
KEY ELEMENTS OF A MORE EFFECTIVE CIVIL SERVICE: AN ARMENIAN PERSPECTIVE*

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Introduction

This article identifies key elements necessary for civil service to advance the kind of governance that promotes economic, social, and political development. Its genesis was the desire of its principal author to have his nation, Armenia, achieve its aspiration of membership in the European Union (EU), requiring such development. The article suggests a model for assessing civil service systems that may generate more definitive outcome measures than those offered by other models. The underlying research assembled data from semi-structured interviews with human resources (HR) management experts, academicians and practitioners at different levels in the United States and the German public administration.

The Armenian Civil Service Challenge

The current national political leadership of Armenia seeks civil service and public service reform, geared toward the European stage of civil and public service development in Armenia, rests upon reform-oriented premises and building-blocks that are geared toward the European vision of good governance and public administration practices, focused on structural and functional reforms, modernization, and financial accountability. Some structural and situational (short-term) factors facilitate and some hamper the process of change. Widespread public contempt for the corrupt leadership in power for twenty years drove the “Velvet Revolution” of 2018,¹ and continues to generate support for reform. On the other hand, entrenched habits of bribery and nepotism, petty and not so petty, are hard to break. Earlier, the economic crisis of 2008 underscored the critical role of government regulation,² especially the need to avoid distortions in the banking system by initiating recapitalization and encouraging effective and efficient investment. It called into question the New Public Management (NPM) mantra of less government, as well as the policy preference for austerity.³

Regulatory impact assessment practices are at a rudimentary stage in Armenia. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development/ Support for Improvement in Governance and Management (OECD/SIGMA) developed an assessment tool, the Principles of Public Administration (PPA), which attempts to set out

* The American research was conducted at Northern Virginia Community College and was funded by the Fulbright Scholar program; the German research, at Speyer University in Germany, funded by the German Scholarship Exchange Service (DAAD).

¹ See Feldman, D. and Alibašić, H. (2019) The Remarkable 2018 “Velvet Revolution”: Armenia’s Experiment Against Government Corruption, Public Integrity, DOI: 10.1080/10999922.2019.1581042

² See, e.g., D. Menzel, “Ethics and Integrity in Public Service: Issues and Challenges”, in: D. C. Menzel/H. L. Whitte (eds.), *The State of Public Administration: Issues, Challenges and Opportunities* (London and New York; C. Pollitt/G. Bouckaert, Public Management Reform, A Comparative Analysis – Into the Age of Austerity (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 4th edition, 2017), pp. 108 – 124.

³ See Pollitt, C. and Bouckaert, G. (2017) *Public Management Reform, A Comparative Analysis – Into the Age of Austerity*, 4th edition, Oxford, Oxford University Press., p. 23.

in practice what a well-functioning public administration looks like. The EU, OECD/SIGMA and the Government of Armenia have agreed to carry out baseline PPA assessment Armenia. PPA assessments, following a consistent methodology, have been completed in a number of countries, such as Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia. A similar assessment is underway in Armenia based on the EU/Government of Albania Financing Agreement, “Better Service Delivery through a More Efficient and Responsive Public Administration.”⁴ The assessment team has completed its data collection and fact-checking stages and expects to publish its final report sometime in 2019. The latest draft available at the time of writing reports evaluation findings with ambivalent implications, acknowledging the adoption of a civil service reform strategy that “is aligned with good practices” and “sets out clear and measurable objectives,” but also reports significant shortfalls in effectuating effectiveness and integrity.⁵

I. Conventional assessment typology

Contemporary comparative studies of public administration identify four types of output or change that an administration can effectuate or experience. However, researchers face serious challenges in identifying, measuring and interpreting them.

- Operational results, the most easily identified and quantified of the four, still resist analytic efforts, whether at the “micro” level of a local service office claiming to provide the same level of service with fewer staff and no decrease in quality or at the “macro” level of a government claiming to have reduced poverty
- Transactional results, focused largely on process improvement in management or decision-making, i.e. planning applications processed in 70 percent of the average time it took previously. Such transactional improvements are presumed – rightly or wrongly -- to produce operational improvements.⁶
- Capacity related results i.e. changes within the political or administrative system, for example, a decision to recruit for senior civil service positions on an open and competitive basis, rather than drawing only from the ranks of current civil servants who have reached a certain level in the hierarchy; or a broadening of the range of services now within the government agency’s mandate and ability to provide.
- System-related results: these, for example, might reflect a management decision to contract out most of the services formerly provided by the agency’s own employees, say, to mercenaries instead of citizen-soldiers, or private physicians and hospitals instead of civil servant physicians and government-owned hospitals. This kind of ideological or doctrinal change is particularly hard to assess. But for all four types of change, different observers may have different priorities – sometimes, for example, as between citizens themselves and those in positions of authority making decisions on their behalf. Or, priorities, even if shared, could change before agreed-upon reforms can actually be effectuated.

II. Contextualization of the evaluation framework

Standard before-and-after program evaluation often fails to provide accurate tracking of causation, even if result-based assessment may measure the gap between expectations and reality. Also, goals change – often quite legitimately. Effective evaluation requires context.

Nicholas Henry suggests paradigms of public administration,⁷ on the basis of

⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/eni_2016_c2016_7226_par.pdf_5

⁵ Id., 9-10.

⁶ See C. Pollitt/G. Bouckaert (n. Ошибка! Залкадка не определена. 2) p.134

⁷ See Nicholas Henry (Georgia Southern University) (2017) “Public Administration and

which it is possible to construct a contextual model for evaluating civil service systems that offers more nuances than the standard typology.

Paradigm 1: The politics/administration dichotomy. The more fervent advocates of an extreme version of the formulation refused to recognize the overwhelming evidence that the administrative side “often makes policy.”⁸ In the Armenian context the relationships between political and bureaucratic structures distantly resemble the model of “functional village life.”⁹ Formally, the Law on Civil Service prohibits civil servant status holders from participating in political activity, though party affiliation is permitted. Official job descriptions ostensibly define the boundaries between political and administrative behavior for any given position. Although political patronage is prohibited by law, in reality, informal links and influence networks play a crucial role in filling important positions and distributing real power.

Paradigm 2: Principles of public administration collide: For example, one such principle was a narrow span of control, i.e. a small number of subordinates to each supervisor supposedly assure clear communication; i.e. the supervisor could easily judge whether any given subordinate had understood the message. However, the consequent “tall” hierarchy made for multiple transmissions of orders from the top level down through the various ranks, thereby violating the principle of “minimal message handling,” which would actually require a “flat” hierarchy.¹⁰

Paradigm 3: Public administration as management: public administrators tend to think of the word ‘public’ in public administration as referring to the government and its agencies. A broader, more philosophical understanding ‘public’ encompasses its “institutional, interest, and organizational” aspects.¹¹ Thus, public administration may be conceived as the governance method where the subject and object of management seek to identify themselves with each other. So, the public should control the quality of public services. The effectiveness of this feedback varies directly with the level of participation by the public in decision-making.¹²

Paradigm 4: Public administration as PUBLIC administration: The tired old politics/administration dichotomy may deserve resurrection in a new form, or perhaps its evolutionary descendant, as two ends of a continuous spectrum, with varying degrees of overlap. At one end of the spectrum, inappropriate political acts, like nepotism, offer an invidious contrast to purely administrative acts like merit selection. However, a discretionary appointment of a political supporter to ensure the likelihood of the actual implementation of policies for which the voters chose the political leadership is also “political,” but eminently justifiable. Still, “political” values, emphasizing ideology, popular sovereignty, and (sometimes) loyalty to a charismatic leader, differ from “administrative” values like fairness and adherence to objective standards of performance.¹³ Obviously, these values can support a distinction between ethical rules of conduct for civil servants and politicians in the context of civil service sys-

Public Affairs” Thirteenth edition, published by Routledge, Taylor & Francis, New York.

⁸ See F. J. Goodnow. *Politics and Administration* (New York: Macmillan, 1900). pp. 10 et seq.

⁹ See G. Peters. “Bureaucrats and Political Appointees in European Democracies: Who’s Who and Does It Make Any Difference”, in: A. Farazmand (ed.), *Modern Systems of Government: Exploring the Role of Bureaucrats and Politicians* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 1997), pp. 232 – 254 (p. 236).

¹⁰ See Nicholas Henry (n. 7) p. 40

¹¹ See Nicholas Henry (n. 7), pp. 42-43

¹² See Uchendu Eugene Chigbu, Vache Kalashyan (2015) “Land-Use Planning and Public Administration in Bavaria, Germany: Towards a Public Administration approach to Land-Use Planning” *Geomatics, Land management and Landscape* No. 1, 2015. pp. 7-17, p. 14.

¹³ See Nicholas Henry (n. 7) pp. 46-47.

tems. In the center of the continuum it can take considerable effort to avoid the politicization of bureaucracy on one hand, and excessive engagement of civil servants in the policy-making process on the other. Administrators can and do alter the course of the policy depending on how they design its implementation. Such alteration can be minimized with improved communication -- and thus, ideally, increased sharing of policy orientation -- between the civil service and the political leadership.¹⁴

III. Indicia of excellence in civil service

Based on the foregoing, indicia of excellence in civil service systems could be categorized under four main headings:

- Degree of appropriate separation between political and administrative management, i.e. in terms of the politicization level of the bureaucracy.
- “Clean” civil service recruitment, selection, and assignment (enforced prohibition of nepotism).
- Integration of civil servants’ self-image with organizational goals.¹⁵
- Integrity management, using ethics performance indicators.

Under each of the above headings, evaluators should consider (Box 1.):

- 1) Systemic features,
- 2) Institutional frameworks, and
- 3) Functional elements of implementation capacity.

Box 1.

<p><u>1. Separation level of political power and managerial administering layers, (career stability benchmarks)</u></p> <p>1.1 Level of political interference with direct management of staff, 1.2 Level of dependency of career civil servants on political appointment, 1.3 Level of impartial and/or nonpartisan nature of career civil service system.</p> <p><u>2. Level of merit based recruitment processes in civil service system.</u></p> <p>2.1 Level of coherence between selection and appointment procedures, 2.2 Transparency of system of recommendations and references in their effect on final appointment, 2.3 Impact of ethics appraisals.</p> <p><u>3. Efficiency of the staff.</u></p> <p>3.1 Congruence of career civil servant attitudes in shaping of decisions with those of political appointees, 3.2 Self-identification of career civil servants with the mission or policy agenda of authority they serve, 3.3 Existence of public participation frameworks; public oversight impact on decision-making processes.</p> <p><u>4. Sufficiency of the Integrity approach.</u></p> <p>4.1 Incorporation of ethics indicators in job descriptions of career civil servants, along with inclusion of ethic performance indicators in appraisal models. 4.2 Incorporation of ethical standards in bureaucratic culture. 4.3 Oversight mechanisms to enforce ethical standards and behavior.</p>
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¹⁴ See Uchendu Eugene Chigbu, Vache Kalashyan (2015) “Land-Use Planning and Public Administration in Bavaria, Germany: Towards a Public Administration approach to Land-Use Planning” *Geomatics, Land management and Landscape* No. 1, 2015. pp. 7-17, p. 14

¹⁵ See Guest, D E (1991) *Personnel management: the end of orthodoxy*, *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 29 (2), pp 149–76; Michael Armstrong (2011) *Armstrong’s Handbook of Strategic Human Resource Management*, (see Chapter 14).

IV. “The devil is in the details”

A. Politics/administration dichotomy; career stability benchmarks

Those who championed the extreme version of the dichotomy envisioned a professional but compliant bureaucracy, merely carrying out the wishes of a dominant political class or party.¹⁶ In the American context the dichotomy set career-based, long-term, politically neutral bureaucrats against transients, holding public office for a limited period of time, political appointees and hence not bureaucrats, giving “political” “a narrow meaning referring just to partisan orientations: an action was termed “political” only when it had implications for a political party.”¹⁷ A more subtle and comprehensive framework for civil service organization could minimize political bias or even inclination. In Armenia citizens’ needs were rarely considered properly. There is little or no citizen-centered service provision, and an absence of benchmarks. Besides, the low level of transparency in decision-making and accountability by service providers on the one hand, and insufficient public scrutiny over the provision of such services on the other hand, create a favorable environment for corrupt practices.

B. Level of merit based recruitment processes

The new national political leadership in Armenia has tried to avoid governance based on favoritism and nepotism. Although political appointees ultimately determine selections for civil service positions, they must make those selections from shortlists designed to expose hidden political connections – to their detriment – and highlight ethical and performance records. References and recommendations must be public and transparent.

C. Staff efficiency

The new national leadership also tries to eschew vague non-specific calls for “efficiency” and “effectiveness,” preferring to rely on measurable relationships between inputs of resources (i.e. budget and staffing allocations) and outputs of service and benefits (e.g., number of clients served, or monetary value of pension payments distributed).¹⁸ True effectiveness depends on avoiding ambiguity and vagueness in mapping outputs.

1. Conforming attitudes and approaches of professional civil servants to those of political appointees

While recognizing the importance of “bottoms up” inclusion of citizen participation in policy formation, it is also important to incorporate “bottoms up” inclusion of civil or career public service engagement at the political level. This approach redefines the internal context of the public administration system, allowing the experience of “street-level bureaucrats”¹⁹ to inform policy formation by the political leadership.

2. “Political” civil servants

Of course, bureaucrats inevitably shape policy:

all civil servants are ‘political’ because they are called upon to carry out political decisions, adapt them and explain them: in other words, to accomplish work

¹⁶ See Ali Farazmand (2001) “Handbook of Comparative and Development Public Administration”, Edited by (Second Edition, Revised and Expanded), Copyright by Dekker Inc. ©, New York. Fred W. Riggs “Bureaucratic links Between Administration and Politics” (p.815)

¹⁷ See Fred W. Riggs (n. 16) p.816

¹⁸ See C. Pollitt/G. Bouckaert (n. 3) (Pp.15-6)

¹⁹ See M. Lipsky (1980), Street-Level Bureaucracy: The Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Service, New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

of a political nature that obviously is not limited to the mere application of legal or economic rules.²⁰

But an open, explicit, and transparent integration into the policy process of bureaucratic experience and insight enhances the ethical integrity of that process, merging informal norms with statutory requirements, and perhaps even forging linkages between ethical behavior and obligatory rules.²¹

3. Inviting oversight: a role for NGOs

One variant of a “new wave” of administrative styles attuned to indigenous concerns emphasizes the sharing of power with NGOs through partnership and coordinated service delivery. Such sharing also invites a measure of oversight by participating NGOs.²²

V. Sufficiency of the Integrity approach.

Preventing misconduct is as complex as the phenomenon of misconduct itself. Only with a range of integrated mechanisms, including sound ethics management systems, can such behavior be limited. The Armenian leadership’s comparative review of codes of ethics in EU countries shows a variety of promising possibilities for the public sector. However, “one size does not fit all.” For example, the OECD inventories examples of codes on its website,²³ revealing marked differences among them. Going forward, Armenia must take into consideration contemporary societal collisions, deeply conditioned by social transformation, and made inevitable by the increasing interdependence of all societies. These global changes have increased moral ambiguity all over the world, so more sophisticated versions of public surveillance are now more crucial than ever. Ethical success also depends on how accurately a society can predict the consequences of particular actions as opposed to others, especially in the face of moral ambiguity.²⁴ What seem to be essential functional fundamentals of an ethical program are as follows:

- Establishing and maintaining the legitimacy of the civil service, this must reflect and respect the legal framework while earning citizens’ trust.
- Respecting and reflecting the cultural environment, recognizing the individual and their subcultures have deep emotional, mental, and cognitive investment in their beliefs and value systems.
- Effectuating a synergy of interpersonal collaboration at the “macro” level.

Improvements to integrity in the public sector will enhance the quality of public service delivery. Good governance equals efficiency plus integrity. The Armenian people seek a transparent, accountable government that can assure that its tax money is spent effectively and honestly.

In the past, citizens have suffered many of the problems associated with weak ethics-enforcement mechanisms. Ethics commissions, for example, have been notoriously ineffective. Several years ago three such commissions were established on a

²⁰ See Luc Rouban (2012) Politicization of the Civil Service in B. Guy Peters and Jon Pierre (eds) *The SAGE Handbook of Public Administration*, SAGE publications Ltd (pp. 361-362)

²¹ See Dobel, J. Patrick (2007) *Public Management as Ethics*, in Ewan Ferlie, Lawrence E. Lynn, Jr., and Christopher Pollitt, (eds) *Public Management*, Oxford, Oxford University Press. (p. 161)

²² See Ali Farazmand (2001) “Handbook of Comparative and Development Public Administration”, Edited by (Second Edition, Revised and Expanded), Copyright by Dekker Inc. ©, New York. Keith M. Henderson “Internationalization or Indigenization: Alternatives on the path from Dependency to Independence” (p.634)

²³ See http://www.oecd.org/document/12/0,3343,en_2649_34135_35532108_1_1_1_1,00.html.

²⁴ See D. T. Wilson/V. Mummalaneni, *Modelling and measuring buyer-seller relationships – Report 03* (New York: Institute for the Study of Business Markets, 1988).

voluntary basis by the Civil Service Council of Armenia and the Union of Armenian Government Employees, intended to enhance the ethical environment at the ministries. But local cultural perceptions – quite at odds with international good practice – defeated those efforts.

Then, after the 2012 adoption of the Law on Public Service, Armenia established the Ethics Commission for High-Ranking Public Officials. But there was no accepted code of conduct for political positions. For the most part, the Commission just deals with creating and maintaining a register of asset declarations, reviewing them to detect conflicts of interests. For no particularly good reason, the ethical standards applied by various other ethics commissions differ, depending on which group of officials they cover – “High-Ranking Officials,” the National Assembly, the General Assembly of Judges, the Prosecutor General, or various ethics commissions for public servants in specific government agencies. Further, the functions of high-ranking public officials and top staff are themselves poorly defined and conflicting. The absence of clear standards for ethical behavior, especially under such circumstances, contributes to the likelihood of official misconduct. Members of the National Assembly (Parliament) and other high-level officials likely have conflicts of interest, with outside activities and businesses interests tarnishing their performance of official duties. Powerful Members of the National Assembly block legislation requiring resolution of conflicts of interest prior to assuming office. Even if such legislation exempts National Assembly Members themselves, they resist on behalf of their conflicted allies in government. Such resistance decreases public participation as it fosters cynicism, hopelessness, and apathy. Government actions in Armenia mainly focus on other regulatory and legislative reforms, ignoring legislation that would allow for effective enforcement. Where appropriate legislation has been enacted, effective implementation has been problematic.

Conclusion

We have identified the key elements of a more effective civil service. Such elements are within Armenia’s grasp if it would only choose to adopt them. As noted above, it is not easy to change habits entrenched over many years, borne of a system which trained citizens to associate public service delivery with corruption, and where nepotism and political patronage appeared to be permanent and inevitable aspects of civil service and government generally. But the Armenian people took a stand in 2018, fiercely and effectively protesting against corrupt political leadership. The challenge facing the new reform leadership is formidable, but not insurmountable: it must demonstrate to the public, in stark terms, which clean public administration – in particular, a clean civil service – can be theirs, but only if they exercise the political will to force their legislators to choose between taking the necessary steps and being replaced by others who will.

Key words: *public administration, public service, civil service, paradigm, assessment, efficiency, outcome*

ՎԱԶԵ ՔԱԼԱՇՅԱՆ, ԴԱՆԻԵԼ Լ. ՖԵԼԴՄԱՆ - Առավել արդյունավետ քաղաքացիական ծառայության տարրերը. հայաստանյան հեռանկարներ - Այս հոդվածում փորձ է արվել վեր հանել քաղաքացիական ծառայության այն հանգուցային տարրերը, որոնք էական նշանակություն ունեն սնտեսական,

սոցիալական և քաղաքական զարգացումն ապահովող կառավարման համակարգի համար: Այդ իմաստով հողվածում քաղաքացիական ծառայությունը դիտարկվել է հանրային կառավարման համակարգի համատեքստում և դրա հարացույցային մոտեցումների տեսանկյունից վերլուծելով հանրային ծառայության հետ գործառական կապերի բնույթը՝ առաջարկվել է քաղաքացիական ծառայության գնահատման նոր մոդել: Ի տարբերություն գնահատման այլ մոտեցումների՝ առաջարկվող մոդելն իր արդյունքահեն բնույթով միաժամանակ խարսխված է հանրային կառավարման համակարգաստեղծ կապերի վրա, ինչը հնարավորություն է ընձեռում բացահայտելու վերջնարդյունքների միտված անհրաժեշտ միջոցառումների ուղղվածությունն ու բնույթը: Հետազոտության հիմքում ընկած է ԱՄՆ-ում և գերմանական պետական կառավարման տարբեր մակարդակներում մարդկային ռեսուրսների կառավարման փորձագետների, գիտնականների և պրակտիկ մասնագետների հետ միևնույն ձևաչափով անցկացված հարցազրույցների տվյալները:

Բանալի բառեր – *հանրային կառավարում, հանրային ծառայություն, քաղաքացիական ծառայություն, հարացույց, գնահատում, արդյունքահեն, վերջնարդյունք*

ВАЧЕ КАЛАШЯН, ДАНИЭЛ Л. ФЕЛЬДМАН – *Ключевые элементы более эффективной гражданской службы: армянская перспектива.* – В статье уточняются элементы гражданской службы, имеющие значение для системы управления, которая обеспечивает экономическое, социальное и политическое развитие. Гражданская служба рассмотрена в контексте системы публичного администрирования и с точки зрения существующих парадигм. Предложена новая модель оценки гражданской службы. В отличие от других подходов, она основана на системообразующих связях публичного администрирования и позволяет выявить природу и направленность необходимых мер. В основу исследования положены данные, полученные по стандартизированному формату экспертами по HR менеджменту, исследователями и практиками разных уровней государственного управления США и Германии.

Ключевые слова: *публичное администрирование, публичная служба, гражданская служба, парадигма, оценка, результативность, конечный результат*

Ներկայացվել է՝ 09.10.2019, Գրախոսվել է՝ 30.10.2019, Ընդունվել է տպագրության՝ 25.05.2020