

KEY DIRECTIONS OF THE CIVIL SERVICE DEVELOPMENT IN BELARUS

DIRECCIONES CLAVE DEL DESARROLLO DEL SERVICIO CIVIL EN BIELORRUSIA

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Recibido: 10/09/2017

Aceptado: 26/10/2017

Abstract

The present article gives an overview of scientifically substantiated approaches to developing civil service in the context of the growing demands to personal and professional skills of civil servants. Additionally the following issues are analyzed in the paper: creation of the Portal for the National HR Policy in Belarus, and promotion of informational openness on HR and anti-corruption policies.

Keywords: national HR policy, civil service, public administration, civil servants, information communication environment

Resumen

El presente artículo ofrece una visión general de los enfoques fundamentados científicamente para el desarrollo del servicio civil en el contexto de las crecientes demandas a las habilidades personales y profesionales de los funcionarios públicos. Además, en el documento se analizan los siguientes temas: creación del Portal para la política nacional de recursos humanos en Bielorrusia y promoción de la apertura informativa sobre las políticas de recursos humanos y anticorrupción.

Palabras clave: política nacional de recursos humanos, servicio civil, administración pública, funcionarios públicos, entorno de comunicación de la información

Introduction

In the layout of the state civil service presents a critical structure that serves as a bridge between the government and the society. The Constitution (the Fundamental Law) and other legal regulations of the

Republic of Belarus outline a plethora of tasks to be solved by the civil service. Public managers and officers across all government echelons are engaged in forecasting, goal setting, planning, workflow management, coordination, and performance control. In this light the synergy of public agencies must

ensure that an efficient public administration system is in place. The groundwork of this efficiency is laid down by a number of factors, such as high professional level of civil servants, new HR technologies, anti-corruption measures, and, not least, public support.

Development

Civil service improvement, including staff capacity building, has become key issues in the realities of the world today. Public policies are ushered in by civil servants. Therefore, their professionalism and personal competencies define performance and responsiveness of the public sector ultimately impacting citizens' livelihoods and the prestige of the state in general. That is why, there should exist a working mechanism for attracting most competent and responsible professionals to the public office who would be able to translate into practice the fundamental state-building principle – “The State for the People”.

The scientific doctrine, as a rule, circumscribes civil service to a job on ensuring that the state's policies and functions correspond to the society's interests.^{1, p. 86} Aristotle observed in his day that a civil servant is called to solve common issues and to delve into nuances grasping the connection between the power and the people.

The civil service system that has evolved in the Republic of Belarus is distinguished not only by its professionalism, but also by the rule of law, democratic nature, committed public service, humane character and social justice. Strong presidential leadership is another distinguishing feature and a vantage point of the Belarusian civil service. And, as was noted by Head of State, it is strong presidential leadership that saved the country from falling into an abyss in the mid 1990-s.

Continued development of the civil service institute is one of the major state-building trajectories with human rights and freedoms at the top of the government agenda. The aim is to create an open, competitive and high profile civil service focused on the needs of the citizens and the society. At present the effort on improving anti-corruption policies has gained momentum. This was also observed by President Alexander Lukashenko in his annual Message to the Belarusian people and the parliament:

“Belarus must set an example how the corruption can and should be fought. It is essential that during the forthcoming years we carry out a range of systemic measures against this evil”.

To keep pace with the country's dynamic development civil servants must be ahead of their time, perform efficiently in their jobs and demonstrate high professional and personal competencies. In the modernization period it is essential for civil servants to act as civic-minded, agile, responsive and high performing leaders.

President Lukashenko especially emphasized that the public office should be staffed with the best. The governance system should employ responsible individuals capable of independent thought and action.²

Along these lines, new HRM approaches are required to improve the Belarusian economic model, which capacity is scaled up through increasing e-government practices, civic-minded state-building, and integration to the world economic system.

The vibrant social and political environment calls for a package of preventive measures to counter unwanted implications of certain gaps in the state sector that negatively affect the performance of public agencies. The lack in qualified managing and core personnel, high staff turnover and aging levels, oftentimes insufficient professional competency, and gender disbalance are among the commonly encountered voids in public bodies. For example, women account for 70 per cent of the number of civil servants while 30 per cent of public posts are occupied by men. And the presence of young citizens in the public office is estimated at 15 per cent out of the whole civil service corps.

With this in mind, it is relevant to pursue with a step-wise development of the civil service institute. This approach was anchored in the 2030 National Strategy for Sustainable Social and Economic Development of the Republic of Belarus (Strategy-2030) adopted in February 2015. It is also getting important to improve the practices of local government and self-government authorities. The Strategy2030 points to the following directions of how these spheres should develop in the near future: making local governments and self-governments more economically solid; developing and implementing various participation instruments to facilitate engagement of local governments in the regional decision-making; promoting citizen engagement and participation in the development of national programmes and local initiatives with the increasing role of local communities.^{3, p. 142}

In this light and considering the national objectives, several main avenues can be mapped for the civil service development.

HR component is indisputably the most important part in any improvement process. However, HR provision (staffing the public sector with regular and reserve employees) in the Republic of Belarus is not solely about the content and legal framework of in-service training and professional advancement. Successful professional advancement is backed up by the quality concept put into practice (the EFQMmodel – the quality model of the European Fund for Quality Management), as well as by the efficient control, knowledge management and certification. The following tools are applied for the assessment: licensing, accreditation and inspection of the institutions for civil servants' professional advancement; certification of the teaching staff; expenditure control; real-time quality control and performance assessment; career growth dynamics,

and other. The quality of the curricula, inclusive study modes and teaching methods, used for the civil servants' training, is equally important.

Mechanisms of Belarus' integration to the global community, including international academic area, and promotion of cooperation on equitable terms underpin the role and high priority attached to the tasks on improving efficiency of public administration and building capacity of decision-makers.

Improvements in managerial training, transfer of state-of-the-art decision-making technologies and adoption of advanced international practices require pinpointed modernization of the civil servants' training system. The urgency for the upgraded legal and organizational framework of the civil servants' training in Belarus is fuelled by the state's commitments on implementing the roadmap for higher education reforms. Adjustment of international practices on civil servants' professional advancement to the Belarusian context takes an important part in the reform process. One of the feasible ways to harmonize the national higher education system with the Bologna higher education architecture is to shift to the two-level training system for civil servants (combined bachelor and master degree studies) based on the extended use of the following programmes – MPA (Master of Public Administration), MPP (Master of Public Policy), MIR (Master of International Relations), and MBA (Master of Business Administration).

It appears now important to strengthen the interplay between the processes of training, retraining and inservice training of civil servants by designing modular curricula structures; diversify study programmes; promote competence-based approach; and accentuate the importance of building decision-makers' leadership skills and raising their awareness about modern computer technologies. For that purpose, it is vital to look ahead of the on-going trends when developing teaching capacity, including building the institution's own pool of trainers (including international experts) as part of that capacity building effort.

To build an inclusive government it is essential to take account of interests of most vulnerable social groups, including physically and mentally challenged individuals. This means that the disabled people should not only be provided with a safety network based on new methodological and organizational approaches but they should also be engaged in decision-making via getting corresponding education and assuming posts in the public office.

At the same time, the first and foremost way to improve the procedure of entrance into the public office is to make it as open as possible. This can be done by raising citizen awareness about the possibilities, requirements and procedure of entering the civil service. Another effective measure is to provide a broader access to the information on open vacancies and selection results. The selection criteria should be defined in such a way as to attract most promising and high-profile candidates to apply for a position in the public office.

It is also important to apply modern assessment tools to produce a well-grounded evaluation of applicants' professional level and personal qualities. In this regard adoption of state-of-the-art HR techniques would positively impact the whole institute of civil service.

However, it is not just the procedure of the public personnel selection that requires further consistent improvement. The key task in the contemporary environment of dynamic changes is to advance the civil servants' performance assessment system. Creation of an impartial and holistic performance assessment system will underpin an uninterrupted quality upgrade of public services.

Practicing integrated types of assessment, where various modes and methods are applied, is another important way to make the procedure more effective. Another popular practice is to introduce regular monitoring of civil servants' professional knowledge by organizing computer tests, requesting reports and essays, and conducting '360-degree' appraisals.⁴⁻⁶ At this stage it would be relevant to develop methodological recommendations for assessing professional and personal qualities of civil servants, including predefined assessment criteria, lists of professional and personal qualities required for certain public office levels, and, finally, the principles and the algorithm of the assessment.

Today attestation plays the most important part in assessing performance of the Belarusian civil servants. Attestation provides a rather detailed picture of the competence level of a civil servant. Nonetheless, this method can be further improved in a number of ways. One of them would be to establish compulsory knowledge tests pending on duties performed in this or that public post. Development of such attestation packages could become another step of a concerted effort.

It is worth noting that the modern civil service is not only about civil servants effectively performing their job responsibilities on the basis of the specialized knowledge and skills, but it is also about civil servants possessing certain personal and moral qualities that are critical to accomplishing their duties in serving the public. For one thing, jobs in the public office are about working with people and doing paperwork – or in a broader view, they are about managing public resources and social processes. A civil servant should be well-spoken, exercise good knowledge of the legislation and be able to defend his or her standpoint. Apart from that, a modern civil servant should be stress-resistant and possess solid organizational skills. In our opinion, communicability is one of the most important qualities that every civil servant should have, implying his or her ability to maintain self-control, stay connected and grasp the point when communicating with citizens. In this respect civil service should attract gifted and proactive individuals and at the same time put forth high demands to professional and moral qualities of those who assume high-profile decision-making posts.

Nowadays, it is vital to embed ICT in the civil service practices. Ever increasing complexity of managerial tasks, shrinking timelines for decision-making, expanded decision-making responsibilities – all this calls for high-quality information feed to support decision-making processes with the help of the state-of-the-art IT.

At present, to respond to the above mentioned challenges numerous countries around the globe have been undertaking intensive measures to integrate various information and communication resources in the sphere of governance so as to make them more accessible, set up upgraded information search tools and create unified communication means for users performing different tasks. Societies cultivate an information-communication environment and then navigate, modify and improve it. In its turn, new achievements in science and technology scale up the information-communication environment of a contemporary society. Latest research proves that continuously updated information-communication environment of a society triggers its performance capacity, social transformations and, most importantly, intellectualization of all spheres of social activity.

In such realities as mentioned above it is reasonable to promote informational support and interaction between public agencies and other institutions in Belarus as well as between citizens and business sector by means of creating a common information-communication environment for public service, national HR policy and anti-corruption campaign.

A direct response to this task is the effort to create a common information portal for civil servants – The Civil Service Portal of the Republic of Belarus. The given resource is created to foster informational openness and transparency of the procedure of entrance to the civil service, and to promote prestige of the career in the public office in Belarus.

Conclusions

In conclusion, it is worth noting that the civil service should attract young professionals who are willing to serve the interests of the people, society and the state. The quality of the civil service human resources defines not only the status quo of public administration system but also its efficiency. Ultimately, efficient performance is ensured by the strong presidential power. The institute of presidency epitomizes stability of the Belarusian state and underpins effectiveness of the social sphere and all economic sectors. We recognize the indispensable role of a strong presidential power in building a rule-of-law state and democratic society and in creating conducive conditions to enable continued growth of the civil service capacity.

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