

Preparing the Public Servant for the New Government

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In order to implement the goals of the Aquino administration, there is a need to re-orient the bureaucracy into a new value-system that is responsive to the demands of the clientele/public. The existing bureaucracy which has been long conditioned to the system of the previous dispensation, is faced with the task of reordering and realigning itself with the visions of the Aquino administration: a government unbridled with graft and corruption, inefficiency, unprofessionalism, alienation and irrelevance. The question raised is whether mere value-system can significantly mark the transformation without a radical departure from the established structure of power relations.

Introduction

There is always a certain banality that accompanies any discussion of the role of the public servant in any regime. This is so because the forces at work in the public servant's environment is so complex that earth-shaking and specific prescriptions are hard to come by and if they do, they find limited or qualified application in actual situations. Nevertheless, the value of any discussion is to draw a perspective of events that allows a more focused view of the subject — in this case, the public servant.

I would like to start my discussion by introducing the main ideas that I will subsequently develop in this paper.

First, there is very little change that can come about in the bureaucracy that now serves the new government because it is still controlled by the conservative elites who are likely to resist any meaningful change in the transformation of power and property relations.

Second, the change that may occur, although not reaching significant proportions will come through a gradual "politicization" of the bureaucracy as it departs from the neutrality stance that has characterized the traditional Weberian view of organizations.

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Third, the politicization of the bureaucracy can either be functional or dysfunctional with respect to the required reforms depending on the speed by which public administration both as academic discipline and as practice can develop new techniques for altering the norms of bureaucratic performance, i.e., responsiveness vs. efficiency, process vs. output.

In developing these ideas, I shall first discuss the role of the bureaucracy under the Marcos regime and the state of transition in which we find it today. What follows will be an attempt to discuss new values, structures and processes in the emerging bureaucracy and the challenges that they present to the public servant. The final section of this paper will analyze the obstacles to bureaucratic change by describing the political constituency of the Aquino government and the long-drawn process of developing and internalizing new norms of behavior in a turbulent setting.

The Bureaucracy Under the Marcos Regime

The bureaucracy that we inherited from the Marcos regime was steeped in the tradition of centralization and hierarchical supremacy. The tradition of centralization was in large measure, an extension of the norms of dictatorial behavior that prevailed during that time — one that grew out of presumption of inequality in bureaucratic relationships. Centralization was a means of ordering the bureaucracy to conform to the dictates of those who held power. Centralization was further buttressed by the hierarchical supremacy of high powered technocrats who were serviceable in realizing the political and economic ambition of the regime. Later on, technical competence was supplanted by a stern demand for personal loyalty to the Chief Executive which became the basis for reward in public service. As this happened, we saw the widespread abuse of technical criteria to legitimize self-serving decisions, rampant graft and corruption, the weakening of public accountability and open partisanship and patronage.

There were elements in the Marcosian bureaucracy that frighteningly fulfill the theory of Weberian bureaucracy and the alienation that it naturally spawns. The technocracy brought into power high-calibered men with a penchant for efficiency and functional specialization but with little or nonaccountability to the public. Partly because their authority rested on the expertise that they possess and more importantly because they were bound by loyalty to the ruling political master, they soon began to wield enormous power in the political scene. This power was reinforced by a systematic manipulation of information that kept the public misinformed. The bureaucracy reached a point where it was no longer capable of determining how that power can be used so that it was easily made to work for anybody who knew how to control it.

Meanwhile, the honor of the public servant was made synonymous to his ability to execute conscientiously the order of his superiors as if it conformed exactly with his own convictions. This holds true even if the order appears wrong to him. Before he realizes, the public servant, albeit a rational technocrat, begins mouthing irrelevant platitudes and programmed answers. At one point we almost believed that the economic crisis was in fact caused by external factors, that income distribution was improving, that the growth outlook was positive, and so on.

To be sure, there were those politicized factions in the old bureaucracy who defied the Weberian ideal of "separation of the official from the person." Their actions were political to the extent that they adhered to non-bureaucratic and professional norms.¹ But even these persons were unfairly identified to the collaborators of the Marcos rule although they were simply limited by the repressive and alienative milieu in their bureaucratic setting.

On the whole, the Marcos bureaucracy was a highly-professionalized monolithic structure that has alienated the bureaucrat and, as a consequence, has not been responsive to the people.

The Transition to the New Bureaucracy

After the euphoria of the February Revolution fizzled out, the Aquino government found itself with a bureaucracy that still serve the legacy of the old regime. The transitory power of a ruling regime has left behind the sustained power of a bureaucracy. The Aquino government's distrust of the bureaucracy was based on the view that the bureaucracy served as a collaborator and beneficiary of the previous administration. The reorganization measures, the purges and the seemingly indiscriminate replacement of officials treated bureaucracy as a monolith — a faceless mass — with little or no regard to specific circumstances of collaboration under the old order.

Despite the protection extended by Executive Order No. 17² against indiscriminate purges, many public servants have remained demoralized and confused. The absence of specific criteria by which one is judged to be no longer suitable for a job caused anxieties and sometimes even outrage at unjustifiable decisions of those in positions of authority. The alienation of the public servant brought about by the impersonal, high-handed approach of the old regime was only aggravated by the atmosphere of uncertainty that still beclouds the direction of the new bureaucracy.

The Freedom Constitution that provided the legal framework for the Aquino government sustained the traditional bureaucratic values of economy, efficiency and the eradication of graft and corruption. One is led to wonder whether those responsible for the language of this provision gave much

thought, if at all, to the qualities of the structures and processes that they would have wanted to be at the service of the new regime. For sometime, it seemed that all that mattered was to replace the persons in the bureaucracy with little attention paid to their qualifications, capabilities, and more importantly, their values. While integrity, more than competence, was made the overriding criterion for appointment to a public post, it is common knowledge that a number of those who assumed the positions of leadership in the new bureaucracy were pathetically lacking in moral rectitude and missionary zeal.

As government reorganization proceeded, the nature of the new bureaucracy that would be installed became more apparent. The prescribed qualities of the new bureaucracy went beyond the traditional norms of efficiency and effectiveness. The features of emerging structures and processes can be described as follows:

- 1) a streamlined structure that seeks to overcome redundancy, promote efficiency in coordination and promote responsiveness to the public;
- 2) a decentralized setup that seeks to transfer substantive powers, resources, and capabilities to regional and local units;
- 3) a reliance on private initiative and popular participation in decision-making;
- 4) a strengthened system of accountability through improved transparency in government transactions; and
- 5) a comprehensive and integrated delivery system and improved performance with respect to frontline services.

Thus, the philosophy underlying the new bureaucracy goes beyond the conventional values of economy and efficiency. It seeks to promote relevance, responsiveness, client-orientedness, popular participation and accountability. These values are congruent with the new thrusts of government programs which give priority to poverty, unemployment and social justice. The processes it employs are distributive in essence — decentralizing powers, promoting popular participation in decision-making, and sharing the task of development with the private sector. The structures that are emerging are likely to be compact and problem-oriented. The proliferation of task forces, project teams and volunteer groups during the first few months of the Aquino government are marks of this new orientation.

The Challenges of New Structures, Processes and Values

How does the public servant figure in this maze of new structures and processes?

The requirement for a strong government presence in the delivery of social services presents the challenge of devising new ways of focusing and reaching the target clientele. All too soon, the public servant who finds himself face-to-face with his client realizes that there is no clear-cut formula for dealing with problems in the field. If he is to exert any impact at all, innovative ways of dealing with specific transactions would have to be evolved.

The sensitization of one's feelings is a requisite step to being a responsive public servant. Each individual transaction with clients is unique and requires the creative energies of a public servant. Premium must therefore be given to innovation. Treating each transaction as a learning experience might be as important as evaluating the outcome of a process since the former, although inefficient, could be an input to more meaningful improvements in output in the long-run.

To be sure, there are known techniques for sensitizing one's feelings within the organization. The general prescription has been to humanize the bureaucracy by removing the vestiges of formalism and impersonal exchanges. A breezy, friendly and non-officious style, as is now in vogue among some cabinet ministers could make a difference. Within each ministry or agency, there is enough leeway for promoting a pluralistic setting that encourages healthy competition, organizes tasks on the basis of expertise rather than on positions of authority, and resolves conflicts in an open and direct manner.

The public servant should be his own person. The conventional wisdom that separates the official from the person is anathema to the dynamism that new bureaucracy requires. Individuals in the organization should be trained to own their own feelings, have the courage to face it and effect change through it. The repressive regime that must have given rise to the practice of writing anonymous letters has now ended and the long overdue freedom from intimidation should now be able to provide a more open and judicious settlement of conflict.

To some extent, we are suggesting a different kind of training or reorientation for the public servant — one that is focused on values rather than skills. Not that we advocate a complete disregard for the latter; but that if relevance and responsiveness were to be the norms by which civil servants are to be judged, then the manner of preparing them for this task should take a different focus all together.

It is not enough however, that we make the public servant sensitive to his milieu. There still remains the latent danger that the public official, no matter how principled and well-meaning, will veer away from his mandated tasks and consequently from the goals of the organization which

he serves. This brings us to the aspects of accountability and the need to prepare the civil servant to cope with its multi-faceted dimensions.

The resurgent focus on accountability was a reaction to the unabated graft and corruption that took place during the past regime. The accountability we seek to promote however, goes beyond the limited notion of fiscal responsibility; rather, it extends to the total performance and behavior of the public servant. It is a way of checking possible abuses of power which may occur when government fails to deliver programs and services in favor of self-interest or personal aggrandizement.

The accountable official is one who translates publicly-determined purposes into services and outcomes. Accountability requires that civil servants make a distinction between the public and private resources, and more importantly, between public and private interests. In the process of making the distinction, the public servant makes a choice that is ultimately judged according to whether it has served the public interest or not.

At the minimum, public officials should be clear about the values to be promoted or protected by a government policy or program. Public orientation dictates that the values adopted should not unfairly reflect the basis or interests of a narrow segment of society (i.e., the inefficient industrial sector in the case of import liberalization). It is the public servant's task to verify information to the extent that is being promoted. The commitment to veracity in turn implies that the public official has the moral obligation not to lie; to be truthful in presenting information to his superiors and to the public; and to respect the right of others to present information relevant to the policy or program.³

Bottlenecks to Major Bureaucratic Reforms

At the beginning of this paper, we put forward the view that notwithstanding the well laid-out plans for establishing the new bureaucracy no significant changes will take place in the near-term. We advance two reasons for this proposition.

First, is the observation that the changes in the structures and processes envisioned under the new bureaucracy can only be sustained through a change in the value system of the public servant. This value-system however, will have to be internalized through a new set of norms which has yet to be developed. A case in point would be instruments which are now in use to evaluate public servants. If we advocate less controls in order to release the creative energies of the public servant, the tendency would be to evaluate him on the basis of output. This loads the evaluation in favor of the efficiency criteria and negates the premium on innovation, relevance and responsiveness which are fundamentally process-oriented. The challenge

therefore becomes one of rhetoric vs. technique. Until public administration would have developed methods of assessing public servant by the norms that we have prescribed, and new standards for judging merit and success in the organization are evolved, then the changes in the value-system will come very slowly, if at all.

The second argument rests on the observation that bureaucratic elite in the Aquino government is comprised of conservatives who are likely to oppose any radical transformation in power and property relations. The bureaucracy that is emerging, amidst the lip-service to decentralization, popular participation and relevance, is an instrument of control rather than a channel for democracy. Despite the new government's distrust of the bureaucracy, it was only through the dispensation of public offices that the Aquino government could proximately reward those who helped it rise to power. We find the bureaucracy filled with old-line politicians, private businessmen, career civil servants, the religious, the military, and enterprising volunteers who landed in their positions essentially through a process of self-selection.⁴ We hear of many cases of unqualified appointments to high positions, overpaid consultants and other forms of political/bureaucratic largesse. We therefore raise the frightening but inevitable question: Can value-change be of significant consequence where there is no radical transformation in the structure of power relations? Can a revolution of the February 1986 vintage drastically reform the bureaucracy or simply restore it to its once decadent state?

Let me end with a positive note from Alexander M. Bickel:

Ills there are in our society, as the revolutionaries have reminded us . . . Yet, revolutions are born of hope, not despair, even though they need the rhetoric of despair to justify the dirty work by which they are made. The question about a revolution, therefore, is not what is has despaired of, but what are its hope?⁵

Endnotes

¹Ledivina V. Cariño, "How Can We use the Bureaucracy We Now have?: Issues As We Search for Means to Get the Public Servant Moving." Paper presented at the Seminar on Modernizing the Bureaucracy sponsored by *Solidarity*, Manila, August 9, 1986.

²Executive Order No. 17 signed by President Aquino on May 28, 1986 provides government officials broad powers to dismiss any of their personnel "in the interest of honesty, efficiency and effectiveness." There were specific cases, however, of hasty dismissal of civil servants.

³Donald P. Warwick, "The Ethics of Administrative Discretion," unpublished manuscript, Harvard University, June 1979.

⁴Emmanuel De Dios, "Can There Be Recovery Without Reforms," paper presented at the IBON Data Bank Colloquium, Ateneo de Manila University, August 1986.

⁵Alexander M. Bickel, *The Mortality of Consent* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1975).