

# Knowing civil service reform

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## The Long Road to Reform

Civil service reform is not a short term endeavor. It is of course simply a means to an end, which involves 'deliberate changes to the structures and processes of public sector organizations with the purpose of getting them to run better' Source?. Christopher Pollitt and Geert Bouckaert's comparative analysis of public management reforms identified the following ends:

- making savings (economies) in public expenditure
- improving service quality
- making government operations more efficient
- increasing the likelihood that the chosen policies will be effective.

The public sector of Pakistan was inherited from the British colonial system that sought compliance with state policies and supported little public participation. These propensities shaped the whole range of bureaucratic structures and systems comprising recruitment processes, training, mobility systems, inefficient public administration and incomplete devolution. The dominance of state in the market and elite capture were the characteristic features. Geopolitical threats and political settlement framed the role of bureaucracy in higher-level policy formulation and implementation systems.

The public sector is plagued with both political and technical problems. The political problems which include the scheme of the public administration, and the relationship between several categories and hierarchies in the various parts of the civil service that can only be resolved through a political process.



The technical problems have created functional weaknesses that could be attended through technocratic responses. The various sets of reforms have not appropriately adjusted to suit the respective realities of Pakistan's public administration because reforms have focused on the structure of the organizations rather than on the functioning of these institutions. The technocratic problems have been considered less than political problems in some cases due to which the reasons or the rules for poor performance have still been s attached with the system.

The Public Service Commission has recognized that rules for recruitment, poor motivation and lack of incentives are the major challenges. The absence of strong human resource management (HRM) systems, including a functional HRM planning system, damages staff allocation and management.(HRM) systems, including a functional HRM planning system, damages staff allocation and management. The HRM system is still manual and staff records are kept in individual files, even basic staffing data such as number of sanctioned and filled positions, titles, grade levels, qualifications, training obtained, years in service, etc. are not available in electronic form at the department level. This has led to inefficiency and created hollowness for opportunities in personnel management, including in the filling of vacant positions. The absence of data and a poor monitoring system for HR planning means that estimating staff strength can be a challenge. So, this inefficiency has become the reason for two main problems. First, it is possible to hire more staff than are needed that leads to an increase in the wage bill. Second, without human resource planning, various unwanted vacancies exist in several departments due to the difficulty of establishing staff movements at any given time.

It is clear that the talented people are attracted by those countries which have large economies, well developed businesses, good living standards, social security, growth opportunities

and above all high financial incentives. Unfortunately, Pakistani employment market is not much attractive for talented and growth loving people and fails to create good opportunities for potential talented employees. For example, recruitment process of public sector organizations is too slow, confusing and unfair. Talented people with multiple options are unlikely to make the effort or wait the six months that it can sometimes take to hear back from an employer.



Another most important factor in public sector reforms is existing compensation structure. The compensation system of public sector based on political constraints as compared to the private sector is subject to profit constraints.

The public sector may be willing to pay higher wages to its employees especially semi-skilled workers but it does not pay attractive financial incentives to its higher skilled or talented workers. But, the burning question is why civil service reforms are not implemented in true spirit and its goals hardly achieved. One reason may be that we ignore the success factor of such reforms. In a paper, Institute for Development Policy and Management, Manchester, highlighted following reasons of failure

- The main problem is that the low administrative capacity and poor performance favors an incremental approach to reform.
- The “power of the purse” of donors has led them to take center stage in the selection and definition of reform projects, undermining the sense of local ownership and distorting decision-making as governments adopt initiatives that are likely to bring the most aid money rather than those that are the most necessary.
- Effective central coordination and a sustained focus on end results are necessary to bridge internal gaps and diffuse ownership of reform within government.

World Bank (1995) experience suggests that unless the political will is strong, the reform process will be ineffective. They argue that political desirability, feasibility and credibility are necessary political conditions for successful reform.

