

REFORMS IN THE CIVIL SERVICE THE PHILIPPINE EXPERIENCE

By

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Introduction

Today's blistering pace of innovation fueled by the computer revolution has afforded strong impetus to the opening up of society. Citizens are now, in a sense more empowered as access to almost any kind of information lies at their fingertips. This new found sense of empowerment has translated to a more demanding and exacting public, however. People no longer rest content with what is good enough. They want more for every cent's worth of their hard-earned money. The same is true with the taxes they pay. They clamor for better education, better public works and highways, better health services, better law enforcement, better judicial system, and the like.

But how can the government deliver when it is hobbled by systems, practices and values that have seen better days? How can it satisfy the increasing demand for better public services when it is saddled and girded by useless and worthless organizational baggage that had gathered and accreted through the years?

The palpable need to reform and improve the workings of public institutions has compelled political leaders, policy makers and public administrators to go back to the drawing boards in an earnest attempt to search for solutions.

This paper is a humble attempt to document the effort of the Philippine government in this area. More specifically, it seeks to present some of the initiatives pursued and still being pursued by the Philippine Civil Service Commission towards reforming the Philippine bureaucracy. The paper shall also delve into some of the issues and problems hampering the implementation of these initiatives as well as the prospects for the future.

The Philippine Civil Service: An Overview

Before proceeding to discuss the substance of the paper, a description of the Philippine civil service is in order, if only to set things in perspective. The Philippines subscribes to the republican form of government. The sovereign powers of the state, while emanating from the people, are lodged in the three branches of the government, namely, the executive, the legislative and the judiciary. This power apportionment, which is institutionalized under the 1987 Philippine Constitution, ensures a mechanism for check and balance.

But it is said that there is another great branch of the Philippine government aside from the three just mentioned. The Philippine civil service has been described as the fourth branch of government, owing largely to its pervasive presence and enduring influence in the lives of the Filipino people. Truth to tell, from the moment of conception until deathbed, a Filipino citizen finds himself subjected to the ubiquitous power and influence of the bureaucracy. As a matter of fact, there seems to be no avoiding its sway and authority.

This is not so surprising. By sheer size alone, it boasts, as of the latest count, of some 1.3 million workforce, spread out all over the Philippine archipelago. Public school teachers, rural doctors, and policemen are but a few of the examples. Also, the broad reach of the Philippine civil service is something to consider. It embraces all branches, subdivisions, instrumentalities, and agencies of the Philippine government, including government-owned or controlled corporations with original charters. Local government units such as the provinces, municipalities and barangays, being the political subdivisions of the state, also form part and parcel of the system.

Historically, the Philippine civil service traces its roots a hundred years ago, when the Americans, who then wielded and exercised political sovereignty over the country by virtue of their having annexed the Philippines under the Treaty of Paris, installed a civil service system patterned after their own. As the Americans endeavored to cultivate an administrative culture based on the ethos of professionalism and competence, they established an entity entrusted with the protection and safeguard of meritocracy in the Philippine bureaucracy. Known as the Civil Service Board, but later reorganized into a Bureau, its main tasks involved the administration of civil service examinations, and the promulgation of standards for appointment in the government service.

Following the end of American rule and the subsequent grant of independence shortly after World War II, the Philippine legislature enacted in 1959 Republic Act No. 2260, otherwise known as the Civil Service Law. This was the first integral law on the Philippine bureaucracy, superseding the scattered administrative orders relative to government personnel administration, issued since 1900. This act converted the Bureau of Civil Service into the Civil Service Commission (CSC), with department status.

The 1970s and 1980s were decades of ferment and turbulence in Philippine contemporary history. The social, economic and political changes that had been wrought by the imposition of the Martial Law are well known and thoroughly documented. Pertinent to the civil service system, however, three cardinal documents deserve mention. The first was the Integrated Reorganization Plan or IRP, which instigated such landmark reforms as the restructuring of the categories of service into career and non-career and creation of a pool of management technocrats. The second was the 1973 Philippine Constitution, wherein the CSC was elevated to the status of a constitutional body, governed by a collegial commission composed of a Chairman and two Commissioners. The third document was Presidential Decree No. 807. It enshrined the CSC as the central

personnel agency of the government charged with overseeing public personnel administration.

The year 1986 was again another significant turning point. The People Power Revolution ousted the Marcos regime, and brought back freedom into the country. Following the change in political leadership, there transpired several striking developments which impacted into the heart of the Philippine civil service. A sweeping reorganization took place. Existing statutes pertaining to the civil service were codified, and integrated into the Administrative Code of 1987. Most importantly, a new Constitution was ratified. Even as it reiterated the constitutional standing of the CSC, it also spelled out its mandate: to establish career service and adopt measures for the promotion of morale, efficiency, integrity, responsiveness, progressiveness and courtesy in the civil service.

To date, the Philippine civil service is structured into two major categories, namely, the career service and the non-career service. The career service is that part of the civil service founded on merit and fitness. Its features are competitive examination, opportunity for advancement, and security of tenure. In terms of positions covered, the career service encompasses, among others, those positions, where appointments require prior qualification in an appropriate examination; closed career positions which are scientific, or highly-technical in nature; and positions in the so-called Career Executive Service; career officers appointed by the President of the Republic. Commissioned officers and enlisted men of the Armed Forces of the Philippines are also included, but they shall maintain a separate merit system. The positions in the career service are further classified into three levels:

1. first level-- clerical, trades, crafts and custodial service positions, which involve non-professional or sub-professional work in a non-supervisory or supervisory capacity requiring less than four years of collegiate studies;
2. second level-- professional, technical and scientific positions involving professional, technical or scientific work in a non-supervisory or supervisory capacity requiring at least four years of college work up to Division Chief level; and
3. third level-- positions in the Career Executive Service.

The non-career service, in contra-distinction to the career service, pertains to the part of the civil service characterized by entrance not based on the usual tests of merit and fitness, and tenure is otherwise limited. It covers elective officials; officials holding their positions at the pleasure of the President; chairmen and members of commissions and boards with fixed term of office and their personal and confidential staff; contractual personnel; and emergency and seasonal personnel.

The Role of the Civil Service Commission

As may very well be apparent by now, the administration of the public personnel system in the Philippine civil service devolves upon the Civil Service Commission or the CSC. It is the body tasked by the 1987 Philippine Constitution to serve as the central personnel agency of the government. Consequently, it assumes a wide breadth of functions and responsibilities relating to public personnel administration. It is responsible for adopting measures designed to promote morale, efficiency, integrity, responsiveness, progressiveness and courtesy in the civil service. It is also mandated to strengthen the merit and rewards system, integrate all human resources development programs for all levels and ranks, and institutionalize a management climate conducive to public accountability.

More specifically, the CSC is conferred with such powers and functions, as:

1. to promulgate policies, standards, and guidelines for the civil service and adopt plans and programs to promote economical, efficient, and effective personnel administration in the government;
2. to formulate policies and regulations for the administration, maintenance and implementation of position classification and compensation and set standards for the establishment, allocation and reallocation of pay scales, classes and positions;
3. to control, supervise and coordinate civil service examinations and prescribe all forms for civil service examinations, appointments, reports and such other forms required by law;
4. to formulate, administer and evaluate programs relative to the development and retention of qualified and competent workforce in the public service;
5. to hear and decide administrative cases instituted or brought before it;
6. to take appropriate action on all appointments and other personnel matters; and
7. to inspect and audit the personnel actions and programs of the departments, agencies, bureaus, offices, local government units and other government instrumentalities.

The CSC's fiat may actually be summed up into four major functions: merit protection and promotion; capability-building or human resource development; quasi-judicial; and organizational development. Given the nature of its mandate, it needs no

belaboring that it is situated in a very auspicious position to take the initiative in ushering administrative reforms.

CSC Reform Initiatives: A Sketch-Map

In 1995, when the author was designated by then Philippine President Fidel V. Ramos to take over the helm of the CSC for a period of seven years, she saw a bureaucracy still grappling with the same age-old problems of political patronage, red tape, incompetence, inefficiency, and corruption. Truth to tell, her predecessors did achieve some significant headway in the fight against these bureaucratic ills. A semblance of professionalism was in place, with the conscious and deliberate effort to tighten standards and personnel discipline. Yet, she personally felt that much was still waiting to be done, if only to develop a Philippine civil service geared towards the new millennium.

First on the agenda, therefore, was to formulate a blueprint for action of the CSC, which should serve as a coherent framework for undertaking reform efforts. Following extensive deliberations and consultations, a vision statement was soon crafted. As worded, it reads, as follows:

“Vision: Building Human Resources for Good Governance

“Good governance is the foundation of sustainable development, and strong civil servants make good governance possible.

- *professionalism tempered with human consideration*
- *empowerment grounded on self-discipline*
- *commitment graced with creativity and innovations*

“We build, promote and sustain the growth of strong and committed Filipino civil servants. We ensure that their environment is technologically updated, conducive to their continuous learning and optimum productivity and responsive to their needs to develop as full human beings.

“In all these efforts, we are inspired by our people’s aspirations for our country to stand proud and strong in the community of nations, with a government that is truly world-class and globally competitive.

“We are exemplar of the human resource system we build. We lead by living the philosophy, which breeds strong civil servants: to serve—with integrity and excellence—God, country, and people.”

In able to carry out this vision, a six-point strategy was enunciated in a mission statement, to wit:

“1. Ensure that the government attracts, develops, motivates and manages a service-intensive corps of public servants;

“2. Set and maintain policies and standards of merit for performance-based, disciplined and accountable governance;

“3. Empower employee organizations and agencies to develop and institutionalize worker –friendly human resource management systems that promote professionalism, integrity and productivity;

“4. Initiate, develop and propagate programs that will ensure continuous learning, values orientation, professional growth and career advancement;

“5. Strengthen our capabilities to become a resource center for governance innovation and human resource development.

“In pursuit of these tasks...

“6. We shall build strong partnerships with other resource centers, both local and foreign, decentralize front-line operations and acquire appropriate and updated technologies.”

Put simply, the avowed thrusts of the CSC as espoused in both the vision and mission statements may thus be summed up as follows: nurturing public service ethics, promoting bureaucratic excellence and bolstering employee empowerment.

The reform programs and projects undertaken during the incumbency of the author were primarily pursued along this line.

A. Nurturing Public Service Ethics

It was realized that the drive for good and honest governance, which is the indelible mark of a bureaucracy having a world-class stature, entailed not merely keeping the organizational structure, systems and procedures in good running condition. Much attention should also be devoted to cultivating the proper values, norms, attitude, and work culture in the workplace. This is because the internationalization of the right attitude and strong moral values serves as the foundation for an enduring administrative reform. It should be noted, however, that norms and ethics are the primary function of environment, not legislation as commonly perceived. The best recourse therefore was to adopt and implement mechanisms tending to create a conducive and enabling environment that would breathe life to the desired ethical values.

The flagship program in the promotion of ethics in the public service was *Mamamayan Muna, Hindi Mamay Na* Program (or loosely translated, Citizens Now, Not Later Program). Launched in 1994, the program was designed to minimize if not totally eradicate discourtesy, arrogance and inefficiency in the government. It was meant to be a nationwide client-satisfaction program aimed at instilling courteous and efficient behavior among civil servants.

More specifically, the program was anchored on three major objectives, namely:

1. To institutionalize courtesy and quick service to the public as standard norms of behavior among government employees;
2. To confer immediate recognition on employees for acts of courtesy and prompt delivery of services; and
3. To provide the public with a redress mechanism for grievances against discourteous employees and for red tape in government agencies.

The *Mamamayan Muna, Hindi Mamaya Na* Program is essentially a client feedback mechanism towards improved public service, with the CSC at the helm. The agencies to report instances of discourteous or inefficient service as well as prompt, efficient and honest service.

Thus, a client who feels dissatisfied with the service of a government agency can bring his complaint to the CSC by way of the program. The CSC mediates between the client and the agency towards immediate resolution of the complaint. The agency, fearing negative exposure from the media and possible public censure, is compelled to act fast on the complaint. This program component is what is known as *Bilis Aksyon* or Quick Action. It is a quick administrative justice mechanism to provide quick redress to citizens when they encounter employees who do not exemplify the virtues of public service. *Bilis Aksyon* Partners are stationed in every agency to assist the CSC in this endeavor.

On the other hand, a client, who feels satisfied with the service of a government employee, may report such good deed to the CSC. The CSC, upon verification of the employee being cited. This forms part of the reward component of the program, *Gantimpala Agad* or Instant Reward. Its notable feature is that it immediately grants rewards and incentives to well performing employees as adjudged by the transacting public.

From a simple client feedback mechanism, the *Mamamayan Muna, Hindi Mamaya Na* Program soon spun off various support systems in the course of its implementation. There was established a *Mamamayan Muna* Hotline, a telephone hotline where citizens could get in touch with the *Mamamayan Muna* operation center for their complaints and commendations, twelve hours a day, from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., Mondays through Fridays, with no noon breaks. Another surrogate project was the *Mamamayan Muna* Drop Box, which was labeled “CSC *Mamamayan Muna* Drop Box 724,” where “724”

stands for seven (7) days a week and twenty-four (24) hours a day. This was a drop box installed in the CSC and its regional offices to provide the public a means to relay their feedback to the CSC even after office hours and even on weekends. Reports received at the Box are collected daily and are acted upon 72 working hours from receipt.

A radio program, *Mamamayan Muna sa Himpapawid* (Citizen Now On-the-Air), was also produced. The one-hour radio show tackles a wide range of concerns of both the public servant and the ordinary citizen, featuring various government agencies and their respective programs and projects, truly bringing government and the people closer together. A sister program was later conceived particularly to the needs of Filipinos abroad.

Just before the end of the seven-year term of the author in 2001, she presided over the groundbreaking ceremony of the *Mamamayan Muna in Action*, a one-stop shop office featuring a service counter manned by trained staff, an information kiosk, which houses user-friendly computer-based facilities and a technical assistance area.

In pursuing the program, there was no pretension that it may cause drastic changes in the mindset of civil servants, much less reinvigorate the bureaucracy overnight. There was the danger that it might perpetuate the notion that erring bureaucrats can still get away through amicable settlements and by facilitating the resolution of the problem of the complainant. There too was the danger that *Mamamayan Muna, Hindi Mamaya Na* Program might just go the way of other reform measures: so much promise at the start, only to wither away later.

Thus, beyond *Mamamayan Muna, Hindi Mamaya Na* Program, the CSC did not lose sight of its role in ensuring that offenses committed by government personnel especially those involving deficiencies in service delivery, are properly dealt with. Beyond courtesy, it was tightening the noose on such violations as inefficiency, neglect of official duties, dishonesty and the like. Finally, it moved to speed up the administrative justice system without jeopardizing due process.

The meting of administrative sanctions was, however, complemented by the giving of due recognition to officials and employees, who have exemplified the ideals of public service. This was done through the Honor Awards Program. In a nutshell, the Program was aimed at spotlighting civil servants or groups of civil servants, who have consistently demonstrated exemplary service and behavior on the basis of their observance of the requisite norms of conduct in the public sector. By doing this, it was hoped that public servants would be motivated and inspired to uphold the highest standards of ethics. At the same time, other government functionaries would have real-life role models or exemplars worth emulating.

The Program consists of three categories, namely:

1. Presidential or "*Lingkod Bayan*" Award—conferred to an individual for consistent dedicated performance exemplifying the

best in any of the professions or occupations resulting in the successful implementation of an idea or performance which has significant effect to the public or principally affects the national interests, security and patrimony.

2. Civil Service Commission or “*Pag-asa*” Award—conferred to a group of individuals or team who has demonstrated outstanding teamwork and cooperation which resulted in the successful achievement of its goal and greatly improved/ facilitated the delivery of public service, effected economy in operation, improved working condition or otherwise benefited the government.
3. Outstanding Public Official and Employee or “*Dangal ng Bayan*” Award—bestowed to any public official or employee based on his consistent demonstration and observation of the prescribed norms of conduct in the government service.

B. Striving for Bureaucratic Excellence

The Philippine civil service has always suffered from unfavorable public opinion. Among others, it has been perceived and stereotyped as ineffective and mediocre. One of the reasons for such perception could be traced to the influences and inroads of politics in the civil service particularly in the area of personnel administration. Concededly, qualification standards for selection and hiring largely been ignored and indiscriminately trampled upon to give to the entry and promotion of political proteges.

To address this concern, the CSC has seen fit to send one reverberating call to state workers nationwide—that job performance shall be *sine qua non* of job security, that the constitutional guarantee on tenurial security shall not be a shield for incompetence, inaptitude and ineffectiveness. Indeed, merit and fitness shall continue to be the be-all and end-all of government service. One step towards this direction was to ensure that the ranks of government workforce are peopled by individuals, who do not only possess above-average qualifications but whose education, skills and competencies are beyond question.

The Brightest for the Bureaucracy Program or BBP was the CSC’s answer to the need to bring in exceptional individuals into the government service. It was designed to draw honor graduates and government examination top-notchers into starting a career in public service.

The BBP was launched in 1995 and actually forms part of a larger, long-term effort to professionalize and upgrade the ranks of the Philippine civil service.

Bright and talented young people seldom consider a career in the government. It is publicly perceived that the government is a poor employer in terms of pay, job

satisfaction and career growth. While such negative perception may still hold some validity, past reform efforts have steadily and significantly changed working conditions in the civil service. Among others, government pay is now relatively at par with the private sector, at least for the first and second level positions. With the BBP, the CSC hopes to correct the notion that the government is only for the mediocre and the average. The program seeks to imbibe the concept of merit system which is all about giving taxpayers their money's worth in the delivery of public services through bright young people of superior skills and abilities.

In essence, the BBP works this way: government agencies, on a voluntary basis, allocate one or two positions for the BBP and enroll these with the CSC. The CSC, through its implementing office, shall endeavor to match these positions with the qualifications of the BBP applicants. Those deemed suited shall be endorsed to the agency concerned for possible placement, which is not guaranteed, however, for they still have to undergo the agency's internal screening processes.

The BBP applicants are drawn from a pool of BBP participants, composed of honor graduates and high-flyers in government examinations. Before being accepted into the program, these well credentialed individuals are subjected to rigorous selection procedure consisting of a written test and a panel interview. Only those who are able to pass the two-stage process are included in the roster of BBP participants.

By 2000, there were already a total of 112 young and idealistic professional placed in more than twenty-five (25) government agencies in Metro Manila. Regional offices nationwide have likewise indicated a positive response to the program, opening a number of second-level posts to be filled up by BBP applicants.

But for those already in the service, a local scholarship program was established to provide educational and other learning opportunities for various levels of personnel to enhance their professional development and career advancement.

Initially, the target beneficiaries were employees with bachelor's degree who wish to pursue graduate studies. The program has since expanded to include skilled workers and undergraduate employees. This adds to three types of scholarship being administered yearly, namely:

1. Master's Degree Program—grant to government employees who have passed the selection criteria set by the CSC, to pursue graduate studies in their chosen area of expertise;
2. Bachelor's Degree Completion—a scholarship grant to qualified government personnel desiring to complete their academic deficiency of one year to earn a bachelor's degree. Available only to those who only have one more year of collegiate study in order to matriculate with a degree; and

3. Skilled Workers' Skills Upgrading Courses—grant to clerical and trades and craft personnel to pursue skills enhancement training and seminars.

In 1999 alone, the roster of grantees under the local scholarship program included 529 grantees under the Masteral Degree Program, 373 beneficiaries under the program for skilled workers and 152 grantees under the Bachelor's Degree Completion Program.

In addition, a Distance Learning Program was conceived as an alternative strategy without prejudice to continuing manpower development. As in correspondence schooling, it consisted of modules on a wide range of topics and courses.

Building the capabilities of government middle-level managers also received high prioritization. Anchored on the assumption that front-line managers are instrumental in igniting and releasing the productive and creative spirit within the organization, it was found appropriate that their managerial skills should be kept abreast with requirements of the changing times. Thus, the Supervisory Development Course and the Advance Management Development Program were instituted in order to enhance the leadership capability of first-line supervisors in the Philippine bureaucracy.

At the institutional level, the CSC has commenced the documentation of best practices prevailing in various government agencies in the hope of coming up with better benchmarks for reform measures. It has also spearheaded the revision and updating of personnel policies, which recently in the promulgation of the Revised Policies on Merit Promotion Plan.

The Merit Promotion Plan lays down the basic policies and guidelines governing the manner and mode of appointments and promotion in the public sector. Every government agency is duty-bound to develop its own merit promotion plan in accordance with the general policies by the CSC.

In 2001, in an effort to keep abreast with the developments in the theory and practice of public personnel administration, the CSC decided to revisit its existing policies on selection, appointments and promotion. After extensive consultation with the various sectors of the Philippine civil service, a Revised Policies on Merit Promotion Plan was promulgated.

Briefly, the Revised Policies reaffirms the basic policies on recruitment and selection. Thus, it reiterates the long-standing policy of deep selection, that is, the selection of employees for appointment in the government service shall be open to all qualified men and women according to the principle of merit and fitness. It also restates the principle that equal employment opportunity shall be guaranteed to men and women at all levels of position in the agency, provided they meet the minimum requirements of the position to be filled.

What the Revised Policies gives added emphasis is on the constitution of the Personnel Selection Board or the PSB, given its critical role in employee selection. Based

on the Revised Policies, the PSB shall be established in every agency, with the primary function of sifting the chaff from the grain, so to speak, thus, narrowing the field of possible appointees from whom the appointing authority shall make his final choice. It shall be composed of the agency head, human resource management officer, and representatives from the employee's sector.

Hand in hand with the revision of personnel policies was also the revision of the performance evaluation system. It was observed that the older performance appraisal system was no longer responsive to the evolving requirement of personnel evaluation. Instituted at a time when knowledge or information technology was still in its infancy, the older system had proven deficient in recent year. This prompted the CSC to undertake a re-fashioning of the evaluation system.

Under the Revised Policies on Performance Evaluation System, a new system for performance evaluation has been adopted. This is the cross rating scheme. The said scheme is a departure from the older personnel appraisal system where performance rating of individual employees was the sole responsibility of the supervisor. As its name implies, cross-rating involves a multi-dimensional approach in performance evaluation. An employee shall be rated based on his self-rating, peer and subordinate rating as well as supervisor's rating.

To really strengthen the system, the Revised Policies has called for the creation of committee in every government office, known as the Performance Evaluation Review Committee or PERC. The body is responsible for reviewing employees' performance targets and performance standards, and the monitoring and evaluation of the personnel evaluation system with the end in view of continually improving the workings of the system.

Part and parcel of the professionalization strategy was also the development of innovative mechanisms on matters of testing, recruitment and placement. A number of undertakings had been pursued in this area, namely, the Computer-Assisted Test, the CAT-VIP and the Job Opportunity Data Bank System.

The Computer Assisted Test or CAT is a CSC-developed software program instituted to revolutionize the pencil and paper types of civil service examinations. The CAT facilitates the systematic storage, updating, retrieval, checking and scoring of examinee data through computer software.

Basically, the system aims to provide an individual, through a one-stop process, the opportunity to acquire civil service eligibility, which is one of the prerequisites for entering the Philippine civil service, in an instant. Instead of waiting for months to get the results of One's examination, the CAT allows examinees to find out whether they hurdled the examination or not in about an hour. This breakthrough has been an affirmation of the CSC's drift towards new trends in information technology relative to test administration.

The CSC went a step farther in an effort to improve its examination function. The special needs of visually impaired individuals, who used to be precluded from taking the civil service examinations because of their disability, have been accommodated through the CAT-VIP. This technology utilizes voice-sensitive computer aids and specially designed instruments or keyboards that are user-friendly and easy to operate for the blind community.

On the other hand, the Job Opportunity Bank System or JOBS was conceived to provide the public a greater access to possible areas of government employment. It takes the form of a regularly updated database of job vacancies obtaining in all government agencies, both national and region-wide. Through the JOBS, job seekers may have an easier time accessing much needed information on available jobs in the public sector.

Both the CAT and the JOBS have been placed under the umbrella of the CSC Information Technology-Data Center, which is the hub of information technology in the CSC.

Finally, the mark of a truly world-class and professional civil service is its being able to stand side by side its counterparts in the global arena. On this score, the CSC has seen it fit to strengthen its international ties and linkages by conducting study visits abroad for its officials and employees. At the same time, it has paid host to similar study visits sponsored by neighboring countries. The purpose has been to facilitate greater cross-cultural understanding and exchange of ideas, developments and innovations on civil service-related matters.

C. Empowering the Employees

Empowerment completes the circle in the major thrusts adopted by the CSC during the past five years. Unionism in government emerged after the restoration of democracy in 1996 largely as a self-defense mechanism of apprehensive employees whose jobs were threatened in the face of the massive purge and government reorganization undertaken by the new administration. Subsequently, the 1987 Philippine Constitution guaranteed government employees the right to self-organization and collective negotiations and fleshed out further by a presidential order.

The CSC, as the central personnel agency of the Philippine government, has an important role in breathing life to the self-empowerment principle. This, the CSC has stepped up the promotion of responsible public sector unionism. Among others, it has commences the practice of giving, with the active collaboration of employee unions, the Gawad Kalinga or the Employee-Friendly Employer (Government Entity) Award to recognize those government offices, which have manifested genuine concern for the welfare of their rank and file personnel.

The CSC has also vigorously pushed for the registration and accreditation of employee unions, which have since numbered close to five hundred. Apart from this, it has cultivated the practice of mediation and conciliation to cultivate harmonious relations between agency management and employee unions.

An integral component of mediation and conciliation is the collective negotiation agreement or CAN where employees can negotiate with the management terms and conditions of employment, which are not, in any way, prescribed or determined by law. Office concerns such as the provision of air-conditioning facilities or clean and functional employee restrooms are mundane matters, but with telling impact on employees' morale, which can be properly worked out through the CAN.

Weeding out the vestiges of discrimination in the workplace, especially those which are gender-based, has also comprised the empowerment initiative of the CSC. The CSC has sought to foster the equality of treatment and opportunities in the workplace by ensuring that no one is prejudiced on account of his gender, ethnic or social origins, religious belief or physical disability. Of particular note has been the systematic conduct of gender sensitivity meant to enlighten civil servants about issues and concerns having to do with gender relations. Another undertaking in this area has been the promulgation of administrative guidelines for prosecuting cases of sexual harassment in the government workplace.

A program intending to promote employee empowerment cannot be said to be complete without addressing the employee welfare component. The CSC has thus put in place a number of novel privileges. These include the special leave privileges, which contemplate the granting of leave privileges to employees to enable them to celebrate personal milestones, or to discharge filial and parental obligations as well as cope with domestic emergencies. This set of privileges, which is limited to three days of leave of absence, is on top of the usual sick and vacation leave.

A Revisit of CSC Reform Initiatives

It cannot be gainsaid that the reform measures thus far undertaken by the CSC have resulted in some pocket of reforms, which should constitute the building blocks for a responsive and responsible Philippine civil service. But there is a lot of unfinished business to deal with. It is submitted that the future agenda for the Philippine civil service should include the following essential components:

1. A dynamic and proactive response mechanism to citizens' demand for better public service, regardless of whether government continues to provide the service directly or limits the role to policy-setting. The civil service should not merely react to evolving circumstances, but be able to anticipate likely scenarios of change within the environment of public administration and plan accordingly.

2. The development of a civil service with distinctly stronger capability than presently obtaining to fulfill its mission. This means not only better qualifications and credentials of people but other attributes and skills essentials to a continuously learning and self-renewing organization. A culture of excellence is the bible of tomorrow's civil service.
3. The pursuit of an empowered civil service that is not rigidly rule-bound; which has the flexibility to make decisions and adjustments toward performing its tasks effectively and speedily. Such empowerment must seep to the lowest possible level of the organizational hierarchy.
4. The development of an organization of men and women with shared personal values and commitments in the workplace. Those are the values that have long guided the civil service such as professionalism, honesty, political neutrality, industry, responsiveness and courtesy to the public.
5. The mainstreaming of technological applications that can contribute greater efficiency and speed in the workplace or that allow instantaneous access to and processing of information. This proceeds from the recognition that information technology is a necessary tool for better public service delivery.

Concluding Notes

The massive developments that are now taking place and transforming the face of human society only serve to emphasize the fundamental point that administrative reform should not be a one-shot deal but rather a continuing endeavor. Thus, it is incumbent upon the Philippine Civil service Commission to ceaselessly push through with its innovation. It is only in doing so will it be able to secure to the Filipino people the envisioned Philippine civil service of the 21st century.

