Strategies for Meeting the Challenges of Diversity Management in the Civil Service

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Introduction

Diversity in the civil service has emerged as a key issue in the initiative to reassess the role of government. Demands for equity, equality and fairness in a time of growing demographic diversification indicate a parallel need to diversify public bureaucracies. The unprecedented challenges to public policy making and management set in motion by the forces of globalization and democratization require governmental capabilities which can effectively embrace diverse cultures and perspectives.

In designating the year 2001 as the Year of Dialogue Among Civilizations, the United Nations General Assembly acknowledged acceptance of diversity of tastes, ideas, beliefs and values as a basic precondition toward a creative dialogue that contributes to development and adds vitality to democratic governance. The fifteenth biennial Meeting of Experts in New York in May 2000, organized by the Division of Public Economics and Public Administration (DPEPA) of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, underlined the importance of diversity in the adaptation of contemporary governments to the challenge of globalization. The Meeting specifically recommended that Member States should strengthen their civil services through diversity and mobility, both to develop social capital and to enhance national institutional capacities.

Diversity means variety: it is an intrinsic characteristic of the natural world, where a bewildering and seemingly inexhaustible variation in living form contributes to an intricate, complex ecology. In the human sphere, diversity is manifest in languages, cultures, skin colors and other physical characteristics. In organizations, a diverse workforce integrates not only individuals from different racial, national, religious and ethnic backgrounds, but also men and women, the elderly and disabled, and those with different sexual orientations. Diversity, in this context, means opportunities for all groups to be hired and to advance, and valuing the differences among them.

While diversity in public sector organizations has long been paid tribute, in few is it a reality. Diversity may challenge long cherished domination of bureaucracies by one group and entrenched ways of doing business. The achievement of diversity would require changes in hiring and promotion practices, as well as structural changes to ensure mobility and opportunity for previously excluded or under-represented groups. Such changes would challenge narrow power over policy-making, bureaucratic isolation, secrecy, hierarchy, over-reliance on rigid rules, insensitivity to those excluded, and lack of responsiveness. Reforms that promoted diversity would also encourage others, such as broader participation in policy making, stronger community linkages, improved communications and information flow, greater openness and transparency, more humane operations, and enhanced capacity for decision making and implementation. How might this transformation be attained?

Diversity in the civil service: concept and context

The nineteenth century reforms which firmly established public bureaucracies as the core of the administrative state theoretically opened up civil service careers to all qualified citizens. Equal opportunity and the hiring and promotion of quality personnel would fulfill both the demands of
democracy and the requirement for a capable workforce. Weber’s characterization of bureaucracy as neutral and impersonal by definition appeared to rule out discrimination (See Weber, 2000:54-63). Recruitment and promotion by merit took no account of the issue of representation, whether by race or class, at all.

In practice, large proportions of the population were excluded even from eligibility for employment. Where the mass of the population were uneducated, they were de facto excluded. Cultural prejudices, legal regulations, and inflexible working conditions often ruled out women or relegated them to low-level positions. Colonial regimes did not even consider the indigenous populations they ruled as equal candidates for career service, except for servants, low-level positions, and a few needed professionals. The elderly were precluded by retirement provisions, and the disabled without thought.

Yet ideas about democratic government and equal access to public employment persisted and found recognition in concepts of representation in the civil service (e.g. Kingsley, 1944). It was argued that a representative bureaucracy would lead to more democratic and better decision making by expanding the diversity of views involved; would improve responsiveness to the public; would increase the legitimacy of governmental institutions; and would give practical expression to values of social equity and justice (Krislov and Rosenbloom, 1981: 23).

As education systems improved and broadened their scope, and colonial regimes withdrew, civil services in some countries did provide a greater opening for opportunity and mobility through their competitive hiring systems. Social and political ferment following the Second World War resulted in programs which broadened the role and size of governments, and therefore their employment rolls. The civil rights movement in the United States first produced an emphasis on equal opportunity, and then programs of affirmative action, whose objectives were to redress previous discrimination against minorities and to further their advancement (Golembiewski, 1995: 29-36).

Even so, by the end of the twentieth century, equality of representation was far from achieved. In the United States, where efforts had probably gone the furthest to integrate minorities, it appeared that they had made relatively little headway. A report by the American Council on Education in 1995 contended that “despite having attained their highest employment levels in history, minorities have yet to achieve parity in representation in the federal government’s management and supervisory ranks” (Goodman, 1995: ix). It concluded that “in most federal departments, minorities still work predominantly in clerical and other low-level positions, where they are unlikely to have management responsibility or to make substantive contributions to policy development” (Goodman, 1995: xii).

Meanwhile, the idea of workforce diversity found a receptive audience in the private sector. Diversity had long been recognized as a mark of enlightened management in many business organizations (Walsh, 1995: 1; Harris, 1997: 17). In 1987, the Hudson Institute published a landmark report, Workforce 2000, which drew attention to demographic changes in the United States (Johnston and Packer, 1987). It predicted that minorities and women would shortly outnumber past majorities in the labor force. The unmistakable trend, together with pressures from globalization, was heralded as the source of future inevitable and irreversible organizational
transformation. Diversity management had become a rational business strategy, rather than a legal or moral issue.

Diversity management is, therefore, first, a pragmatic response to workforce trends, whose size and scope require more than compliance with legal mandates. To take advantage of available talent, and to utilize it effectively, organizations would have to take deliberate steps to encourage recruitment and advancement of a heterogeneous pool of labor, including minorities, women, the elderly, disabled, and non-conformists of all kinds. Management changes would need to extend from practical physical accommodations and work schedule adaptations to the transformation of organizational cultures.

Second, a case was made out for diversity as offering significant competitive benefits. A diverse organization, it was argued, would create opportunities for greater creativity and breadth of view, significant insights into global markets, and links to diverse consumer bases. Diversity would pay off in terms of market share and profits, and diversity management would be a good investment.

During the past decade, a large literature has developed on managing diversity in organizations, but in the United States at least, organizational awareness has not been translated into significant gains for minorities or women (Harris, 1997: 17). Instead, growing conservatism has sparked a backlash manifest in laws, regulations and court decisions, which has constrained affirmative action programs in education and employment. In this context, diversity management may even be regarded as a step back from more concrete goals to diversity in the workforce, a pale substitute for serious efforts to include women and minorities in high quality careers. Or the change in emphasis may be rather a recognition that past strategies were not working and new ones were required.

In the public sector, the arguments for diversity go well beyond profitability and markets, to the role of government. The issues of demographics and organizational effectiveness persist, but are transformed by the contemporary context, and augmented by considerations of democracy in human resources management and public policy making and implementation.

**Diversity and the role of government**

Governments are now expected to respond to unprecedented and unfamiliar problems, as well as older concerns transformed by a fast changing, volatile and complex environment. The uneven impacts of globalization have not only entailed substantive opportunities and problems, but have changed the policy context. Population movements have altered the balance of ethnic and racial groups in many countries, and created or exacerbated social tensions. As the result of policies of importing cheap labor from poor countries, previously homogeneous countries now host significant minorities, whose later generations face an identity crisis of acceptance. Refugees, were they concentrated in one place, would constitute an entire nation. The end of communism sparked violent ethnic conflicts, as old hatreds erupted in countries where diverse groups lived among each other or in close proximity. Even where there is little or no violence, women and other groups are questioning and resisting discrimination, and demanding political rights. The movement of populations to cities has also brought marginal ethnic groups into the mainstream,
often concentrating in an informal economy, whose poverty stands in stark contrast to the affluent sector of society, contributing to the widening gap between rich and poor.

This diversification and mixing of populations has been accompanied by greater political awareness and mobilization. Sometimes cutting across divisions, and sometimes representing single religious, ethnic or racial groups, people are organizing. They are working to improve their own lot, to make demands on governments, and also to challenge the legitimacy of those in power, and more frequently now to force them from office. The revolution in communications has created world wide instantly accessible sources of information and put people in touch with immediate events and each other. They are less and less prepared to be passive outsiders, excluded not only from economic benefits but from power over their own fate.

Governments, similarly, cannot afford to ignore the ferment in society that swirls around their agencies and institutions. They are required to respond to a greater range of clients and stakeholders, who may make inconsistent claims, refuse to accommodate the status quo, and demand recognition and satisfaction. Expectations have risen, whether for speedy response to disasters, equitable policies, clean government, or effective urban management. Government agencies need the capacity to make and manage policies in a complex, fast changing and unstable environment, where prediction is difficult, and pressures derive not only from circumstances within national boundaries but also from outside.

Traditional governmental bureaucracies may have difficulty in adapting to a diverse environment of this kind. Where agencies rely on inflexible rules, they uneasily make accommodation for cases which do not fit within them. To the extent that hierarchies result in limited information at the top and inadequate authority at the bottom, they may be out of touch and unresponsive. Where the culture is one of passive following of orders, problem-solving and initiative are constrained. Predominant conventionality and uniformity prevent innovation, creativity or the capacity to recognize and meet new situations. And if public institutions are in addition viewed as corrupt, inefficient, or the exclusive preserve of a single group, it is not surprising that in many countries, governments are objects of suspicion and cynicism. The credibility and legitimacy of governments are critical issues in the capability of the public sector to make and implement policies effectively.

Such criticisms of bureaucracy are not new, and form part of a broader argument for diminishing the role of government, and privatization of public agencies and enterprises. But even where privatization is justified, it requires not less but more effective public management to carry out a myriad critical functions, from macroeconomic policy making to internal and external security; from public health to ensuring safety in building codes; from infrastructure to monitoring contract compliance. Civil service reforms, therefore, call for enhanced public policy capacity and greater responsiveness, creativity and flexibility. Because of stronger and competing demands for participation in decision-making, public policy makers find themselves involved in crafting solutions, building support, cooperation and compromise.

The need for more diverse civil services then rests on three basic premises: the continued and pivotal importance of public bureaucracies in the modern state; the need for civil service reform to transform traditional bureaucracies; and demographic and political changes stemming from a
variety of causes and taking different shapes throughout the world. Diversity is justified by the requirement for a highly qualified workforce, social equity, development of human capital, innovation and problem solving, cultural change, and nation building.

**A highly qualified work force.** Because of greater professionalization of civil services, and the need for high quality personnel in policy and management positions, governments need to draw on a wider pool of talent. They cannot afford to exclude groups because of discrimination and prejudice, but should seek out actively persons with high ability whatever their background.

**Social equity.** The civil service should not be the preserve of any one group, but should be realistically open to all citizens. It is a public resource, not a political prize, or instrument for a single social class, gender, race or religion. The civil service should provide a model for fairness and non-discrimination.

**Human capital.** One of the most effective strategies toward development is the building of human and social capital. Civil services should be an active force in building human capital through the deliberate attraction of neglected and underrepresented groups. They should develop and offer career paths to enable diversity at all levels of organization, including top managerial and policy-making positions.

**Innovation and problem solving.** Because governments have to devise and manage policies for heterogeneous societies, civil services need to develop capacity to relate to, understand, and cooperate with the various groups which compose them. Diversity should improve cultural sensitivity toward client groups, as well as incorporating a greater variety of viewpoints into policy making, broadening the range of possibilities for consideration, and providing more realistic insights into complex, dynamic problems.

**Organizational culture.** It has been generally accepted that organizational change requires more than rearranging structures or passing laws. Real reforms depend for their success on changing organizational cultures. Diversification contributes to changes in basic assumptions about how an organization conducts its business, and to public organizations which support change.

**Nation building.** Effective civil services cannot stand aloof, sheltering behind a neutral facade of technical competence, from the vicissitudes of the societies of which they form part. They are an essential component of governance, and should conduct themselves so as to help prevent conflicts and integrate populations increasingly divided among different races, nationalities and ethnic groups. Diversification in civil service should contribute toward policies of inclusiveness toward all members of society.

It might be thought that demographic change on its own would bring about gradual diversification of civil services, but there are more likely to be significant obstacles to this development. Changes may be too slow, or alternatively they may bring about destructive disruptions to the status quo. Diversity, if it is to happen at all or make a positive contribution to civil service reform, requires conscious management, which faces a number of challenges.
Challenges to diversity management

Managing diversity in civil services is not an easy task. Challenges derive from the exclusionary nature of public employment, conditions of work (including career structures), societal constraints, prejudices and adverse cultures, and problems arising from diversity policy itself.

The exclusionary nature of public employment. Civil services require qualified people: the unqualified and uneducated are excluded. Non-citizens (who may be predominantly minorities) are also excluded. Sometimes certain groups (for example, married women or older persons) may be excluded by law. As public organizations have taken advantage of new technology of computers, they may have become even more exclusionary since the army of clerks, for whom literacy was an adequate requirement, may now have been made obsolescent. Where governments have responded to demands for cutbacks and privatization, such downsizing has probably further restricted opportunities for public service. Greater professionalization and the need for higher technical qualifications might exclude an even larger proportion of the population, unless other changes take place.

Conditions of work. Diversification may obviously be impeded where the civil service is the preserve of one group which excludes all others on the grounds of race, gender, or ethnicity. Corrupt organizations also are likely to oppose openness in recruitment and advancement as a single group or network keeps tight control on office and its rewards. These pathological cases aside, even where minorities and women are able to gain a foothold, they may be restricted to lower level positions and work categories. Equality of opportunity exists in theory, but is restricted by narrow job descriptions and various barriers to advancement. Inflexible work facilities and schedules may preclude women with children or the disabled from full participation in civil service careers.

Societal constraints. Where there is widespread poverty and illiteracy, and where education is not universal and is poorly adapted to producing individuals with required skills, it will be difficult to attain diversity in the public workforce. Where women are excluded from taking an active role in society, they will likewise be unable to pursue civil service careers and advancement. Where civil service employment is primarily available only in capital cities or large urban centers, rural residents may be de facto excluded.

Prejudice and adverse cultures. It is well known that individuals in organizations tend to select in their own image, looking for their own traits and believing only these will satisfy the demands of the job. A dominant group easily perpetuates its domination. Formal job qualifications may be framed in accordance with this image, even though the positions in question may not really require the skills stipulated. The unexpressed objective may be to keep out women and minorities. Such formal and informal practices make for a diversity unfriendly culture, for example valuing masculine traits (aggressive, competitive, firm, just) against feminine (soft, dependent, emotional, intuitive) (Golembiewski, 1995: 63), and rejecting individuals whose dress, appearance or mannerisms do not conform to the standard accepted model.

Diversity policies. Efforts to implement policies toward greater diversity and integration in civil services may also have dysfunctional effects which defeat their aims. Attempts to favor
previously under-represented groups or to compensate them for previous injustices provoke a backlash from applicants or candidates from the majority, who now find themselves disadvantaged. Where minorities, women or other under-represented groups are appointed or promoted, they may be the target of resentment and isolation, or subject to such pressures to conform that they may be forced to resign. Further, the need to distinguish “protected” groups leads to an emphasis on “stereotyping” of individuals as belonging to one race or gender or ethnic group, actually intensifying racism and prejudice, rather than alleviating it.

The specific challenges to diversity may take a number of forms, depending on the nature of the civil service and its relationship to society. Briefly, there are two major problems for countries dealing with diversity in public employment. One is the problem of exclusion, that is, who is being kept unfairly out of public employment. The other is the problem of inclusion, that is, who to allow in public employment who is qualified and competent, but who is not drawn from a relatively small circle. The former problem stems from the historical fact that governance has largely been confined to the privileged few and their connections. Governance at one time held the keys to power, status, class and spoils, and still does in many countries where government is undemocratic, business is monopolized by a few wealthy families, land is unevenly distributed, and education is reserved to the religiously observant and the wealthy. In short, an inner circle keeps public employment to itself and to its henchmen who it can appoint and dismiss at will in lower positions. Almost nobody else has access. There may be diversity, but only by accident, and then only at the lowest levels of governance when the major criterion for office is personal loyalty to one’s patron.

The problem of inclusion is somewhat different. So many people from all walks of life want public employment that restrictions have to be applied to ensure that only the best are selected and once selected give no cause for dismissals or replacement. While things may on the surface appear more fair, more open, more accessible, the reality may be different, again confining office to a meritocracy based on intelligence, schooling and ability to meet select criteria which may have little to do with performance on the job.

The following are examples of common situations, where discrimination arises, but the list is not exhaustive, and there is also overlapping among the categories.

Women. Women are either excluded altogether or are primarily limited to low level positions in a male dominated environment (for example, United States, Britain, where positions are theoretically open to all, but few women penetrate the “glass ceiling”).

Exclusion of the majority. In certain regimes a self-selected minority rules and the majority of the population may be excluded. With regime change, there is the problem of integrating the majority into the civil service without victimizing anyone from the previous ruling minorities (for example, ex-colonial regimes, South Africa).

Dominance by the majority where minorities are excluded. This situation refers to countries where migration has taken place, and citizen or non-citizen minorities are in effect excluded (for example Western Europe, where such minorities still remain relatively small, and the United States, where they are considerably larger).
Dominance by one ethnic group in a fragmented nation. Where society is fractured by tribal divisions, certain tribes or groupings may have come to dominate the civil service (for example, certain African nations).

A relatively balanced population. Here the civil service is part of a wider struggle for dominance, and without counter-policies, may be viewed as a prize or as part of the spoils of public office (for example, Lebanon, the Balkan states).

Dominance by a majority, with the neglect of marginal populations. In this situation the size and penetration of marginal ethnic populations may differ, but there may still be linguistic and cultural barriers to their entering the civil service (for example, certain Latin American countries).

Exclusion of groups not classified by gender or ethnicity. Groups finding difficulties in acceptance include the disabled, homosexuals, and non-conformists of all kinds.

The paradox of diversity management is that greater diversity is valued for bringing about a more just and tolerant society, as well as more effective organizations, but these conditions seem necessary to bring it about. Diversity is both end and means. What strategies are available to accomplish a transformation in public bureaucracies, where the transformation itself seems to be a pre-condition of success?

Strategies for diversity management

Diversity management in civil services is a relatively new phenomenon, and it is by no means clear just which strategies are likely to succeed. Strategies also depend on circumstances, which differ from country to country, so that successful experience in one is unlikely to be duplicated in another. Moreover, the strategies presented here – legal, educational, structural and societal - differ from each other not only in their means, but also in their objectives. Each strategy has both advantages and disadvantages, and it is probable that they would need to be combined depending on circumstances.

Legal strategies

A legal strategy is an effort to use law and regulation to achieve representation in the civil service of a country roughly commensurate with its composition. Its aim is to gain for under-represented groups their share of the benefits and power related to a civil service career. There is legal prohibition of all unfair discrimination and prejudice, as well as the removal of all unnecessary obstacles to equal opportunity. The only issue is individual merit – do individuals have appropriate qualifications and can they do the job? Where there has been severe past discrimination, this aim is amplified to redress past wrongs and afford a measure of compensation.

There are therefore two distinct approaches. The first is to provide equal opportunity to every person and eliminate discrimination based on race, sex, religion, national origin, color, age,
veteran status, or disability. The second, affirmative action, requires agencies whose workforce does not conform to the characteristics of the population, to make good faith efforts to promote and recruit persons who are under-represented. The aim is a representative workforce that conforms to the profile of the country’s population. Neither approach requires an agency to employ persons who are unqualified or incompetent, although affirmative action is often seen as favoring equally or less capable minority (or women) applicants over better qualified majority (or male) candidates.

Laws and regulations send clear signals regarding what is or is not acceptable conduct in recruiting, retaining or promoting staff. They are backed by commissions empowered to hear individual cases alleging discrimination, or by ability to sue in the courts, or both. At one extreme they may prescribe hiring quotas, or that certain percentages of government contracts go to firms owned by women or minorities. Legal requirements may go further by setting standards for equal opportunity or affirmative action for any entity receiving money or doing business with the government.

A less stringent approach is to stipulate processes for hiring for all positions with the aim of ensuring that there is no discrimination and that a good faith effort has been made to attract and consider underrepresented categories. When filling positions, agencies are required to advertise widely and also in specific publications where minorities and women might be expected to seek jobs. They should undertake deliberate strategies, such as cultivating relationships with educational institutions attended by minorities and women. Applicants are requested to declare their gender and ethnicity separately to a diversity office, which has to certify that the “pool” of applicants is adequately diverse, before selection and hiring may proceed. At the end of the process, the diversity office must again certify that processes have been strictly followed, and that no discrimination has taken place.

An exclusively legal compliance approach is unlikely to bring about diversity, and may involve a number of problems. First, it is not self-enforcing – enforcement depends upon individuals or classes of individuals bringing suits in court or filing complaints to validate claims of discrimination and gain damages. Not only are such legal actions expensive and slow to satisfy individual claims, but public policy is formed on an ad hoc basis from case law, which is complex, changing, and unpredictable. There may also be biases in the judicial system itself.

Second, a purely compliance approach does nothing to allay conflicts in the workplace, to counter allegations of special preferences to any group, or to avert suspicions that persons less qualified or competent have been appointed or promoted. If anything, litigiousness may intensify conflicts and make diversity more difficult to accept. A legalistic approach attacks symptoms rather than dealing with the causes of prejudice and discrimination and creating a diversity friendly workforce (Harris, 1997: 20-22).

Third, in emphasizing “protected” categories, a legal approach actually entrenches those categories, rather than obliterating them. Everyone is given a label, making it even more difficult to judge people as individuals. While the end of discrimination may be the goal, the entrenchment of distinctions in law may make this goal more difficult to attain in the long run. The division of individuals into “protected” and “unprotected” categories may arouse
resentment, and may not really reflect individuals’ class, wealth, or background. In any case, where populations have intermarried, ethnicities have also blurred, so that individuals may fit in more than one category, and their classification may be arbitrary.

Fourth, even if regulatory policies do achieve their goal of recruiting minorities, there is no guarantee that these individuals will maintain a distinctive perspective, or do anything to represent the group from which they were drawn. All this assumes that the sought after or under-represented minorities actually want and seek public employment generally or specific public sector jobs. But this might not be the case: they might not want to join the establishment, fear retaliation or isolation from their own group, or perceive their prospects as poor in public service.

**Educational strategies**

An educational strategy aims to replace existing organizational culture with a multi-cultural vision. It goes beyond the elimination of discrimination or privilege, or even diversifying the composition of the workforce. The aim is not a “culture blind” organization, but one which reflects the contributions and interests of diverse cultures. According to this perspective, an organization should move from an initial stage as a mono-culture, through a transitional stage as a non-discriminatory culture, to a multi-cultural perspective. A multi-cultural perspective assumes that there is no common culture, but that an organization should value the differences among cultures and transcend them through a common set of values and a sense of purpose. The emphasis is on the group rather than the individual (Brinkman, 1997: 45).

A primary strategy for transforming the organizational culture is educational. It begins with a cultural assessment of the organization and then moves to increase the level of cultural awareness of the differences among people. Training is required, including the top levels, to get people to understand their own culture, and then those of others. Throughout the organization, employees are required to undertake interpersonal training, communication and cultural sensitization. Change should not be seen as a threat or imposed, and all employees should participate in the change process.

An educational strategy may fail to achieve its aims because it tries to do too much through too little. Training is not a panacea, and in the case of cultural transformation, it may be a wholly inadequate tool. After all, what is demanded is an entire change in individual personality and assumptions, and it is doubtful that a few workshops can accomplish such a deep and lasting change. There is little agreement on the content of the training (e.g. “shock therapy”; demonstration of demographic trends and their significance; experiential discussions; role playing, etc.), and documented evaluation of its effectiveness is scanty and insufficient to validate any predictive model. In any case, there is doubt whether what has been learned in the classroom can actually be applied back in the work setting, especially where the organization is not change oriented or is even hostile to change (Golembiewski, 1995: 32-42).

Finally, like a legal perspective, where taken to extremes, this approach tends to highlight and emphasize differences. The individual is lost within the group; affiliation is all. It is assumed that culture is dominant and determining in behavior, decision-making and interpersonal relations,
and that a common culture is unattainable. Organizational life is portrayed as a constant negotiation (at best) or struggle (at worst) among different groups. Such a scenario seems more of a nightmare than a vision to be pursued. Civil services exist to perform certain tasks according to the authority invested in them, and not every problem or facet of policy, management or day-to-day activities needs to be seen through a cultural prism. In converting every issue to one of cultural diversity, such an approach loses touch with the paramount issue: a workplace where individuals may achieve their potential without fear of discrimination.

**Structural strategies**

The structural approach to diversity is concerned with the way civil services are organized. Diversity is regarded as a means to and a result of bureaucratic reform. It starts from the premise that bureaucratic organizations, among their other failings, are hostile to diversity, because of their emphasis on narrow specialization, their stress on process, and the application of rigid rules to pre-assigned categories.

For diversity to become a reality, it is necessary to change the policies of the organization in regard to the way work is divided up and people are assigned to do it. A new perspective is needed to redesign jobs and structures to encourage diverse recruitment, discourage narrowness, and facilitate greater flexibility. Deliberate actions need to be taken to ensure diversity not only in appointments, but to provide opportunity for all employees to advance rather than for certain groups to be assigned to and stuck in low level jobs.

One possibility is job rotation, allowing individuals to gain experience in doing different work, gaining diverse skills and knowledge. Another is job enrichment, giving employees greater responsibility over a particular area of work, rather than splitting it up on hierarchical lines. This approach would tend to flatten hierarchies and cut the number of levels decisions might need to go through, thus empowering front line officials.

A related aspect is reform of career structures. Bureaucracies differ in how they organize their members’ careers, but two of the most typical appear to make it difficult for those to those who do not fit within conventional boundaries to progress. The first is a career service, which presumes lifetime employment within the civil service. It is typically stratified by educational attainment, with different levels of education correlated with broad functional bands (e.g. clerical with high school diploma). Formal education forms barriers at certain levels, beyond which an individual however otherwise talented or knowledgeable may not pass. It is assumed that individuals enter the service at a relatively young age (immediately after completing their education) and lateral entry is exceptional. The second is a system of position classification, where positions are discrete, and to be hired or progress, individuals apply for a particular position for which there is competition. Much depends on the position description, which may specify qualifications or experience only obtainable through prior employment in an agency.

Both these systems provide particular problems for women or anyone else who may enter the workforce late, has to defer education for financial or family reasons, or wishes to interrupt employment for purposes of child bearing and raising. If civil services are genuinely interested in not discriminating against such persons, they would need to consider more flexible career
systems, which, for example, might allow for discontinuous employment patterns, part-time positions, and job sharing.

Similar barriers at a practical working level might be removed. More flexible hours and telecommuting might improve the attractiveness of civil service employment, and might even serve the public better. More adaptive facilities might allow employment of women, the disabled and older people.

Diversity management should also be built into strategic planning. The agency should express a commitment to diversity in its mission statement and objectives. Just as it measures its performance in achieving those objectives, it should also measure its performance on a regular basis in achieving diversity. At an individual level, part of regular personnel evaluation should relate to contribution to furthering diversity, and this evaluation should be considered in promotion decisions. The aim here is to encourage a pro-active stance toward diversity, which would go beyond simple hiring, retention and promotion decisions to making an actual contribution.

Bureaucratic reform has more to commend it than diversification, and many of the strategies outlined above would probably be helpful in many civil services. At the same time, bureaucratic reform should not be reduced to diversity concerns, nor will greater diversity necessarily translate into more effective organizations. The limitations of this kind of strategy lie in the general difficulties in gaining organizational changes. Job enrichment and job rotation are feasible, but may be limited by the need for qualifications for certain work, particularly as civil services become increasingly professionalized. Mission statements and objectives may merely evoke lip service. In any case, the civil service exists not apart from, but as a part of, its society and milieu.

**Societal strategies**

The three strategies outlined above share in common one factor: they are all internal in direction, focusing on actions which might be taken within public organizations. Yet civil services reflect the prejudices and social structures of their societies. To the extent that diversity policies are an exception, to be found only in the public sector, it will be more difficult for them to succeed. Moreover, civil service diversity is valued not only for itself, but as a public policy designed to impact society at large. Civil service reform is only part of a general need to level the playing field, through a greater value placed on human resources and the investment in human capital, the building of civil culture, improvement of working conditions, and strengthening the image and effectiveness of public service.

The aim of a societal approach to civil service reform is social justice. From a narrow perspective, civil service recruitment of women and minorities is related to the educational and life opportunities available to them. From a broader perspective, greater diversity in the civil service is expected to result in policies which improve their lives.

Not all women or minority individuals are poor or uneducated, but face barriers nonetheless to participating in the civil service workforce. Yet many are among the poorest segments of the
population. This lack of uniformity complicates policies to promote societal diversity. It is difficult to target policies exactly, because of the variety of the target group, and any measures taken are unlikely to correlate directly with more diverse civil service employment because their effects are diffuse. Yet social policy generally may make little difference to the upward mobility of certain groups because they remain discriminated against, or only selected elements are in a position to take advantage of opportunities.

The favoring of particular groups because of their status, apart from their economic standing, is a difficult and controversial question in a democracy. From the point of view of strategies for improving civil service diversity, educational policy is the key. General improvement and expansion of public education is an obvious way to enlarge the pool from which civil servants might be drawn. But there is no guarantee that such a policy will benefit minorities or women or other selected groups. Particularly in higher education, where professional qualifications are gained, limited places require selection policies, which will probably arouse conflict. If quotas are set aside for certain groups, other candidates equally or better qualified for admission will be rejected. Other policies might be extended outreach by universities to encourage underrepresented groups to apply, reserving places for a top percentage of high school students, or “adoption” of certain high schools by universities to improve their performance.

Strategies for broadening the pool of applicants, apart from educational policies, might include outreach through professional organizations, using the Internet to post positions and explain application processes, providing materials in more than one language, or forging links with appropriate non-profit organizations involved in human development. But attacking the sources of prejudice, intolerance and discrimination in society is a much more difficult task, and one which has to find commitment from the top political leadership.

Societal policies are controversial because they raise conflicts beyond the arena of personnel policy in the civil service itself. Yet unless policies within the civil service are supported from outside, it is unlikely that they can be successful.

**Summary and conclusions**

No country has had a completely homogeneous population. There has always been diversity with its subtle differentiation, discrimination and prejudice. Some groups have always been more favored than others, and others have been persistently disadvantaged. But this is far cry from the time when public office was almost exclusively dominated by one distinct group, invariably well connected, privileged and male. In time, the aim of public service regimes has been to open up public office to all the talents, to reduce barriers that prevented entry and to prevent subtle discrimination and prejudice from blocking further promotion to the deserving. Not even totalitarian regimes dedicated to equality, opportunity and equal treatment have been able to succeed in eliminating bias or rather perceived bias by residents who feel that they are insufficiently represented in official circles or believe that they do not receive their fair share of public goods and services.

So no matter how well intentioned a country is, how effectively anti-discriminatory legislation is enforced, and how well a public service personnel system operates, there are always latent
pressures and influences, motives and prejudices within the machinery of government. The aim is not their elimination, but their minimization. Elimination will occur when every person is treated exactly the same as any other and no-one harbors ill feelings or believes in natural superiority. Minimization does not entail such perfection. It aims instead to educate people to the point where the great majority believe that there is little possibility of institutional bias and little opportunity of individual bias going beyond a handful of incidents which can be remedied.

Yet even this standard represents a challenge in contemporary civil services:

- Diversity challenges stereotypes about people, and about their capacities: it shatters myths about the superiority of certain groups and the inability of women, the disabled, the elderly and minorities to compete and succeed if only they have a real opportunity to do so.

- Diversity challenges the power of entrenched groups, opening up careers, responsibilities, decision-making, and advantages previously reserved to them. It breaks up enclaves of privilege, to a career for talent.

- Diversity challenges exclusiveness. It combats prejudices against people who do not fit fixed images or stereotypes – who do not “look the part”. It presents opportunities to individuals, who previously had seen public service as closed to them. A more diverse civil service workforce expands concepts of trustworthiness and confidence to include the broader citizenry, beyond a self-selecting elite.

- Diversity challenges conformity, and the insistence that those in public bureaucracies assimilate to a single norm of behavior, attitude, and thought. It brings a fresh approach to the organization of work, the structure of careers, the potential contribution of differences, and the formulation of public policies.

- Diversity challenges formalism, in which process substitutes for result. It opposes procedures and forms which on their face are neutral, but really act to exclude people.

In today’s world, patterns of discrimination and exclusion in civil services are no longer appropriate or functional. Discrimination is contrary to stated ideas of social justice, and where it flourishes breeds cynicism and marginality. Democratization requires inclusiveness, not exclusiveness, since it asserts the concept of the value of every individual, and every person’s fitness to qualify for public service. Demographics, working differently in different societies, indicate the need for a broader reach to gain or maintain quality civil services, to include all groups who are able and willing to do the job. The changing nature of problems faced by the public sector demands greater effectiveness and legitimacy for public services, which may, together with other measures, be enhanced through a more diverse workforce.

The strategies for attaining greater diversity in civil services include legal, educational, structural, and societal. All have their drawbacks, and none is sufficient by itself. The private sector is discovering the importance of diversity, though as yet progress is still limited: the public
sector should take a leading role in defeating discrimination and encouraging greater representativeness and opportunity in public life.

REFERENCES


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