

INTRODUCTION

Personnel Policy and Public Management: The Critical Link

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Government jurisdictions in the United States have frequently reformed their administrative systems as they have struggled with changing political and economic circumstances. These administrative reforms are typically designed to reflect popular new models or emerging paradigms for public management. They are driven by complex and not necessarily congruent combinations of values and purposes ranging from the purely partisan to the largely technical. During the twentieth century, for example, there were at least twelve highly visible efforts to reform federal administrative arrangements—about one every eight years.¹ There were also innumerable similar reforms enacted by state and local governments. With each reform, changes, both large and small, in the administrative machinery of government are implemented, and the effects of those changes often last long after the reform itself has become a distant memory. It is interesting to observe that, more often than not, public personnel or civil service systems are at the top of the reform agenda.

The fact that personnel policy is the frequent target of reform bears witness to the central importance of personnel management to technically and politically effective government operations. It is through the personnel function that public agencies recruit, select, develop, pay, and hopefully retain highly qualified employees. These civil servants, in turn, directly influence the content and execution of public policies. They are the individuals responsible for translating objectives contained in legislative enactments or executive orders

into the daily operations of government programs. Since the 1960s, as important new issues have arisen to demand the attention of public personnel managers and the constituencies they serve, the scope and impact of the public personnel function have grown and become even more socially and politically critical. Equal employment opportunity, pay equity concerns, labor relations, and constitutional protections are but a few of the issues now central to the field.² As a result, public personnel policy and management are increasingly dynamic and complex, and it is always the case that the technical, ethical, and political aspects of the civil service attract attention.

Since the rise of merit systems in the United States, civil service processes have been designed in large part to insulate public servants from politics and partisanship. The goal has been a neutral and technically competent career service. At the same time, however, there is a need for democratic oversight of the public bureaucracy by elected officials, and management must have the flexibility necessary to achieve public policy objectives in a timely and efficient manner. The challenge has always been to find a way to temper the control and flexibility that are required with appropriate levels of protection for public employees.

In this context, and in a system where public expectations are high, effective public management can be quite difficult. Indeed, the thrust of most civil service reform efforts in recent years has been to find ways to cope with the perceived need for flexibility in public management while maintaining adequate levels of centralized oversight to ensure employees are protected from abuse. Recent reforms have pushed steadily toward making the administrative agencies of government more responsive to political (especially executive) direction and toward overcoming what is seen as an overly restrictive structure of merit system rules and procedures that arguably has the effect of severely limiting management capacity and organizational performance.

Obviously, proposals for reform focusing on these specific issues are not new. They have antecedents that date to the Brownlow Committee recommendations of the late 1930s, and similar ideas are reflected in the U.S. Civil Service Reform Act of 1978. Consistent with concepts associated with the "new public management," current reform initiatives stress reinvention, re-engineering, decentralization, deregulation, employee empowerment, results-oriented management, and executive control. Recent initiatives reflect the notion that human resources functions in government should be strategically integrated with the planning and management control tasks in

agencies and, most importantly, should emphasize support as opposed to regulatory activity. Reinventing themes relevant to the civil service were reflected in the Clinton Administration's National Performance Review and in the report of the National Commission on State and Local Public Service of 1993. In this volume, the reader will encounter two types of civil service reform. One of these focuses, in the Brownlow tradition, on making structural and technical improvements in the personnel function. As such, it is in the long-standing tradition of government modernization, and therefore does not represent an anti-government point of view. It seeks to improve the performance of government. The second type of reform, consistent with the new public management perspective, often seeks to dismantle existing civil service systems and to replace them with models closely resembling those found in the private sector.

This book will examine the kinds of public personnel reforms noted above and the extent to which they are being implemented in state government. An assessment of reform at the state level is particularly important given the significance of states in the delivery of public programs and the historic role the states have played as incubators of administrative change. The purpose here is to provide readers with a contemporary analysis and assessment of civil service reforms undertaken by state governments during the last decade of the twentieth century and the first years of the twenty-first. Some states have implemented dramatic reforms during that time, while in others, reforms have been resisted, often successfully. The chapters presented here were prepared for this volume by nationally recognized experts on civil service and civil service reform in the United States, and we believe they will be of wide interest to public policy makers, practitioners, students, and academicians. In general terms, we sought a regional distribution of states and variation in history and politics that should be associated with attitudes toward reform. With these goals in mind, we selected states that had engaged in reform and others where reform efforts had been less successful. Our selections were also controlled by the availability of highly qualified authors who could speak knowledgeably about the intricacies of civil service reform in each state.

We expect this book will be useful as a text for advanced undergraduate and graduate courses on public administration and public personnel administration or human resources management. It is divided into two major sections. Part One, which is comprised of the first five chapters, examines the context of personnel reform in the states. Donald E. Klingner of the University of Colorado at Denver

provides a useful general background on personnel policy and civil service reform in chapter 1. He identifies alternative approaches to structuring personnel systems driven by differing value orientations. In chapter 2, Hal G. Rainey of the University of Georgia reviews federal trends in the quest for flexibility in public personnel systems and other currently popular reform ideas and their implications for state government. Rainey considers what it will take to achieve effective change in public organizations and the preconditions necessary for successful reform. Sally Coleman Selden of Lynchburg College presents an empirical analysis of recent civil service reforms in the states and their causes and potential consequences using data generated in part by the Government Performance Project conducted at Syracuse University. Chapter 4, by Richard C. Kearney of East Carolina University, reviews the role of public employee unions in civil service reform, notes the impact of unions, and explains how that impact differs by time, state, and legal environment. Finally, in chapter 5, Stefanie A. Lindquist of Vanderbilt University and Stephen E. Condrey of the University of Georgia, discuss the legal framework within which public personnel systems operate and the implications of some civil service reforms for constitutional due process.

Part Two of the book examines the experiences of selected states with civil service reform. In chapter 6, for example, we review the dramatic reforms that occurred in the state of Georgia in the mid-1990s. The Georgia reforms were comprehensive, and in many ways went beyond what has occurred in other states. The state removed merit system protections from all employees hired after July 1, 1996, and placed authority for most personnel management decisions in line agencies and departments, leaving the state's central personnel agency to serve primarily as a consultant to those organizations rather than a regulator of the system. This chapter reports the findings of a statewide survey of supervisory and nonsupervisory employees working within the Georgia system. The findings indicate that supervisory and nonsupervisory employees alike are quite pessimistic about the effects of the reforms on the personnel management process in the state.

In chapter 7, James S. Bowman of Florida State University, Jonathan P. West of the University of Miami, and Sally C. Gertz of Florida State University examine civil service reform in Florida, which became, in the year 2000, the second state to enact comprehensive reform removing merit system protections from public employees. Bowman, West, and Gertz trace the historical antecedents

of the reform effort in Florida and explore the provisions of the law, its major implications, and its impacts.

Steven W. Hays of the University of South Carolina and Chris Byrd and Samuel L. Wilkins of the South Carolina Budget and Control Board review reform efforts that have taken place in the state of South Carolina in chapter 8. They note that thanks to a variety of political and administrative catalysts over the past decade, South Carolina's government has become a leader in managerial reform, and that by far the most celebrated facet of that reform movement was a complete redesign and reorientation of the state's centralized human resource management function. Borrowing heavily from the contemporary wisdom of reinvention, the personnel system was decentralized and line managers were empowered to make almost all of the staffing and human resource decisions that once required outside review and approval. The authors chronicle the many structural and procedural changes implemented in South Carolina and provide an assessment of their effects.

The nature of the public personnel management system in Texas is next explored by Jerrell D. Coggburn of the University of Texas at San Antonio. Coggburn reviews Texas' unique approach to public sector human resources noting that it is the only state with no centralized personnel office to direct or even work in a consultative role with line agencies. Instead, the state has had for a very long time an almost fully decentralized personnel function in which agencies and departments assume primary responsibility. The implications of this decentralized approach and its impact on the effectiveness of human resources management in Texas are reviewed.

In chapter 10, N. Joseph Cayer of Arizona State University and Charles H. Kime of Arizona State University—East analyze personnel system changes in the state of Arizona. The review of human resources policies and practices in that state reflects consideration for more than twenty years of specific suggestions for change. In 1980 the state made major changes in its personnel system to reflect some of the changes made at the national level through the Civil Service Reform Act (CSRA) of 1978. While much of the spirit of the CSRA reform influenced the Arizona effort, the state was not ready to adopt the panoply of reforms represented by CSRA. The 1980 reform in the state was an effort to modernize state personnel and place personnel activities on a professional level. Over the past two decades, the state has made piecemeal changes. Unfortunately, numerous political upheavals in the state have stunted efforts at real change, but nonetheless, efforts now are under way focusing on such issues as

classification and compensation reform, broadbanding, performance evaluation systems, and modernizing benefits plans for employees.

Chapter 11, by Katherine C. Naff of San Francisco State University, contains a discussion of efforts to reform the civil service system in California and how its experience stands in marked contrast to states such as Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina. Despite California's reputation as a "trendsetter"; that is, the place where the tax revolt, environmental movement, and immigration debate began, the state's civil service system has changed little since the introduction of the merit system in the early 1900s. One important reason has to do with the state's political environment. In contrast to many other states, California has strong unions representing its civil servants and the relationship between those unions and Governors Wilson and Davis had a significant effect on prospects for serious reform. The chapter concludes with a rather pessimistic assessment of the likelihood that major civil service reform in California will occur over the coming decade.

In chapter 12, by Peter D. Fox, former Secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Employment Relations and Robert J. Lavigna, Senior Manager for Client Services of CPS Human Resource Services, discuss significant reforms of the Wisconsin state civil service system. Fox and Lavigna review the state's progress in reforming the hiring process, position classification, and labor relations systems. The focus of the effort was on bringing significantly increased flexibility and efficiency to personnel program management. According to the authors, these reforms have yielded more timely hiring, better qualified job candidates, new ways to reward and retain talent, and more cooperative relationships with labor unions. Above all, Fox and Lavigna assert that these improvements have been achieved without sacrificing the principles for which progressive civil service systems are known—merit, fairness, and openness.

In chapter 13, Norma Riccucci of Rutgers University, Newark, examines recent efforts by the state of New York to reform its civil service system. Riccucci finds that the system is administered through a fragmented structure, and efforts to reform this structure have been frustrated by a lack of legislative support. However, incremental reforms have been achieved by an effectively led centralized civil service department. Riccucci observes that while some may argue that many of the reforms are rudimentary, they have "pulled New York State's civil service up to par with other state's civil service systems."

In chapter 14, we provide a summary of some of the lessons we believe may be learned from the reform experiences in various states. Prospects for the future, including issues that are certain to become central in future reform debates, are set forth for the reader's consideration.

Before closing this introduction, we think it is important to emphasize a central premise upon which this book is based: government and its employees matter. As noted earlier, the tasks accomplished by government workers include everything from the maintenance of public facilities to the interpretation, formation, and implementation of public policy. They perform the critical work of government and bring public programs to life. In a very real sense, then, they are the government, or at least, they are the people in government with whom citizens are most likely to have regular contact. As a result, and because government service matters, civil service reform matters. Nothing less than the effectiveness of government and popular perceptions of its legitimacy are at stake. The chapters that follow do much to underscore this important reality.

Notes

1. Among the major reform efforts of the twentieth century at the federal level, one may count Commissions or Committees including the Commission on Department Methods of 1905 (i.e., the Keep Commission), the Commission on Economy and Efficiency of 1910 (i.e., the Taft Commission), the Joint Committee on Reorganization of 1920, the President's Committee on Administrative Management of 1937 (i.e., the Brownlow Committee), the First Hoover Commission of 1947, the Second Hoover Commission of 1953, the Task Force on Government Organization under President Johnson, the Advisory Council on Executive Organization from 1969 (i.e., the Ash Council), the President's Reorganization Project under President Carter, the President's Private-Sector Survey on Cost Control established in 1981 (i.e., the Grace Commission), the National Commission on the Public Service established in 1987 (i.e., the Volcker Commission), and the National Performance Review under President Clinton. See Ingraham (1992) for a discussion of each of these efforts excluding the National Performance Review under President Clinton.

2. Hays and Kearney (1990) discuss the emergence of these important issues in greater detail in the preface to the second edition of their edited text on public personnel administration.

References

- Ingraham, Patricia W. (1992). "Commission, Cycles, and Change: The Role of Blue-Ribbon Commissions in Executive Branch Change," in Patricia W. Ingraham and Donald F. Kettl, eds. *Agenda for Excellence: Public Service in America*. Chatham House, NJ: Chatham House Publishers.
- Hays, Steven W., and Richard C. Kearney, eds. (1990). *Public Personnel Administration: Problems and Prospects*, 2nd. ed. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.