

How to Improve the Competence of Civil Servants in the Local Bureaucracy?

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Abstract: Local government units (LGUs) are the closest unit of government to the grassroots. And in the performance and execution of their devolved powers, duties and functions, the local human resources play a vital role. The underlying assumption here is that the quality of service delivered by LGUs lies on the competence of its personnel. However, since the local setting is highly influenced by culture of political patronage system, the system of merit and fitness is hardly observed. Thus, the competence of our local civil servants is at risk. The intent of the policy is to address the need to improve the competence of civil servants in the local bureaucracy, especially those in the low income LGUs. The methods used as basis for policy recommendation are interview of key informants and review of related literature. Furthermore, stakeholders are carefully analyzed to better understand their perspective on the problem together with their motivations and available resources. The goals of the policy are to instill competence among local civil servants and to ensure high quality of service delivery. Moreover, there are criteria set as basis for the most preferred policy recommendation. There are four alternatives considered and among them, the most preferred policy recommendation was to upgrade the minimum qualifications for permanent positions in the local bureaucracy. This was chosen based on the criteria listed and analyzed in this paper. But still, this policy paper provides for rooms of improvement for better resolution of the problem at hand.

Keywords: Local Government units, competence of civil servants, Local Bureaucracy.

I. INTRODUCTION

Description of the problem

Local government units (LGUs) are the closest unit of government to the grassroots. And in the performance and execution of their devolved powers, duties and functions, the local human resources play a vital role. The underlying assumption here is that the quality of service delivered by LGUs lies on the competence of its personnel. However, since the local setting is highly influenced by culture of political patronage system, the system of merit and fitness is hardly observed. Thus, the competence of our local civil servants is at risk.

In truth the local civil service is plagued with several and intertwining problems – or “metaproblems”. In the problem map (see Appendix A, B, C), we can see these metaproblems illustratively. At a glance, the influence of the culture of political patronage or high tendency to politicize the local civil service has been the take-off point in the problem mapping. Realizing further that it is just a result of a more complex problem tracing back to the lack of teeth of the Local Government Code of 1991 in relation to the local human resources management. Then as we explore further, we discover that the map reveals critical points in the formulation of the policy problem. One of these is the poor systematic planning in the local human resources management which leads to branches of problems such as the high tendency to politicize the local civil service, the lack of well-defined career ladder in the local civil service, the lack of technical knowledge and skills of the personnel officer, the lack of budget to raise salary rates, the need to re-examine performance appraisal of LGU personnel, the slow progress of promotion of LGU personnel and the lack of budget to raise position grades. These problems results to further problems and realizing that most, if not all, of these leads directly and indirectly, to the need to improve the competence of local personnel, especially in the low income LGUs. And then we find the need to address this problem.

Description and assessment of past policy preferences

The problems above stated are not new. Previous policies have been made in order to resolve some of the sensed problems.

The Implementing Rules and Regulations of the Local Government Code of 1991 has a provision for the Human Resources Management and Development under Rule XXII from Articles 163 – 180 which includes Organizational Structure and Staffing Patterns, Responsibility for Human Resource Management and Development; Applicable Laws, Recruitment and Selection, Personnel Selection Board, Public Notice of Vacancy, Appointments, Promotions, Compensation, Working Hours and Attendance, Leave Privileges, Permission to Leave Station, Grievances, Statements of Assets and Liabilities, Oath of Office, Practice of Profession, Partisan Political Activity, Prohibited Business and Pecuniary Interest, and Penalty for Engaging in Prohibiting Business Transactions or Possessing Illegal Pecuniary Interest. Similarly, there is also a provision for Appointive Local Officials under Rule XXII which sets the minimum qualifications that local appointive officials must meet to fill the position.

In addition, according in an article written by Ms. Corazon Alam G. de Leon, a former CSC Chair, she mentioned that there is a program called Brightest for Bureaucracy Program (BBP) designed to draw honor graduates and government examinations' top-notchers to start a career in government service. However, little was mentioned on its applicability in the LGUs.

Finally, it is the CSC's goals and objectives for the LGUs to: (1) professionalize the Civil Service by enhancing the merit system by advocating conversion of HRMO into mandatory position in LGUs with the power of appointment and discipline lodged with CSC; (2) improve public service delivery by developing programs for LGUs to improve services at the local levels and to increase awareness of CSC rules; and (3) to strengthen LGUs' external relations by developing programs that will follow through the CSC's "jump start" programs for LGUs.

Significance of the problem situation

The problem situation is in need of a policy because as aforementioned, the underlying assumption is that the quality of service delivery lies in the competence of our local civil servants. If our local civil servants are equipped with the right knowledge, skills and attitude, then perhaps we can expect better public service from them.

The local bureaucracy is plagued with too much politicization due to the deeply embedded culture of patronage system and the over familiarity of people especially in the small LGUs. Admittedly, it is very difficult to eliminate problems which are culture-based. But this doesn't mean that we cannot do something about it. We can still do a policy which can effect incremental resolution to our problem.

And as the focus, the intent of the policy is to address the need to improve the competence of civil servants in the local bureaucracy, especially those in the low income LGUs.

II. METHODOLOGY***Key informants for interview:***

- CSC Representative (Regional Director)
- Local Personnel Officer

Review of Related Literature:

List of documents or policy relevant information to be reviewed (evidence)

- CSC Rules, Regulations and Policies
- Local Government Code of 1991
- Local Government Code of 1991 Implementing Rules and Regulations
- Academic Sources about LGUs, CSC, local civil service, local human resource management, etc.

III. DISCUSSION

How to improve the competence of civil servants in the local bureaucracy?

The need to improve the competence of the civil servants in the local bureaucracy can be further traced back from the poor systematic planning in the local human resources. Because of this, it results to the high tendency to politicize the local civil service, the lack of well-defined career ladder, the lack of budget to raise salary rates, the lack of budget to raise position classification, all for the local civil servants. These results further to the disregard of the principle of merit and fitness, the prevalence of incompetent salaries, and the slow progress of promotion among local civil servants.

We can also see from here, that because of these problems, even at the recruitment stage in the LGUs, the competitive applicants are discouraged to choose the LGUs as their employer and will opt to rather apply in the national agencies or private sectors.

With all of these, there is a need to improve the competence of civil servants in the local bureaucracy, especially in the low income LGUs, so that we can further address its effects such as poor service delivery, weak local bureaucracy, lack of enforcing implementers, low level of professionalism in the local civil service, and the high distrust on the LGUs.

Operationalization of “competence”

In this paper, “competence” is measured at two levels: (1) individual and (2) social. This is to ensure that competence is assessed holistically.

Individual level looks at the qualifications and credentials of the civil servants. This is to strengthen the adherence to the principle of merit and fitness. Also, this is to give credit to the achievements, accomplishments and experiences earned by prospective and promotable civil servants. The underlying assumption here is that, the qualifications and credentials have weight on the ability of local civil servants to provide quality of public service.

Social level looks at the feedbacks from the local clientele. This is to acknowledge that although qualifications and credentials give weight on the individual capacity of the local civil servants to provide quality of public service, the feedbacks given by the local clientele affirm the kind of quality of public service rendered by the local civil servants.

Goals and objectives

Goal 1: To instill competence among local civil servants

Objectives:

1. To increase above-average qualified local applicants
2. To increase promotable local civil servants

Goal 2: To ensure high quality of service delivery

Objectives:

1. To increase positive commendations from local clientele
2. To increase satisfaction from the local clientele

Stakeholder Analysis

Local Civil Servants

The local civil servants are the manpower behind the operations of local government units. And they serve as the “implementers” of policies formulated or adopted by the LGUs to ensure that they operate within their mandate. Thus, it is necessary that local civil servants are equipped with the right knowledge, skills and attitude in rendering service to local clienteles. Furthermore, in enhancing their competence, these will provide them long-term benefits such as improved credentials and better career development and mobility in the government service.

Local Applicants/Job seekers

The local applicants/job seekers are the potential or future civil servants in the bureaucracy. And to earn promising civil servants, it is important that the local bureaucracy hire highly qualified applicants. However, due to uncompetitive salary and benefits package, and slow career development available in the LGUs especially among the low income classification, they are discouraged to choose LGUs as their employer.

Personnel Selection Board (PSB)

As the primary advisory body of the appointing authority in selecting qualified applicants, the PSB is tasked to formulate screening procedures and criteria to objectively screen, assess and evaluate applicants for employment and promotion in the local bureaucracy. However, since they are just an advisory body, the appointing authority, which is an elective official, has still the final say on who to appoint in the local bureaucracy.

Local Appointing Authority

The appointing authority is often the local chief executive or where applicable, is the presiding officer of the local council. Thus, he has the power to appoint employees, whether career or non-career, in the local bureaucracy. And as advised by the PSB, he has the discretion to choose among the shortlist of qualified applicants regardless of the candidate's ranking. Thus, the principle of merit and fitness can be poorly observed in the selection of prospect civil servants. But then, the capacity to professionalize the local civil servants lies on the appointing authority. Hence, the improvement of the local bureaucracy through the existing or prospect civil servants is dependent on the appointing authority.

In addition, since this policy involves personnel services, the local appointing authority must make sure that there are funds available to effect necessary changes, as applicable.

Civil Service Commission

The Civil Service Commission being the central personnel agency of the government, through its regional offices, is tasked to assist LGUs in effectively and efficiently perform and handle civil service matters at the local level. The rules, regulations and policies that the CSC issue become the primary basis of the LGUs on handling matters of personnel management and development. But still the wide discretion lies on the local appointing authority.

Enumeration of possible alternatives

1. Upgrade the minimum qualifications for permanent positions in the local bureaucracy
2. Introduction of local counterpart of the Career Executive Service for senior civil servants in the local bureaucracy
3. Provision of more capability-building seminars and trainings for local civil servants

Criteria Evaluation

Effectiveness

This criteria focus in ensuring that alternatives achieve the objectives of the goals of instilling competence and ensuring high quality of public service by the local civil servants.

With the problem of the lack of competent local civil servants, each alternative is measured by the following indicators:

1. Increase in the number of above-average qualified local applicants
2. Increase in the number promotable local civil servants
3. Increase in the positive commendations from local clientele
4. Increase on the satisfaction ratings from the local clientele

Feasibility

This criteria focus on the likelihood that the alternatives are likely to happen and that the alternatives are likely to be implemented.

With the problem of the lack of competent local civil servants, each alternative is measured by the following indicators:

1. Easy mobilization of resources
2. Little resistance from other stakeholders
3. Technical availability

Sustainability

This criteria focus on the long-term maintenance of the alternatives upon its implementation.

With the problem of the lack of competent local civil servants, each alternative is measured by the following indicators:

1. Easy to monitor
2. Flexible to unanticipated changes
3. Manageability

Policy Alternatives

Alternative 1:

Upgrade the minimum qualifications for permanent positions in the local bureaucracy

This policy aims to increase the minimum standard qualifications of the local civil servants for permanent local position. This is to ensure that the prospective applicants are beyond average qualifications. So that during the recruitment level, we are already trying to increase the number of above-average prospective local civil servants. The upgrading of the qualifications will be done and prescribe by the Civil Service Commission. And this will be used by the PSB as criteria for screening and assessment. This may also be applied as criteria for promotion.

This policy is effective because it already clearly targets the increase in numbers of prospective and promotable local civil servants. This will motivate them to enhance and improve their credentials before applying for the vacancy. Also, since this will be done by the CSC, as part of their mandate, it will be applicable to all LGUs. And since all appointments of the LGUs are subject to CSC's approval, all appointments must comply with the new qualifications. Thus, no appointment will be granted unless the applicant meets or exceeds the new qualifications. However, this alternative does not ensure that it will increase client satisfaction because it has no direct correlation with the attitude of the local civil servants towards their clientele.

This policy is feasible because it will not require expensive budgetary requirement and technical experts since this has been an existing function and resources of the CSC. However, this may incur some resistance from the local applicants and candidates for promotion as it will be more difficult for them to enter the local civil service.

This policy is sustainable because it will be manageable and easy to monitor because it is already an existing of mandate and function of the CSC. Furthermore, the new qualifications are flexible because the said new qualifications will be subject to regular review and revision to ensure that the qualifications are responsive to change.

Alternative 2:

Introduction of local counterpart of the Career Executive Service for senior civil servants in the local bureaucracy

The position classification is the common practice in LGUs. One of the possible reasons for this is that, the job classification plan of an LGU identifies first the position to be filled in. And this kind of job classification has its own limits, especially in the career advancement of senior local civil servants, because once the highest position classification has been reached, senior local civil servants have no way to go. Thus, a counterpart of a Career Executive Service must be introduced by the CSC in the local civil service to promote better vertical and horizontal mobility and will encourage senior civil servants to advance further in their government career. The said Career Executive Service local counterpart must be adaptable to local set up and needs.

This policy is effective because it will oblige to increase local civil servants' positive commendations and client satisfaction ratings because these two will be necessary to qualify for the Career Executive Service. However, this will not guarantee increase in the number of promotable civil servants because they still need to meet the qualifications set by CSC for applying to Career Executive Service. Similarly, it cannot guarantee the increase in above-average applicants because the primary targets of this policy are the existing senior local civil servants.

This policy is feasible because the CSC have technical manpower to plan and work on the formulation and implementation of local counterpart of the Career Executive Service. However, it will be costly for the LGUs because it

will require them to appropriate additional budget for this, which could have been otherwise allocated to other more pressing needs of the LGU. And this will cause resistance from LGUs, especially the low income classes. Likewise, it will also cause resistance from CSC because this will mean extra work load on their part.

This policy is sustainable because CSC Regional Offices will be the monitoring arm of the CSC National Office and this policy is localized as it will be designed in coherent to local set up and needs. However, since not all CSC Regional Offices are close (in distance) with all its LGUs under oversight, there might be some difficulty in monitoring the policy. Furthermore, as a pilot policy, it will be too procedural upon its implementation considering that will be matched with local set-up and needs.

Alternative 3:

Provision of more capability-building seminars and trainings for local civil servants

To further enhance the knowledge and skills of our local civil servants, the LGU should provide more capability-building seminars and trainings which include courses on total quality management, proper documentation, ethics and accountability, teambuilding and other similar courses for the local civil servants. It may also include trainings and seminars for “special needs” meaning those courses that are timely and urgent to the needs specific to local situation. Furthermore, the seminars and trainings should include job-related and hands-on practice so that it will be relevant and applicable.

This policy is effective because there will be an increase in the promotable civil servants since the trainings and seminars will be added credentials to them. And better credentials increase the probability of getting promoted. It is also expected to increase positive commendations and client satisfaction ratings because those will be some of the learnings to be achieved after the seminars and trainings. However it will have little effect in the increase in number of above-average qualified local applicants because this policy is directed towards existing local civil servants.

This policy is feasible because it will excite young and aspiring local civil servants for the new learnings from the seminar and trainings. Likewise, the DILG and CSC can be the sources of resource speakers who will provide the trainings. However, this alternative will be costly because it will require additional budgetary requirements for personnel services that might cause some resistance to low income LGUs. Moreover, due to lack of competent local civil servants, LGUs may require to hire resource speakers from private institutions, when there is no available resource speakers from CSC and DILG, which will cause additional costs to the LGUs. Furthermore, this alternative might cause hesitation from old local civil servants because most of them have already earned tenure in service and may find it unnecessary for them to engage in seminars and trainings.

Alternative 4: Status Quo

This policy preference allows to continue the existing policies and conditions to prevail. In other words, no changes will be effected.

This policy is ineffective because it does not meet any of the indicators for effectiveness. Since no policy changes will be effected, we cannot expect to increase our variables – above-average qualified local applicants, the number promotable local civil servants, and the positive commendations from local clientele and the satisfaction ratings from the local clientele. In addition, it distorts the reason why there is a need to improve the competency of local civil servants. The underlying assumption is that, we can only achieve significant change in the indicators if a change, drastic or incremental, if something will trigger the changes in the problem situation

This policy is feasible because there are no resources and technical availability needed because we will stick with the existing conditions. There is very little resistance from other stakeholders because the situation is something they are used to. On the other hand, the possible resistance from this policy preference will come from the local civil servants as they clamor for better career development in their LGU.

This policy preference is sustainable because over all, there is no need to dwell away from the existing conditions. Hence, for as long as we are following existing conditions, this problem situation will continue.

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Preferred alternative:

Upgrade the minimum qualifications for permanent positions in the local bureaucracy

This policy aims to increase the minimum standard qualifications of the local civil servants for permanent local position. This is to ensure that the prospective applicants will be beyond average qualification. So that during the recruitment level, we are already trying to increase the number of above-average prospective local civil servants. This is more of a preventive measure to address the problem of lack of competent civil servant in the local bureaucracy. The upgrading of the qualifications will be done and prescribed by the Civil Service Commission, as part of their mandate and functions. And this will be used by the PSB as criteria for screening and assessment before arriving at the shortlist of qualified applicants. This may also be applied as criteria for promotion. Thus, we are trying to address the problem on both recruitment and promotion levels.

This policy was chosen for recommendation because of the following reasons:

1. It will address the problem of the need to improve the competency of local civil servants in both recruitment and promotion level.

This policy aims to address the lack of competency both at the recruitment and promotion levels. By upgrading the minimum qualifications, it is similar to taking the quality of prospective and promotable civil servants a notch higher than average or minimum standards. In addition, it will give more edge for prospective and promotable civil servants that exceed the minimum qualifications.

2. It will not require additional budgetary requirement.

Since, this policy is merely updating and upgrading of existing qualifications, there is no necessity to appropriate additional budgetary allocation. Perhaps, if this policy will be needing budgetary allocation, it will only be spent for supplies to properly document the upgrading process.

3. It will not require additional technical manpower.

Since it is one of the CSC's objectives to enhance the merit system and they have existing manpower that works on this specialization, no additional technical manpower will be required, unless deemed necessary by CSC. But still, the existing technical manpower can simply put this in their agenda to strengthen the merit system for LGUs.

4. It will be easy to sustain because it will be subject to regular review and revision.

Since it is one of the CSC's function is to conduct periodic review and revision of existing policies for the improvement of civil service, monitoring and sustaining this policy will not be very difficult. This policy is more of reiterating their review and revision functions in order to enhance and improve the civil service and further strengthen the merit system especially in the local civil service.

5. It will be easy to sustain because is already incorporated in the function and mandate of CSC.

Again, the required sustaining measures are incorporated in the CSC's function and mandate. Thus, this is not an additional burden for them but rather an added factor in enriching the mandate and functions vested in them by the law.

Strategy for adoption and implementation

Once the CSC has finished the upgrading process and the new qualifications have been set, they will issue to all LGUs a memo or administrative order prescribing the new sets of qualifications. It will be provided in the issuances the strict compliance of the LGUs to apply the said qualifications to prospective and promotable civil servants.

This will now be used by the PSB is assessing, screening and evaluating the qualifications and credentials of the prospective and promotable civil servants. Thus, before arriving on the shortlist of qualified prospective and promotable civil servants, the PSB has to make sure that the prospective and promotable civil servants meet or exceed the newly prescribed qualifications.

Hence, the local appointing authority will simply choose among the shortlist and he may not deviate from the new qualifications for selecting his desired local civil servant because the CSC will make sure that the prospective and promotable civil servants meet or exceed the newly prescribed qualifications otherwise, the appointment (applies to both recruitment and promotion) will not be approved.

Limitations and possible unanticipated consequences

This policy recommendation is not the single best way to address the problem of lack of competent civil servants in the local bureaucracy. However, out of the three policy alternatives, this policy recommendation was the most compliant and rated highest to the criteria that we used. This is more of a preventive measure as it tries to address the problem at the recruitment level. But, this is also a remedy as it can also be applicable in the promotion level. Hence, hitting two things at once.

Furthermore, inasmuch as the said policy recommendation provides for adaptability to local set up, we still cannot forecast all unanticipated consequences given the diverse nature and set up of every LGU. In addition, there is still a room for conflict and misunderstanding, before or after implementation, between the CSC, LGUs and other stakeholders. Also, this policy preference does not guarantee a dramatic effect, but rather an incremental one. Since, much of the focus of this policy preference is towards qualifications and credential, the determining factor is what the clientele will say. Thus, if local civil servants can properly translate their above-average qualifications to better quality of public service, then this policy is on the right track.

However, we must still be open that there are other policy recommendations that can be prescribed or we can further improve the policy recommendation stated above given a longer time of research and analysis. But due to limited resources and time constraint, the researcher opted to enumerate what she deemed the most doable and realistic for this mini policy paper.

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