, the U.S. Civil Service system is viewed as an *ideal* model. Historically, recruitment and selection of government employees has been the most controversial and politically charged personnel endeavor. Thus, this case examines the political environment within which civil service reform is being attempted in both jurisdictions. Valuable lessons have been learned. First, and foremost, is that civil service reform is a *slow* process. In the United States full implementation of civil service precepts took several decades. Secondly, the greatest single failure of both the system in Mexico and Summit County is the lack of clear career paths for professionals. It must be remembered that civil service systems are career systems, designed to offer the opportunity and possibility of a career in the public service free of political or other influences.

Key words: civil service, public service, government.

Resumen: Este estudio de caso compara los esfuerzos de reforma en el servicio civil en el Estado de México, México, y el Condado de Summit, Ohio, Estados Unidos. El sistema de servicio civil en Estados Unidos es visto como el modelo ideal. Históricamente el reclutamiento y selección de empleados gubernamentales ha sido el esfuerzo más controvertido y con mayor carga política. Así, este caso examina el ambiente político dentro del cual la reforma del servicio civil se lleva a cabo en ambas jurisdicciones. Se han adquirido conocimientos valiosos; en primer lugar, de manera principal, se entiende que la reforma en el servicio civil es un proceso lento, en los Estados Unidos la completa implementación de los preceptos de servicios de carrera necesitó varias décadas; en segundo lugar, la mayor falla en ambos casos es la falta de trayectorias claras hacia la profesionalización. Debe recordarse que los sistemas de servicio civil son sistemas de carrera, diseñados para ofrecer oportunidades y posibilidades de una carrera en el servicio público libre de influencias políticas o de cualquier otro tipo.

Palabras clave: servicio civil, servicio público, gobierno.

Introduction¹

Creation of civil service systems in Europe and, then the United States, in the nineteenth century were seminal acts in the evolution of “professional” government. Whereas the nineteenth-century concern was to find people to fill government jobs (i.e., recruitment), the twentieth-century concern was to match the skills of the recruit to the demands of the job (i.e., selection). Our modern understanding of objective, merit-based civil service systems rests on assumptions of neutral objectivity of selection processes. Neutral selection includes job analysis and position classification, (Cox *et al.*, 1994).

But what happens if there is no objectivity? Or if this pursuit of objectivity produces results that are politically or socially undesirable? Herein lie the questions to be considered in our examination of civil service change efforts in the State of Mexico, Mexico and the County of Summit, Ohio. Both the state government (and by constitution the municipal governments of the state) and the county government are struggling with reform efforts. Both “judge” the depth, and, therefore, the “quality,” of their reforms against the standards of a classic civil service system.

Classic systems treat personnel processes as mechanistic operations. Employees are recruited from a pool of applicants, meeting pre-established guidelines. The hiring process is circumscribed by restrictions on information; employment applications as well as interview questions are carefully screened to avoid illegal questioning while making certain that any bona fide occupational qualification questions are included. From this perspective fundamental tenets of personnel practice are simplistic. Absenteeism should be reduced; employee turnover is deplored. Hiring is to occur based summarily upon the applicant’s “fit” with the requisite knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) as defined in the position classification guidelines. Promotion is to be based on merit. While in most cases, a personnel manager could organize his or her office using this “by-the-book” and somewhat robotic approach, the manager

¹ We wish to acknowledge the work of Ma. Esther Morales Fajardo and Martha Laura Hernández Pérez without whom this work would not be possible. We also want to note the vital assistance provided by Ma. Esther in serving as a translator for aspects of this research. We are grateful for the support provided by both of them and thank them for their efforts.

learns nothing of why the employees behave as they do. This approach to personnel management ignores the context in which people work – a critical element to any understanding of public sector personnel practice.

Using our experience with and interviews of those involved in civil service reform in Mexico and Ohio² we propose to develop an assessment of the state of local government personnel practice. To achieve this goal we must first introduce theoretical influences and understand the historic context for the evolution of current personnel practices in both jurisdictions. Our goal is to help merit system reformers recognize not only what government personnel practice is, but also what it is becoming. The necessary first step, then, is to understand where it came from.

Theoretical basics elements

The primary theoretical inputs for this paper are based upon the idea that classic civil service system is a mechanic standard, which ignored the people and their context. According to Cox, Buck and Morgan (1994), the neutral selection of personnel includes job analysis and position classification. However, that neutrality many no longer be present. So, for them it is necessary to examine personnel performance in order to understand better the process of changing the civil service system.

Classic civil service system treats personnel processes as a mechanistic operation as if only the knowledge, skills and abilities were enough for improving practices. Berman, Bowman, West and Van Wart (2001) emphasized the context of the people work as a decisive component beyond understanding of public sector personnel practice. The personnel practices would be the elements which begin the examination of civil service system performance.

In the same way, Dresang (1984), Nigro and Nigro (2000) and Shafritz, Hyde and Rosenbloom (1986) provide a dynamic view of personnel practice management and places there at center of government activity. For them, the government does not exist independent from its employees. The people who work in government determine, in large part, the kind of government we have. Conversely, government works the way it does because of its personnel systems.

² Those interviews were doing during September 2002 at State of Mexico and October 2002 at Ohio.

Public personnel administration is more than a series of steps or organizations constructs. It is more than recruitment, hiring, retention, job analysis, evaluation, and promotion. It is a cluster of activities that are changing and evolving, with some activities changing more rapidly than other activities. Furthermore, and critically, personnel practice is shaped and influenced by political goals and expectations.

Based upon the views of those authors, we will develop this paper in order to two important ideas; first, changes in governance can be understood more clearly by examining changes personnel practice, and secondly, by learning how the personnel system and the government interact, we can both predict and, to some extent, make suggestions that may facilitate more effective governance in the near future.

Civil service in historic perspective

The recruitment and selection of government employees has been for long the most controversial and politically charged personnel endeavor. Not surprisingly, most reform efforts of the past focused on the hiring process. Which individual the government hires is a very clear statement of political and social policy. Whatever the choice, the process of hiring creates a work force that reflects society in its political, economic, and social character.

The Spoils System

Contemporary American moralism condemns the spoils system of political appointment by the victorious in popular elections (U.S. Civil Service Commission, 1941: 20).³ Americans are so imbued with ideals of merit that the notion of patronage is offensive. Indeed, in common parlance, to be “patronized” is considered an insult. Despite the fact that patronage – or the spoils system – is enthusiastically supported in some areas of the US and in other countries, our twentieth-century perspective condemns the practice as abhorrent. In the early nineteenth century, however, the spoils system was regarded with respect. During the federalist period, the personnel system had been based upon personal rather than political connections and was looked upon as vaguely

³ During the Senate debate on the nomination of Martin Van Buren as minister to Great Britain, the phrase “to the victor belong the spoils of the enemy” was coined by Senator William Marcy in his defense of Van Buren’s spoils policies.

undemocratic. The argument advanced by proponents of political patronage was that the political will of the people had been demonstrated by their electoral preference for one party over another. This will was thwarted when officeholders of the *losing* party were retained in office (Rohr, 1986).⁴ In fact, the spoils system of patronage appointments dominated state-level politics long before the Jackson presidency. While unscrupulous politicians, who manipulated growing democratic sentiments in the states, ultimately exploited the spoils system its inception mirrored popular opinion. Just as democracy meant an expanded franchise, political patronage came to mean an expanded opportunity to participate in governance as a public servant. Despite the insistences of later reformers, the spoils system was considered, at the time, appropriate in a government becoming less republican and more democratic. Thus the patronage system or “rotation in office” was itself a *reform* measure when introduced by President Andrew Jackson.

Jackson justified his position by arguing three main points. First, his policies would give ordinary citizens a greater chance to service in public office by rotating employees as political fortunes changed. Second, the spoils system permitted Jackson to remove superannuated personnel. These older government employees remained in office far past their useful working careers, protected by family ties and convention. To say the least, their presence reduced effectiveness and limited opportunities for younger personnel to assume positions of responsibility. Finally, the spoils system eliminated the abuses of nepotism (Rohr, 1978). William Dickson, writing in 1832, supported Jackson’s viewpoint, observing that with a reasonable rotation, every citizen of political aspirations and experience... may hope to crown his family with the reflected honor which office confers... This is the peerage which the republic offers... (White, 1958: 292).

Jackson felt that by rotating offices through political appointments officials would be forced to be more responsive to public interests. If jobs depended upon the political party and the continuance of the party in

⁴ This argument is still used today to justify dismissal of career civil servants with a supposed ideological bent different from that of the current administration. Indeed, one of the primary tasks of public administration theories in the 1970s and 1980s has been to reconcile the administrative state with American conceptions of democracy and constitutionalism.

office depended upon a satisfied electorate, then the bureaucrats would be forced to accommodate voters' wishes. Jackson also felt that tenure in office was unnecessary because, "the duties of all public officers are so plain and simple that men of intelligence may readily qualify themselves for their performances" (White, 1954: 30).

This "democratization" of public service was central to the Jacksonian understanding of the politics of the time. Balancing elitism (in the guise of professionalism) and democracy (open hiring) has been at the heart of public personnel systems ever since. Despite the easy label of "corrupt practice" attached to patronage and open hiring systems, the conflict between the morally correct goal of a neutral and objective civil service and the questionable objectives of patronage remain relevant today. No system is based purely upon civil service precepts of objectivity, neutrality and merit analysis. At some point every system gives way to the primacy of "politics" in the selection of certain personnel. While we judge most civil service systems by the *infrequency* of such hires, no system operates without such political appointments.

As Francis Rourke (1992) observed, both political responsiveness and administrative professionalism remain highly ranked values in a democratic bureaucracy.

The question at hand is where to draw the line? The experience of the United States again is instructive. From the very beginning attributes other than strict job descriptions and paper qualifications were critical to being selected for a position. In the late eighteenth century, the equivalent of being a party member was to have served in the Revolutionary Army, or the government. Connections, through the shared experience of attending one of the four or five universities in the country, were equally important. This was a government by educated elite, performing rather specialized tasks. Only later, as the size of the government grows does the diversity of the types of jobs available also grow. No longer are all jobs idiosyncratic. Literally hundreds may be asked to perform quite similar and routine tasks. The need for an exclusively educated elite for the majority of jobs ended long before Andrew Jackson came to office. He could advocate what we call today "job simplification" precisely because many jobs required minimal skill and/or experience. But to conjure up images of an unruly and uneducated rabble dominating public employment was wrong. By focusing on the more critical and higher-level positions Crenson (1975) found that Jackson's appointees were no less

educated than those of Washington, Jefferson or Quincy Adams. Open hiring was possible for other jobs, because the jobs themselves required little education, experience or sophistication (Cox *et al.*, 1994).

From the start of the so-called spoils system, a dichotomy existed between open hiring and political appointment. All owed their appointment to an elected or party official, but some positions were filled simply to fulfill a political obligation and others were filled to fulfill a specific political need. This is *not* a trivial distinction. Furthermore, from virtually the start of the spoils era some positions were regarded as too complex to be subjected to the vagaries of patronage. Thus, by the mid-1840s, the U.S. Naval Observatory was using written examinations and educational requirements to screen applicants for positions as astronomers at the Observatory. The practice of using “non-political” methods of selection for certain professional and technical positions continued throughout the spoils era. In 1851, during Millard Fillmore’s administration, Congress passed a resolution attempting to remedy some civil service problems by requesting Cabinet officers to devise a system for “examination, classification, graded pay, and systematic promotion” (Hoogenboom, 1968: 6) for their subordinates. In 1853, Congress passed yet another measure that included provisions for examinations. While the examinations were often meaningless, the precedent for civil service examinations was set by the 1853 legislation (Cox *et al.*, 1994).

The nadir of the spoils system came with the election of President James Buchanan. Buchanan succeeded Pierce, a fellow Democrat, to the Presidency in 1857; yet he ruthlessly removed the Democrats who had supported Pierce for re-nomination, leading William Marcy to observe plaintively that he never intended to pillage his own camp (Fish, 1963).

The Long Road to a Merit System

Emerging from the military reforms of the late eighteenth century in Prussia and Sweden, the concept of a modern civil service appeared nearly simultaneously in several countries in Europe. The parallels between the ideal model of civil service and the Weberian bureaucracy (Gerth and Mills, 1946) are striking. Both have a bias for salaried, professionals, who are required to fit the job, over what Weber describes as the dilettante, or the patronage appointee of the first century of government in the United States.

Initial steps toward reform were made during Lincoln's administration. In 1863, John Bigelow wrote an evaluation of the French customs service; the report included recommendations for competitive examinations. In 1864, Senator Sumner introduced a civil service reform bill calling for examinations and for promotions based on seniority and merit, but the bill was tabled (Fish, 1963). Also in 1864, Congressman Thomas Jenckes introduced the first of his many bills dealing with civil service reform. This was defeated as were bills in 1865, 1867, and 1868. The 1868 bill was accompanied by an extensive report on several foreign civil service systems, and furnished much information to the civil service reform movement (Van Riper, 1958: 68).

In 1871, the first modern civil service legislation passed as a rider to a civil appropriation bill. It read:

Sec. 9 That the President of the United States be, and he is hereby, authorized to prescribe such rules and regulations for the admission of persons into the civil service of the United States as will best promote the efficiency hereof, and ascertain the fitness of each candidate in respect to age, health, character, knowledge, and ability for the branch of service into which he seeks to enter; and for this purpose the President is authorized to employ suitable persons to conduct said inquiries, to prescribe their duties, and to establish regulations for the conduct of persons who may receive appointments in the civil service (Van Riper: 68).

Much to congressional surprise, President Grant acted on the legislation, appointing a seven-man commission with George Curtis, a leading reformer, as chairman. The legislation, which is still in force, is remarkable for three reasons. First, it gives the President an authority over federal personnel management that he had not had before. Second, it provides a central personnel agency for the government. Third, it provides the President with the first instance of advice and assistance that typifies modern line and staff relationships. The Commission finally failed when Congress refused to renew its funding in 1873 and 1874 (Cox *et al.*, 1994).

Outside the political structure, the reform movement was organizing. In May 1877, the New York Civil Service Reform Association was founded; in 1881, the National Civil Service Reform League was organized. They were both prodigious propagandists; in 1880, 1881, and 1882, the New York Association circulated over half a million documents on reform. They wrote articles, held essay contests, and published magazines (Van Riper, 1958).

Although President Hayes made some inroads on reform, he personally utilized the patronage system to its fullest. The reformers, therefore, supported the candidacy of James Garfield. Garfield was assassinated in 1881 by a disappointed office seeker, and Chester Arthur, the deposed collector of the New York Custom House, became President. The reform organizations immediately publicized the connection between the murder of Garfield and the spoils system. Dorman Eaton (1881) declared "...the source and significance of Guiteau's acts have been found in our spoils system of administration" (p. 148). The reformers at long last had a powerful image and the attention of the public. When coupled with the scandals of Grant's administration and the conviction in 1882 of General Curtis for levying political assessments, the power of the reform movement became the principal issue in the 1882 congressional elections. The Republicans suffered severe reversals in the election. Fear of reprisals if a Democrat became the next President spurred members of Congress to consider a bill already before them. Senator George Pendleton, aided by the New York Civil Service Reform Association, placed a reform bill before the Senate in January 1881.

The proposed civil service examinations came under fire from legislators as well as party bosses on the grounds that examinations are not only elitist but also unrelated to requisite job skills. Civil service reformers successfully rebutted these arguments. The House passed the bill without debate, and on January 16, 1883, President Arthur signed the Pendleton Act into law (Van, Riper, 1958). The reformers were equally successful with the states, such as Massachusetts and New York, quickly followed with laws creating state civil service commissions (Cox *et al.*, 1994).

The Pendleton Act

The Pendleton Act is based largely on the British civil service model. The central concept is appointment by competitive examination, with political neutrality of appointment as a vital corollary. The Act established a Commission comprised of three full-time members. At first these commissioners were to serve indefinite terms, but in 1956 a system of staggered, renewable six-year terms of office was established. The chief examiner was to administer the system. Minor administrative details were established: A six-month probation for all appointees was put in place, no drunkards could be hired, only references as to character and residence were to be accepted from Senators and Representatives, appointments were to be made from those receiving the highest grades (thus allowing

some discretion by the employer), and criminal sanctions were established for corrupt administration of the exam (Van Riper, 1958).

Provisions for practical tests and for entrance at any level of office *are uniquely American*. In 1900-1901, fewer than 200 of the 1477 civil service appointments required more than a secondary school education. Theodore Roosevelt, as civil service commissioner, tried – and failed – to require cattle inspectors to pass a test on branding, reading, shooting, riding mean horses, and roping and throwing steers (White, 1954). To guarantee congressional support, Washington offices were awarded to citizens of various states in proportion to the states' population. No more than two members of the same family could hold public office (Van Riper, 1958).

State laws followed the federal pattern by using a board of commissioners and by emphasizing testing for job entry. In fact, state laws frequently were much broader in scope. For example, the new Massachusetts law applied prospectively to all state officials. Thus, within a relatively short period most employees were covered. It required a specific exemption in statute for employees to be left out of the civil service system. In contrast, only about 10 percent of the federal positions were placed in the classified civil service; the remainder were left to be brought under the Act at the President's discretion, and even then, laborers and those whose appointments were subject to congressional approval were exempt. The Pendleton Act is permissive in that immediate and total compliance is not required. The Act does not compel the President either to implement or to enforce it. The proposition was made that perhaps the Act was unnecessary because it did not compel presidential compliance and because the President already had the authority to implement reform under the 1871 Act. The accepted response was that the President could not act effectively without the encouragement of Congress, and in addition, the executive branch lacked the authority to impose criminal sanctions for violation (Cox *et al.*, 1994).

Contemporary public personnel practice

To this point, we have examined the past, focusing on the dominant ideas that have shaped personnel policy. Now we turn to an examination of current personnel practice, taking particular note of the interplay of past policies that help shape contemporary practice. The specific practices that are to be examined are job analysis, recruitment and selection, performance appraisal, training, and pay.

Job Analysis

How do we know what kinds of persons to hire? This apparently straightforward question is not particularly easy to answer. We hire people to do a “job.” But how was it decided what tasks and function constituted the “job”? That job was created because someone (or more likely some group) analyzed and examined the tasks assigned to an organization, and then broke down those tasks into discrete activities. When the analysis has reduced the task into manageable clusters of similar activities, those activities are designated as a job.

This particular description is only the first step in actual practice. Job analysis extends beyond the behaviors and activities associated with the performance of a particular job to include the skills, knowledge, and responsibilities needed to be successful in that job (Bureau of Intergovernmental Personnel Programs, 1973). The information gathered about the work activities that constitute a job and the skills associated with those activities put job analyses at the core of personnel practice. The job analysis serves as the foundation of a position classification and pay scheme by relating and grouping jobs. Additionally, the job analysis is the organizing structure of all recruitment, selection, and training activities (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 1979).

None of the above activities would be possible in the modern context without the information generated by a job analysis. In the effort to define jobs in a manner that is unrelated to the person in the job (what are the activities and skills needed for the job, not what does the person in the job do), job analysis is the key to any attempt at achieving “neutral competence”. The position classification scheme is based almost completely in the job analysis process. Closely related to position classification and, therefore, job analysis is job evaluation. This process is an attempt to distinguish among jobs (or more likely job classes) for the purposes of pay. The link between job analysis and recruitment, selection and training is still more obvious. The description of skills and competencies necessary to perform a task that is one end result of the job analysis can easily be converted into a job description. The job description in turn serves as the basis for determining who should get a job (recruitment and selection) or what specialized skills are necessary before the job is undertaken (training).

Recruitment and selection

We have discussed the process of defining and creating jobs so that government may get on with the task of serving the public. The next step is to find the persons with the necessary skills and competencies to perform those jobs. The type of person sought dominated the recruitment and selection processes throughout the nineteenth century. Historically, the jobs performed in government could be made relatively simple through the division of labor (remember Jackson's dicta that no government job should be beyond the capability of any American). However, by the progressive era, (although arguably by the Civil War period), many government tasks were too complex for persons without specific skills and education. More recently, the idea that good government was the product of performance in the job has gained acceptance. The concern was not willingness to serve, but capacity to serve. Whereas the nineteenth-century concern was to find people to fill government jobs (i.e., recruitment), the twentieth-century concern was to match the skills of the recruit to the demands of the job (i.e., selection).

How does bias, or lack of objectivity, slip into the selection process? Such bias occurs in two ways. First, bias may be the product of the conscious or unconscious beliefs of those in decision-making positions (discrimination). The difficulties of minorities in getting hired into government have been attributed to such bias. The other problem of bias is in the nature of the selection process itself.

This latent form of bias is often the product of human nature. We are limited in our knowledge of how to connect selection processes such as examinations and interviews to successful performance in the job. This problem is one of validity: "The key dimension to validity is job relatedness." Job relatedness means essentially that the criteria being measured in the test [selection instrument] are relevant and significant factors in the jobs for which selection decisions are to be made" (Shafritz *et al.*, 1986: 428-429). Also we are limited by the idiosyncrasies of the selection process. Thus, for example, interviews during the selection process can be biased by factors such as the timing of the interview, the character of the other interviews, or the bias of interviewers based on appearance or background. In some instances these forms of bias are conscious, although more typically they are unconscious. This difficulty is exacerbated because such unconscious forms of bias cannot be eliminated. The only way to deal with such a difficulty is to multiply the numbers of selection processes to counteract such biases. For example, if

interviews are part of the process of selection, the appropriate practice is to have more than one person conduct interviews to eliminate whatever bias (unconscious) may exist with each individual who serves as an interviewer.

Performance appraisal

The purpose and goal of performance appraisal is to review and evaluate the performance of the individual at specified time intervals. Such evaluations can be used to determine training needs, pay, or promotion. Performance appraisals are intended as major inputs in determining career directions and opportunities for employees. Yet such efforts are beset by numerous problems.

Few problems have been as vexing to personnel administrators as that of performance appraisal. Certainly it is the most maligned area of personnel and in many cases seems to be tolerated only because no one can think of any realistic, better alternatives. At stake is a process that should control the development and growth of the organization itself. Performance appraisal can be restated as a series of questions: What qualities are we now recognizing, rewarding, and developing in employees? What messages are we conveying to individuals about their behaviors, skills, and attitudes? And what ideal qualities do we wish to see developed and enhanced in our employees for the accomplishment of our future objectives? (Ivancivich and Glueck, 1983).

The performance appraisal process is central to a merit-based personnel system. Yet that relationship is keyed on the development of a relevant, unbiased, significant, and practical performance appraisal process. These limitations are as often a product of human nature as deficiencies are in the process. Shafritz, Hyde, and Rosenbloom assess those defects as follows:

- Appraisals tend to be subjective, impressionistic, and non-comparable
- The standards of some raters are much tougher than those of other raters.
- Rating may be more a test of the writing skills of the rater than of the performance of the employee.
- Goals of performance analysis and potential in future positions may conflict.
- Lack of credibility and fairness in ratings (pp. 434-436).

The two key problems for the future are to improve the training of supervisors and managers so that they use the appraisal process more properly and to improve the managerial system to restore the credibility of ratings.

Training

One of the uses of performance appraisal is to determine the training and developmental needs of the employee. Approaches to training have varied widely over the years. Often there has been a tendency to reject training as unnecessary—since the employee should have had the requisite skills to perform the job when hired. This attitude has contributed greatly to the tendency to cut training funds first when fiscal problems emerge.

In the last two decades, the role of training has expanded. First, it was determined that if minorities were to have a chance at employment, pre-employment and promotion enhancement training programs were needed. Secondly, the approach to jobs that suggests that all the skills that will be needed should be acquired before hiring has been replaced by the recognition of the changing character of many jobs. Training has become a career-long need, even for those who remain in a single field for their entire work life. Third, training has emerged as a way to enhance the skills of those in the job to improve the quality as well as productivity of work performed. Finally, training and development have been promoted as a way to enhance career goals and long-range job prospects.

The creation of the Federal Executive Institute (FEI) is but one example of innovative ideas in training and career development. That model was the basis for the development of management certification programs in such states as Georgia, North Carolina, Texas and Arizona reflecting a commitment to training as a central feature of a broad-gauged personnel development program. While some still view training as a waste of money and an appropriate starting point for budget cutting—others recognize that success in attracting and keeping skilled public sector employees is based in part in responding to the development needs of those employees. Honing employee skills to perform well now and developing skills to undertake all future challenges on the job must be considered worthwhile investments in human capital.

Compensation

One of the great myths of personnel management is that compensation is the key personnel motivator. Public personnel practice has suffered greatly from a schizophrenic tendency to use pay, and then not use pay, as the way to produce better performance. The result has been to create the worst of all possible worlds: Salaries are low, and good performance does not yield higher pay.

The primary concern in creating public employee pay systems has been equity. While equity can be thought of as having both internal and external components, the focus has most often been on internal equity. Linking pay to the position classification scheme, the emphasis on longevity of service, rather than performance, and the effort to ensure stability of income all reflect the concern for internal equity. These efforts at internal equity are not without difficulty, particularly where they are linked to position classification, job analysis, and performance appraisal processes, which themselves may be deficient. Politically controversial problems such as comparable worth emerge because of defects in the job analysis process that are reflected in the pay scheme rather than in the pay scheme itself. Also, the highly questionable validity and fairness of performance appraisal processes lead many to overemphasize longevity-in-the-job criteria for pay raises, and this discourages superior performance.

Concern about external equity similarly creates controversy. External equity refers to the salaries paid to public employees relative to that paid to private sector employees or other public employees with similar jobs. The central problem is that of the appropriateness of many such comparisons. Should, for example, the salaries of police officers in San Diego, Atlanta, and Indianapolis be the same? Are the jobs of police officers and private security guards the same? Is the job of a middle manager in the Department of Defense handling contracts worth millions comparable to that of a manager in a regional grocery chain? These questions are difficult to answer. At a minimum, an emphasis on comparability results emphasizes average increases and average salary structures. Difference of skills and competencies and differences of circumstances disappear in this process of averaging.

Another concern about compensation involves the structure of the pay scheme. In personnel systems that are not founded on merit, the pay scheme is based on perception of performance and possible connections. Merit-based systems link salaries to the position classification system.

Typically merit systems also rely on a salary matrix that provides for increases within a grade for longevity. Under such a system, each position has a salary range designated for it. The employee progresses through the salary range based on performance and longevity.

The final concern about pay is whether it is, in reality, a motivator. A number of analysts suggest that pay is, at best, a temporary satisfier (Herzberg, 1964). Others also suggest that other factors, such as a sense of accomplishment, may be as important as pay. Finally, it is generally accepted that a broad-based perception among civil servants that public sector salaries are too low is a source of dissatisfaction. Salaries are inevitably problematic. In an environment where the general public regards civil salaries as too high, but the public sector employees see themselves as underpaid, controversy is bound to ensue.

Political neutrality

Herbert Kaufman (1956) suggested that the three cornerstones of public personnel administration are executive leadership, representativeness, and neutral competence. The changing understanding of personnel practice largely is based on the changing emphasis on one of these three cornerstones. The core concept of the civil service reform movement of the late nineteenth century represented a renewed emphasis on neutral competence and, somewhat, the rejection of executive leadership (at least to the extent it embodied “spoils”).

In the last two decades, the centrality of neutral competence has been challenged. First, in the 1970s, the advocates of the “New Public Administration” chose to emphasize representativeness. Thus the bureaucrat was to be a policy advocate who exercised independent judgment and who struck a pro-client attitude in the management of operations. The ideal was the model of the street-level bureaucrat who knew very well the problems of his “clients” and exercised any available organizational discretion on their behalf. The bureaucrat became the representative of these groups, advocating programs for them before the central administration. The emphasis on the concept of the bureaucracy as the “fourth branch” of government also distanced this group from the philosophical advocacy of executive leadership. This distancing of the bureaucrat from the chief executive helped reinforce the importance of the concept of neutral competence. Advocates of the new public administration sought policy activists who would use the power of government to help the “underclass” and, on the other hand, sought

advocates of a view that partisan politics must be held at arms' length. The classic British civil service model of neutral and unbiased implementation of the law regardless of personal views was upheld. Government thus was both the problem and the solution to social and economic difficulties.

The period from the late 1970s through the early 1990s brought a reaction to the new public administration. The work of politically conservative think tanks such as the Heritage Foundation sought to re-emphasize executive leadership as the core concept in personnel management. This group linked itself to the concepts of the bureaucracy of the 1930s, when an earlier generation of academics sought to reshape the bureaucracy in support of a President whom they agreed with politically and ideologically. This viewpoint (in contrast to the 1930s efforts) explicitly rejects the concept of neutral competence. The "proper" role of the bureaucrat is to seek the interests of the President not to execute the laws if a conflict exists between policy and the law. This attitude about law is derived from the effort to distinguish between statutory enactments and regulations. Statutory enactment and regulations must be obeyed, although the President has considerable discretion as to how to implement the statute. Regulations are deemed nothing more than the embodiment of the discretionary choices of prior administrations. For a bureaucrat to continue to enforce regulations created by prior administrations is defiance of the President. The keys to understanding this perspective are, first, to recognize the fundamental assumption that bureaucracy is not a fourth independent branch but merely an extension of the President and his policies and, next, to accept the idea that neutral competence is meaningless; and, therefore, only obeisance to executive leadership can serve as the cornerstone of personnel management and practice.

Today, support for the concept of political neutrality comes from a perspective that originated among public choice theorists (Savas, 1982, 1987; Butler, 1985) as adopted by those in the "reinventing government" movement (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992) and now is one of the core tenets of the New Public Management. The notion is that those in the private sector are better managers. The solution to the problem of inefficient government is to imitate private business practices, or better yet, simply privatize operations (even personnel functions). If government operations are run under contract with a private company then, presumably, politics is totally negated. It is the ultimate in political neutrality—no politics at all. In many governments, personnel systems

(nee human resource management functions) are now in private hands. At a minimum, the standards by which to judge operations are those of the business firm. These views even call into question the advisability of a career civil service (Devine, 1987; Heatherly and Pines, 1989). This is the political environment within which civil service reform takes place.

Civil service reform in Summit county

In 1984, voters of the County of Summit in Ohio approved a significant restructuring of the government of that county. A central feature of the political initiative to approve a new, home-rule Charter was the public and media perception that the civil service system was broken (Clark, 1979). While the restructuring ranged beyond changes in civil service, the popular expectation was that the primary result of the new Charter was a more efficient and professional civil service. Missing from the County were such common personnel practices as applicant testing, job analysis, promotional examinations and performance measurement. The conventional wisdom was that the system was unprofessional and slightly “corrupt.” The common view was that people got jobs because of “connections” and “politics,” not credentials and experience. The popular stereotype of the lazy, not very smart, public employee seemed all too real. As with most public perceptions these views were often incorrect, but contained a kernel of truth. Even those who were advocates of public employees among elected officials agreed that drastic measures were required (Clark: 10-11).

Yet, the initial Charter reform produced little change in the civil service system. Especially when compared to the classically structured and eight-decade old civil service system in the City of Akron, the County system seemed an expensive and cumbersome artifact from the nineteenth century. Because of the failure to make anticipated changes in personnel practices, the public again pushed for change and in 1995 a second public referenda was held, this time making changes specifically in the civil service system. The voters approved the creation of a Human Resources Commission to “provide a fair, efficient, and economical system of county employment ensuring that persons are employed without discrimination. The Commission hears all appeals previously under the jurisdiction of the “State Personnel Board of Review” (Summit County website, november 12, 2002). The Commission was to be responsible for a complete revamping of the county personnel system. The new Human Resources Commission was to develop rules and regulations concerning job analysis, the classification system,

performance measures, promotional examinations and grievance procedures. Some of this work was done but little was ever presented to the County Council (the county's legislative body) for final approval. Progress has been slow. According to the County Charter (Section 6.04) and the Commission's enabling legislation (95-454) the Commission is required to create a position/salary classification system, which incorporates the mandate of "broad-banding" and an equitable salary structure. This aspect of civil service reform has received more attention than other aspects of the HRC mandate. The County has twice since 1995 attempted to revise the salary classification system. The second of those efforts is nearing completion and is being conducted under a contract with the University of Akron with one of the co-authors of this chapter serving as Principal Investigator.

Current personnel reform

With the election of a new County Executive in november 2000, changes in the personnel system reemerged on the policy agenda. The centerpiece of the change was a renewed look at the salary classification system. For all intents and purposes the County operates at least six salary plans

- Three for classified employees,
- One for most unclassified employees,
- One for the Veterans' Commission employees, and
- Multiple systems in collective bargaining agreements.

The current system is premised on the notion that all salary increases for employees are based upon merit-based performance appraisals. In part because the County Council was unconvinced that the performance appraisal system in place was workable, in 1999 the Council rejected this element of the current pay system. This meant that there is no way for an employee to gain a salary increase, regardless of performance, except through a job change. Thus, the current practice is a perpetual game of title changes to adjust salaries.

There are other defects. Educational requirements are non-existent for virtually all positions, even some professional and technical positions. The qualifications for most jobs are so minimal anyone can qualify. Political connections become as good a basis for hiring such "unskilled labor" as any. This ensures that "the way we have always done it" is the watchword. New ideas about practices and processes are rare. The idea

that only new hires could be brought in at the “mid-point” of the salary range for a position has meant that long-time employees were *guaranteed* to be the lowest paid employee. “Title-shopping” is rampant. There is neither a mathematical, nor a career basis, for the salaries in the three salary systems for the classified employees. The operational basis for having three salary systems for classified employees (administrative, technical, professional) was never applied to actual positions. Salary comparability was not a factor in developing the salary system for employees. Lastly, it was assumed, but not yet known, whether the salaries of technical and professional employees were adequate. The current study was responsible for paying particular attention to the salaries in computer operations, telecommunications and other technical fields.

Morale among county employees is low. The arrangements are so stacked against a person who wishes a *career* in the public service it is little wonder anyone stays. Having to train new employees, who start at salaries considerably higher than your own can try the patience and goodwill of any employee. As a manager, having to fiddle and finagle the system simply to recognize the worth of a good employee is difficult. The salary system is “upside-down.” Those who are most likely to be paid an “equitable” wage are those in the lowest pay categories. Those with more experience, training and responsibility have less comparable salaries. The technical professionals and the senior managers are the most likely to suffer what is called salary compression.

Our role is neither to review the changes being made, nor to critique the defects in the county salary system. However, the defects in the system are instructive, because of the political and popular reaction to the system. After twenty years of government under a new Charter, the perception of “corruption” and simple incompetence among county employees remains. Equally important, it is the salary system that is at the heart of the problems. Even if job analyses are completed and performance appraisals conducted, unless the employees and politicians view the salary system as fair the entire civil service system is suspect. Thus, civil service reform, in Summit County, as in the State of Mexico, begins with the salary structure, not the other elements of a civil service system.

The summit county personnel system in perspective

What are the lessons of the continuing efforts to reform the civil service system in Summit County? Several that come immediately to mind are:

Perceptions. Because the public perceives that the traditional civil service system currently in place in the City of Akron is the “right” way to do things, the less rule-bound and structured system of Summit County suffers by comparison. Unless the County system “looks” like the City model, then in the public mind it is defective. As with any broadly held public attitude, these views are not reserved for non-public employees. As often as not the “victims” of the current system, county civil service employees, are the most vocal and cynical about the county arrangement. Even as the City moves to modify its civil service system (Collins, 2002) to give senior managers more control and “flexibility” in a direct imitation of the New Public Management, in the public mind that system remains the exemplar.

Charter reform. Because legislative, and even Charter, change is permissive, such change does not guarantee reform. Changes begun twenty years ago have never fulfilled public expectation. The sweeping change implied by the words of the new Charter and the Charter amendment creating the Human Resources Commission have produced only incremental change. The implementation of change is more complicated and time-consuming than the public desires. The classic political “impatience” of the American public, which searches for the quick fix, becomes more negative in its assessment of current arrangement. The likelihood of more radical, but not necessarily more effective, reforms become possible in such a political environment.

Salaries. The mechanisms for determining initial salaries and for calculating salary adjustments are at the heart of the matter. The morale problems among employees and the perceptions of “corruption” by the public are based upon the administration (or mal-administration) of the salary classification system. Old-fashioned ideas of getting good people and keeping them are still the basis of the public assessment of personnel systems. At the most critical and “public” levels, the County does neither well.

Salary compression. Those most adversely affected by the salary incongruities are the senior staff and those in technical occupations. This disparity is derived from two different phenomena. First the most visible appointees, those selected through patronage processes have low salaries to avoid a public uproar. Persons with similar responsibilities in non-patronage positions in other regions of the country (i.e. “professionals” such as county managers and their deputies) receive

considerably higher salaries. The form of hire actually depresses the salary that is acceptable to the general public. Technical professionals, most of whom are hired based upon academic and professional credentials, have low salaries because they must remain below that of their political - appointee bosses.

The dilemma of performance appraisal. Nothing is more vexing in the development of civil service than the ambivalence toward the concept of merit-based raises. Public employee unions and most employees are almost universal in their opposition to such a concept, yet the alternative designation for a civil service system is a merit system. How can there be a civil service system if merit is not a factor in appointment and continuation in employment? Many civil service systems are little more than merit-based hiring systems. One of the reasons for this is that few employees, or supervisors, believe that any of the existing methods for assessing merit in performance are fair or realistic. When everyone is deemed “satisfactory” regardless of performance then merit-based salary systems become experience-based systems. When employees believe that ratings are based upon the whims or prejudices of supervisors then they will seek the “refuge” of longevity pay to protect themselves from the unfairness and inequities of the system. Finding a performance appraisal system that can be easily implemented and is credible with employees and supervisors is akin to the search for the Holy Grail. The reforms in Summit County collapsed with the failure to find a performance appraisal system that everyone could agree was fair. Sadly, politics can play a negative role here. For those who know how to manipulate the “merit-system,” the lack of an adequate performance appraisal process is an advantage. This has been the situation in Summit County for many years.

Promotion and retention. The public image of the Summit system was of a government overburdened with inefficient and incompetent employees who worked for the county because no one else would hire them. The near classic image of the government as the employer of last resort became a self-reinforcing image as the public vigorously opposed salary increases by applying the dual logic that county employees were already overpaid and under-worked. When dedicated professionals entered the public service they encountered low wages, long hours and few rewards. As the system devolved into a shell-game of title changes and phantom promotions those who worked in limited professional classes with real educational and experiential requirements for appointment were

left with no means of promotion and career advancement. Rather than a career as a professional public servant the person is left with the uncertainty of a low-paying job with no advancement possible. Not surprisingly, turnover among technical professionals is higher than in other job classes.

The focus on salary levels and career advancement has had one positive benefit. The focal point of salary analyses, in both 1997 and 2002, were the salaries of technical professionals in the government. Recruitment and retention of competent technical professionals has become a universal concern. The salary analysis helped raise salaries somewhat, but the other defects in the system meant that the results were less than positive. The 2002 salary analysis emphasizes both current salary comparability and a career perspective.

Civil service reform in the State of Mexico

Historical review

The implementation of civil service in Mexico is an old aspiration. Early efforts for civil service reform were made prior to the Mexican Revolution, 1910-1921. One reason civil service reform has not been successful is that the administrative career service has been politicized. After the Mexican Revolution, primary interests focused on stability and control of the country. Stability and control are crucial elements for reform. Lacking either element, appropriate conditions for national development are absent. To begin to focus on demands originating from the revolutionary process, new efforts were oriented to constitute a structure, which would provide an answer and allow the building of a new state. It is for this reason that the emphasis was placed more on structure than employees. For the leaders of the revolution public administration was both a way to make a new State and include all of those who participate in the process. Because of the efficiency of public administration personnel it was in the interest of the politicians to retain them within government service, but in a subservient or secondary role to politics. This particular version of the spoils system was not like that of nineteenth-century America in which hiring was designed to promote democracy. Rather it was designed to benefit political leaders who profited through political connections and patronage. That fact created a strong system of patronage where groups utilized the resources of public organizations in order to pay favors and provide benefits to particular groups and individuals (Merino, 1996: 21-22).

After 1930 some changes in personnel systems were made. One change was the establishment of a civil service system at the department of foreign affairs, particularly at consulates. While preliminary efforts were weak, in 1938 under the direction of President Cárdenas (1934-1940) a special rule regulating the relationship between public employees and the government was promulgated. Later, that special regulation was incorporated into the Constitution. In 1960 Article 123 of the Constitution, which regulates all labor conditions, was changed to create two categories: A, for all of labor personnel and B for public servants. Although these classifications covered the relationship between the State and public servants, it did not apply to those working at public enterprises. It was primarily about the right to strike and other laborer rights (Espinoza, 1993: 142). The regulation created after the constitutional reform made it mandatory for certain categories of employees to join a union. It also created a salary classification system consisting of 32 pay categories. Categories 1-16 were the general public servants who are members of the union. Categories 17-32 set the salaries for public servants not in the Union (Espinoza, 1993). This important change gave a great amount of power not only to unions, but also to the formal leaders of organizations who have an important role in retaining personnel in their posts. At both mid-level and high bureaucratic levels loyalty to the bosses was the most important criteria for keeping a job. Loyalty to the leader permeated the organizational culture. This may be considered another uniquely Mexican “spoils system” because of the way of hiring and promoting people in the bureaucracy. In Mexico, although a single party political system dominates national government, the reality is the different political groups inside the party have their own vested interests. Nonetheless, the change expanded opportunities to be appointed to positions in government service.

Politicians achieving public positions used those positions for acquiring monetary and other tangible benefits for themselves. Thus, they became less responsive to public interests. One difference with the experience in the United States is that public administration positions were seen as economic rewards, i.e. patronage, with politicians reaping benefits. They were not viewed as opportunities for achieving higher performance in the public sector.

Twenty years ago President Miguel de la Madrid, an instrumental figure pushing for structural changes in the economy, fought corrupt practices through the creation of a national program called “Moral

Renovation of the Society”. The reform included a wider vision of the role of state in order to change some of their functions and in another hand to modify the behavior of public servant. This proposal included so, a program for creating a civil service career system. The program established the practice of recruitment and appointment by competitive examination and promotions based on merit. Because the reform was attempted during an economic crisis, those problems in the country caused the initiative to pass in second place.

Since the time of de la Madrid many attempts have been made to promote and implement civil service reform. Unfortunately, each attempt has been defeated. Political and economic barriers have been the principal obstacles to reforming civil service. There are three primary reasons for this situation. First, economic pressures caused administrative reforms to fail—each initiative came in second place. Secondly, there was considerable opposition from employee unions. Unions considered the establishment of civil service reforms dangerous to their objectives. Third, reforms met with resistance from the bureaucratic elite and mid-level administrators of President Zedillo’s administration (1996-2000). Bureaucratic in-fighting halted progress on civil service reform (Hernández, 1993).

Another set of proposals for civil service reform is coming. There is some evidence that new conditions make reform possible in Mexico—the success of the National Action Party (PAN) in 2000 and 2006. In 2001, for the first time in more than 70 years a new president from a different political party was elected under the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). Senators met to discuss a new civil service bill and it was approved by the Deputies (April 2003). The importance of the new political arrangements was affirmed when the PRI party members approved a proposed the civil service law. Without that first step the law would not have passed. The main characteristics of this new bill are: the appointment by competitive selection through public postings; promotions based on performance evaluation; training programs, compensation in the event of job loss; and performance appraisal to evaluate individual employees every five years. Every item is considered applicable to all personnel levels—from the lowest levels to general managers (no consideration has been given to operative personnel or the employee union). Even though that process was quite difficult and does not include all public servant, it represents a very important event at the history of civil service history in Mexico.

Local government reform initiatives

Considering how difficult it has been at the federal level to propose and implement administrative reform — a level that values the professionalism of its employees—reform at local levels is even more difficult to implement. There is no evidence that local governments have implemented civil service reform. There have been some efforts focused on performance appraisal, but none of them have an integral vision of a broad civil service system.

Abuses of administrative discretionary authority and corrupt government practices have been the primary elements in federal and local public administration. Attempts at major reforms have done little to mitigate these problems. Thus, public perceptions of government inefficiency and non-productivity remain. It is also important to stress that local government may be a logical place to begin civil service reform, thus generating more effective delivery of scarce public goods and services directly to the people. However, even minimum efforts have not yet been made at the local level. There is no doubt that approval of federal civil service reform will encourage the administrative reform modifications at local levels.

In 1996, a modernization process began within public administration in the State of Mexico. One element of that modernization was to professionalize the public personnel system. This process began with the enactment of special legislation. In 1998, “The Law of Job for the State and Municipal Public Servants” was created to regulate relations between public servants and the government⁵. The program was designed to achieve stability, salary protection, and to provide a structured scheme in order to make the public sector personnel more “professional”. The following years, regulations were established containing administrative mechanisms for enforcing the law.

⁵ This is one of four laws enacted; the other three are: Ley de Responsabilidades de los servidores públicos (that addresses corrupt behavior); Ley de seguridad social para los trabajadores públicos del estado y municipios (that regulates employment rights of public servants); and Ley Orgánica de la Administración Pública del Estado de México.

Current Personnel Reform

Public personnel administration in the state of Mexico has a salary classification system consisting of 32 ranges. The 1998 law and regulations take into consideration the actions necessary to achieve higher professional status but only from ranges 1 to 23. Operative employees, who are members of the Union, are in this range while employees in ranges 24 to 32 are advisers, technicians, general managers, under secretaries and Secretaries all of them are termed “unclassified” because the leader of the administrative structure establishes appointments by discrete activities.

Since 1999 the newly promulgated regulations have been applied. The process began with the intention of regularizing all the employees in order to locate them in the correct range in the salary classification system. Then a catalogue of positions was created. The catalogue included specific description of each job, skills and competences required, and expected salary range.

Cataloguing positions was the first step for regularizing public personnel. The intention of cataloguing was to locate personnel in the position of the salary classification system according to labor characteristics and the activities that were developed. Even if the process of salary classification should assigned task according to requirements of each organization, in this case it will be done based upon the tasks that the employee already perform. However, because of complications involving the employee union, the catalogue was not applied in a strict way. Because personnel were hired or “in-the-pipeline”, and certain activities already had been developed, three criteria were used to apply the newly developed catalogue: longevity of service, performance appraisal and training⁶).

The process evaluated each of the three criteria and each one given a value: 20% credit was given for longevity of service, 35% for performance appraisal and 45% for training (includes education) (Regalement: 100).⁷ Using these values, personnel were located within the correct range in the

⁶ Personnel in the education sector were not included because they have their own career norms and salary classification system.

⁷ The regulations prohibit the criteria of longevity from being considered more important than other evaluation criteria.

salary classification system. The process was created by a commission, which was constituted by the public servants (bosses) and employee union. Promotion in different categories will be accomplished when the first stage is reached. But, the new criteria will be strictly applied (testing, experience, training, and competence) for all new employees not for those who are already at public administration system. The first challenge of reform to catalogue and analyze positions and then assign a pay range to each class of public servant. Establishing a pay range is important for recruitment, selection and training activities. It is also important that the pay structure includes all (old and new) public servants.

The next step will be the routine use of performance evaluations and training of employees. Currently, there are no performance evaluation instruments available. However, instruments have been designed and are being applied as a pilot test in one Department, the Finance Ministry.

Even though evaluation of job condition is a key element for locating employees in the salary classification system, the criteria that have been considered are not correct. One of the strongest critics to civil service system in United States and other countries is the consideration of longevity of service as an element for promotion. Longevity of service develops conformism. It is suggested that public servants who are guaranteed a job in the public sector are presumed to be less responsive to public interests. The fear is that civil service employees will become less efficient and incompetent. In the state of Mexico, the value given to longevity of service should be revised and perhaps would be to consider longevity as an essential element for competence in specific positions (which require more experience). Performance evaluation each several years could equilibrate the value of longevity as criteria for rise in classification system but not substituted training and functioning, because these are activities more in keeping with critical abilities and skills.

In other ways, performance evaluation takes into consideration attitude, effectiveness, and personal initiative of individual employees. Sample tests have been created for each criterion. Supervisors must complete a form for each employee (the sample formats were tested in the pilot program described earlier). In this situation, each employee is evaluated on each criterion by his immediate supervisor. However, this process does not guarantee an impartial evaluation but serves to enhance loyalty to the boss against the higher principles of loyalty to the institution. To eliminate arbitrary evaluations, it would be more advisable to create an

external commission, one that would be responsible for evaluating employee performance according to objective criteria (Guerrero, 1993).

Finally, training has been a controversial theme because there is no professionalize system in place and local and federal governments have tried to remedy inefficiency in public administration through employee training. To accomplish this, a number of courses and seminars have been created. Unfortunately, not all training seminars are relevant to employee skill development. What is needed is training in technical areas and professional skill development that will ensure competencies necessary for performing specific jobs. Under the new process, annual plans will be made for evaluating essential requirements for each of the criteria specified. To date, however, little progress has been made.

It is important to underscore the importance of including supervisors in the early stages of designing performance evaluations. Supervisors should play a relevant role in planning for employee evaluation. This means, mid-level administrators must be involved in decision-making processes involving reform efforts. They must be involved throughout employee development and training programs. Thus, one question must be asked—should employee evaluation and development logically be focused on department chiefs and mid-level administrators? After all, mid-level administrators and department chiefs must assume the responsibility, as well as reaping the advantages, arising from the implementation of civil service reform.

The State of Mexico Personnel System in Perspective

What are the lessons of the continuing efforts to reform the civil service system in the State of Mexico?

Issues of modernization: At the same time that steps have been taken to professionalize public sector employees, government-led efforts toward administrative reforms have emphasized and encouraged the imitation of the New Public Management rather than emphasizing traditional civil service systems. The department charged with implementing civil service reform issued a workplace assessment. The assessment may apply to civil servants in the current system. In the assessment employee over-work was identified as the number one problem. Employee over-work may be the result of inadequate distribution of labor tasks. Of least concern was the need for a civil service. Supervisors in the various units responded to this survey.

An important finding of the assessment concerned the attitude of middle-level technical professionals. It is important to say that using results of the survey as a basis, the government has decided to undertake a Reengineering Organizational Process for structuring or redesigning units with a basis in functions not in process, making organizational and procedures books of each unit, in order to reorganize the structures and get better results (AMV, september, 20, 2002). The quality certification is a concern in the modernization of the administration. Again, it is important to say that in the reorganization process there is nothing said about to the:

Professionalization: According with this new process we can guess that the other program to regularized the public servant will be let down. It is important to recognize, as we said at the beginning, that personal management cannot ignore the context which people work as a critical element to any understanding personnel practice and it includes particular interest of governors.

Primary barriers to change: According to the answers obtained from the survey, it was found that supervisors of administrative units do not consider implementation of civil service reform as a need. This fact helped identify some of the main problems in public administration, corruption and patronage. There is no doubt that at the moment to restore the appointment process upon a basis of merits, supervisors also would have fewer opportunities to hire their friends. Stated differently, discretionary authority in future hires would be strictly limited (EO, september, 20, 2002). This hiring limitation is important when the role of the bosses in the performance evaluation is considered. The lack of an adequate merit system let them promote their own interest. The survey clarify that the new system allows the employees to be promoted to the salary classification system in vaguely evaluation criteria. Also let us know another important limitation for this proposal of civil service: technocrat exclusion and senior managers (range 24-32).

There is an additional problem that relates to process continuity. In Mexico, at local and federal levels, a tradition exists of making changes when each new administration assumes power. In other words, each administration implements change according to their concerns. This has improved the absence of continuity in a lot of policies. If we consider for a moment that a critical role for civil service implementation resides in the power of mid-level administrators (the bosses of units are in these levels and they are opposed to the civil service because discrete hiring is limited

and they are less affected with a new administration), then we are faced with the likely possibility that they possess the requisite power to block the system to professionalize at the first opportunity. This situation reinforces the idea of the need for reform in mid-level technical professionals—and involving them early in the administrative reform.

Organizational reengineering based on the New Public Management (NPM), presents important contradictions in the administrative reform local government seek to develop. On one hand, while NPM leads to flexibility in labor processes (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992). On the other hand, government has the idea that civil service career development can be interpreted as rigorous public personnel administration (according to local legislation about the classical model of civil service). Thus, it would be convenient to make a revision about changes based on NPM principles and the implement of civil service for avoiding a confrontation between the two processes.

Additionally, the persistent spoils systems is destructive for any civil service reform, a difference of the American experience where change and rotation of employees were seen as an advantage in the construction of democracy. In the Mexican case it means the absence of continuity in programs, the loss of experience and the privatization of state activities.

Democracy is the primary difference between the American and Mexican systems. In the first case, the spoils system gave ordinary citizens a greater chance at public service by rotating employees as political fortunes changed (at least in the beginning). In the second case, of Mexico, the spoils system means corruption, abuse and illegal enrichment practices and administrative efficiency is outside.

Political changes in the country and the uncertainty are conditions for avoiding to guarantee the continuity of the civil service reform if a new political party, or even if the same party win the elections. Political and administrative institutions have not reached their consolidation as element of continuity and they are a risk for civil service reform in the State of Mexico.

Mexico and summit: lessons learned

Both the State of Mexico and the County of Summit have struggled to change both the realities and the perceptions of its civil service systems. Both suffer in comparison (both rightly and improperly) to models that are available to the public (the federal system in Mexico and both the U.S.

federal and the parallel city system in Akron). The political leadership of Mexico and Summit must battle the public vision of the proper way of operating a civil service system—that political leadership has bought into those models. *Both* judges their respective systems based upon those models, not based upon an analysis of what is best for the State of Mexico or the County of Summit. The task of reform and change has been made more difficult because of this “ideal” model. The changes being made inevitably seem too little and too inconsequential. No matter what is done, no one is satisfied; neither the public expecting broader and more rapid change, or the instigators of the reforms.

The first question that must be asked is, where does reform begin? The lessons of the *slow* evolution of the American Civil Service system are instructive. The first efforts to create a classified public service system occurred more than three decades before the formal creation of the Civil Service Commission. What were those changes? It was the U.S. Naval Observatory that made the logical decision that the hiring of astronomers should be done based upon technical competence and educational credentials. The first tests as a prerequisite for appointment were born in that choice. Technically, the creation of first the U.S. Military Academy (West Point) and then the U.S. Naval Academy (Annapolis) established the precedent of educational background as relevant to technical and engineering positions.

Equally important to remember is that this decision was made in the midst of a mandate to simplify and structure most public employment so that even those with a relatively minimal education could perform most assignments. The “opening” or democratization of public employment did not come at the expense of technical competence. The early version of “spoils” or patronage was not aimed at *lowering* performance, but to enhance performance. Secondly, the locus of change was simultaneously at *the top and the bottom* of the employment spectrum. Patronage appointments at the top were viewed as vital to successful policy implementation. The job simplification initiative meant that more than merely the highly educated elite could join the public service. Qualifications for appointment were lowered, but the assumption was that the difficulty of the job had also been lowered.

The initial focus of civil service style hiring was on the technical professionals in the middle. Stated another way, the proof of the efficacy of a civil service system was in the ability to attract and retain competent technical professionals. This represents the first lesson of our study.

Assuring that a system is in place to hire and retain technical professionals who are protected from political change should be a priority. The dilemma in Summit County was that the technical professionals were the most disadvantaged by the partial civil service system and the lack of attention to salary classifications, promotional opportunities. In Mexico, the first persons included in the new salary structure were those employees at the bottom of the organizational structure. While Summit County recognized the need to focus on the “middle” professional, the reforms and changes have as yet not accomplished their goals. In Mexico, the technical professionals straddle the boundary between those included and those not yet included within the salary system.

A related concern is that those employees at the bottom of the organization - those with the fewest skills and the least work background - are not critical to a successful civil service system. The goals of a professional, politically neutral and career-oriented cohort of workers are not as critical in positions, which are either temporary or so menial as to be unimportant. The performance of a single unskilled or semi-skilled worker is not vital, and ultimately the goal of democratizing government or the more basic goal of providing employment are more vital than the method of hire. However, the failure to hire competent and professional technocrats very quickly presents a problem. When basic services are mismanaged, when change efforts go awry because of incompetence, or when promised advances stall then the lack of professional competence becomes not merely an administrative concern, but also a political concern.

The continuing conflict in Mexico between politicians who desire the influence gained through patronage and politicians trying to implement a traditional civil service system are hardly surprising. The public expects and demands a shift toward civil service systems as a signal of the end of corrupt practices they perceive as part of patronage systems. Yet that same public will expect those politicians to hire them, even if it means going outside the rules. Seemingly, the pressure to hire people is much greater than the pressure to reform. Reform efforts leap and spurt in fits and starts. There is little pattern. Change will be slow. *The second lesson is that civil service reform will occur in increments.* The corollary to this is that there is common ground in the hiring of technocrats. The pressure to find jobs for people comes from the elite and from the lower strata. It is in the middle ground, where educational and experiential requirements put the job out of the reach of the semi-skilled and the elite alike, that reform

begins. Combining a push for more technical professionals with a reform agenda has advantages for everyone. Even politicians who might oppose civil service on principle (or politics) have little reason to oppose this type of hire. This is the starting point for reform. Once the basis for the system is institutionalized for this cohort of employees then other classes of positions, both above and below can be incorporated. The last to be included will be those near the top and those at the bottom.

A third lesson is that salaries are important. While this may seem obvious, we say this for quite varied reasons. A well-structured salary classification system is the backbone of any good civil service system. A quick test of the efficacy of a salary structure is whether or not the table of organization for any part of the government can be replicated simply by reference to the position allocation and the salary structure. But no salary structure can be created without a proper job analysis methodology, nor can it continue without a fair and consistent performance appraisal system. Second is that Herzberg was right, while salary adjustments and monetary rewards do not in and of themselves motivate employees, stagnant or “unfair” salaries are a source of discontent. Furthermore, a salary system that cannot demonstrate the possibility of career advancement and development is not likely to encourage employees to pursue a career in the organization.

The lack of a fully implemented salary structure has spared the State of Mexico from the problem of developing a workable performance appraisal system. If a “traditional” civil service model is to be introduced, even if only for (but maybe especially for) the middle-level technical professionals, then a credible performance appraisal system needs to be implemented. Recruiting technical professions after conducting job analyses and test- and education-driven hiring, retaining those professionals will need to occur on the same basis. If such employees are to stay then they must be assessed and rewarded on the merits of their performance—not based upon political motives. The success of current reform efforts in Summit County hinge on the acceptance of the need to apply proper performance appraisal methods to all evaluations.

The fourth lesson is the need to consistently and continuously apply accepted performance appraisal methods as part of annual salary reviews. Closely related to the concept of merit review is the use of that data in promotion and career advancement decisions. One of the things that we sometimes forget is that a civil service system is not merely about current employees; it is also

about their future. *Civil service systems are career systems.* By its very creation and implementation the civil service system is designed to offer the opportunity and possibility of a career in the public service free of political or other influences. This is a lesson that has been lost in the race to privatize and deregulate public employment. Public service will change considerably if it becomes little more than the opportunity to collect a paycheck for a few years. The ideal of the public service is as a career. The greatest single failure of both the system in Mexico and the system in Summit County is the lack of clear career paths for professionals.

Conclusions

The problems faced in Mexico and Summit are not unique. There are clear lessons for both governments under review and for a broader audience. The first lesson is the recognition of the power of the imagery of civil service. Yet, it must be recognized that the ideal model civil service system is a myth. Few politicians openly or actively flaunt this myth. The public has very low tolerance for change that adversely affects their perceptions of civil service. The mythical civil service model shapes and dominates public policy concerning public personnel. An otherwise extremely powerful politician, President Bush, learned this when his proposed amendment to the bill creating the Department of Homeland Security to exempt from most civil service regulations those to be brought into the new agency fell afoul of the U.S. Senate. Only by last minute, behind closed doors, maneuvering in the U.S. House of Representatives did this provision find its way back into the final legislation (Shenon, 2002: A12). Even those governments (whether Great Britain or Akron, Ohio), which are seen as having model systems, operate their civil service programs differently than perceived.

The public continues to see civil service as a worthy goal—not an unattainable myth. Many of the complaints across the globe about unethical and corrupt government practices center on practices for which civil service was established to abolish (Hope, 1999). The critical issue is finding the balance point – the point where civil service reform is possible without necessarily imitating a century old model of control and management.

Second, is that the virtues of civil service are also its defects. The insistence on a wall between human resources and politics ensures that persons with the proper “paper” credentials will be hired. On the other hand, the political necessity of hiring specific persons is outside the

competence and purpose of a civil service system. The wall between human resources endeavors and politics creates suspicion and animosity. The incompatibility of the goals means that politically powerful persons will always seek to distort or even abolish civil service. Yet, only through politics can civil service systems be modernized and defects corrected. Progress will be slow when the very persons needed to support reform are the advocates of abolition. This is a situation that is rife for manipulation and corruption. There is little to be gained and seemingly much to lose in the adoption of a broad ranging civil service system. Few politicians willingly give up control over patronage appointments. Implementing something seemingly as simple as a salary classification system is made extremely difficult because of this reluctance. The goal is to find places where the defects are a virtue. In the hiring of technical professionals the conflicting views merge. As suggested above, starting “in the middle” works precisely because the patronage pressure is minimal and the efficacy of credential-based hiring is the greatest.

There is a growing body of literature, labeled the New Public Management, which is highly critical of the core notions of civil service. As suggested earlier, these views parallel those of the first the Public Choice perspective of the 1970s and then the Reinventing Government Movement of the early 1990s. What these perspectives have in common is a deep suspicion of civil service. All favor greater control over personnel decisions in the hands of managers (in the case of public choice theory, politically appointed managers), or even the private sector. Even if these views are rejected (and we as a group do reject this premise), the need to “modernize” a system and premise that dates to the nineteenth century is long overdue. Our recommendation is that civil service systems focus on the core competencies and values that impelled their creation. Those competencies are: job analyses, equitable pay systems, recruitment and hiring of technical professionals and performance measurement. This serves both the need for professional competence and acknowledges the connection between policy-making and politics.

Bibliography

- Berman, Evan *et al.* (2001), *Human Resources Management and Public Service: Paradoxes, Processes and Problems*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Bureau of Intergovernmental Personnel Programs (1973), *Job Analysis: Developing and Documenting Data*, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

- Butler, Stuart (1985), *The Privatization Option: A Strategy to Shrink the Size of Government*, Washington, DC: Heritage Foundation.
- Clark, Paul, A. [ed.] (1979), "Government by Confusion", in *Akron Beacon Journal*, march-april.
- Cox III, Raymond *et al.* (1994), *Public Administration in Theory and Practice*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Crenson, Matthew (1975), *The Federal Machine*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Devine, Donald (1987), "Public Administration the Right Way", in Rector and Sanera [eds.], *Steering the Elephant: How Washington Really Works*, New York: Universe Books.
- Dresang, Dennis (1984), *Public Personnel Management and Public Policy*, Boston: Little, Brown and Company.
- Eaton, D. (1881), "Assassination and the Spoils System", in *Princeton Review*, september, vol. VIII, no. 148.
- Espinoza Valle, Alejandro (1993), *Reforma del estado y empleo público*, México: Instituto Nacional de Administración Pública.
- Fish, C. (1963), *The Civil Service and the Patronage*, New York: Russell and Russell.
- Gerth, H. *et al.* [eds.] (1946), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Guerrero Amparán, Juan (1998), "Un estudio de caso de la reforma administrativa en México: los dilemas de la instauración del servicio civil de carrera a nivel federal", en *Documento de trabajo*, núm. 61, México: Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económica.
- Heatherly, Charles and B. Pines (1989), *Mandate for Leadership III*, Washington, DC: Heritage Foundation.
- Hernández Rodríguez, Rogelio (1993), "La administración al servicio de la política: la Secretaría de Programación y Presupuesto", en *Foro Internacional*, vol. XXXIII, núm. 1.
- Herzberg, Frederick (1964), "The Motivation-Hygiene Concept and the Problems of Manpower", in *Personnel Administration*, january-february.
- Hoogenboom, A. (1968), *Outlawing the Spoils*, Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

- Hope Kempe, Ronald (1999), "Corruption in Africa: A Crisis in Ethical Leadership", in *Public Integrity*, summer, vol. 3, no. 1.
- Ivancivich, J. and W. Glueck (1983), *Foundations of Personnel*, TX: Business Publication.
- Kaufman, Herbert (1956), "Emerging Conflicts inn the Doctrine of Public Administration", in *American Political Science Review*, december, vol. 50, no. 4.
- McElroy, R. [ed.] (1923), *Grover Cleveland*, vol. II, New York: Harper and Brothers.
- Merino, Mauricio (1996), "De la lealtad individual a la responsabilidad pública", en *Revista LAPEM*, núm. 13.
- Nigro Lloyd, G. and Felix A. Nigro (2000), *The New Public Personnel Administration*, Itasca, IL: F.E. Peacock Publishers.
- Osborne, D. and T. Gaebler (1992), *Reinventing Government: How the Entrepreneurial Spirit is Transforming the Public Sector*, Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Riper, P. V. (1958), *History of the United States Civil Service*, Evanston, IL: Row, Peterson and Co.
- Rohr, J. (1978), *Ethics for Bureaucrats*, New York: Marcel Dekker.
- Rohr, J. (1986), *To Run a Constitution: The Legitimacy of the Administrative State*, Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas.
- Sayre, W. (1948), "The Triumph of Technique Over Purpose", in *Public Administration Review*, 8, september.
- Savas, E. (1982), *Privatizing the Public Sector*, Chatham, NJ: Chatham House Publishing.
- Savas, E. (1987), *Privatization: The Key to Better Governmentr*, Chatham, NJ: Chatham House Publishing.
- Shafritz, J. *et al.* (1986), *Personnel Management in Government*, New York: Marcel Dekker.
- Shenon, Paul (2002), "Establishing New Agency Is Expected to Take Years and Could Divert It From Mission", in *New York Times*, november 20.
- Summit County, Ohio (2002), *Human Resources Commission website*, november 12.

Cecilia Cadena, Raymond Cox y Ramona Ortega-Liston. *Civil Service Reform in comparative perspective: the case of local government change in Mexico and the United States*

U.S. Civil Service Commission (1941), *History of the Federal Civil Service 1789 to the Present*, Washington, DC: U.S. General Printing Office.

U.S. Personnel Management (1979), *Position Classification: A Guide for City and County Managers*, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Waldo, D. (1981), *The Enterprise of Public Administration*, Novato, CA: Chandler and Sharp Publishers.

White, L. (1954), *The Jacksonians*, New York: MacMillan.

White, L. (1958), *The Republican Era*, New York: MacMillan.

Interview

Apolinar Mena Vargas (AMV), Director of Organization and Documentation, Government of State of Mexico (September 20th 2002).

Collins, Virgil, Personnel Director, City of Akron, Ohio (october 10, 2002).

Enrique Olascuaga (EO), Undersecretary's Office of Administrative Services of the Government of State of Mexico (september 20th 2002).

Cecilia Cadena Inostroza. Doctora en Ciencias Políticas y Sociología por la Universidad Complutense de Madrid, España. Profesora-investigadora de El Colegio Mexiquense, A.C. Sus líneas de investigación son: gestión y políticas públicas municipales, gestión y alternancia en gobiernos locales, transparencia y rendición de cuentas en gobiernos municipales. Sus más recientes publicaciones son: *XX Años de Ciencias Sociales*, México (2008); y en coautoría con Henio Millán y Alejandro Natal, "Riesgo de vacío en las normas legales para el acceso a la información pública en los municipios del estado de México", en *Rendición de cuentas, democracia y sociedad civil en México*, México (en prensa).

Raymond Cox. Doctor en Administración Pública y Política. Profesor en la Universidad de Akron. Sus líneas de investigación son: ética del sector público, toma de decisión de políticas públicas y gerencia pública. Sus más recientes publicaciones son: junto con Michael L. Hill y Sucheta Pyakuryal "Tacit Knowledge and Discretionary Judgment", en *Public Integrity*, vol. 10, núm. 2 (2008); "Donald Plusquellic: Facilitate

Leadership”, en *Reexamining the Contributions of Facilitative Leaders*, New York (2008).

Ramona Ortega-Liston. Doctora especialista en Ética en el Servicio Público y Difusión de Innovación. Profesora en la Universidad de Akron. Sus líneas de investigación son: política étnica y participación de grupos étnicos en el servicio público. Su más reciente publicación es: “Children Smuggled into the United States from Central America and China: a case study of the Unaccompanied Minors Shelter Care Program”, en *Public Performance & Management Review*, vol. 31, núm. 2 (2007).

Envío a dictamen: 17 de agosto de 2006.

Reenvío: 09 de febrero de 2007.

Reenvío: 17 de enero de 2008.

Aprobación: 25 de marzo de 2008.