Chapter 6

Promotion and Career Path

Promotion and career paths in comparative perspective in developmental states

In developmental states, such as China, India, Malaysia, Mauritius, Singapore and Japan, public servants have predictable career paths, based on experience and performance. They are appointed on a permanent basis – until retirement. However, Botswana is slightly different as it has both the career option and a newly introduced option of a three-year contract for top public servants.

Appointment until retirement

Career public servants in these countries undergo a range of probation periods: three years in Malaysia and one year in China. Once confirmed, appointment is until retirement, and an appointee can aspire to the highest office in the service or occupational category. Change of governments does not affect the job security of public servants – they are career and professional public servants whose tenures are not linked to a government.

Internal promotion on the basis of seniority and performance

Public servants are promoted through the ranks. Vacancies in the public service, except at entry point, are not open to outsiders. It is a “closed system”, that is, vacancies are filled mainly through internal promotion. There are, however, exceptions. These include China, which opened some posts to outsiders, and Korea where public service reforms in the early 2000s resulted in 20% of the senior positions being designated as Open Post System, that is, open to outsiders. In Brazil, except those in the DAS system (senior management service) and commissioned positions, candidates are hired at the entry level and they move up in their occupational categories as they acquire seniority. Botswana has an open system – all positions are advertised to include outside candidates.

Promotion is based on seniority and performance. In these countries, public servants are required by law to spend a minimum number of years in a position before promotion to the next rank. In Malaysia, it takes between 5 - 8 years for public servants to be promoted from one position to another. Similarly, for the administrative cadre in Mauritius, it takes 8 years to move from one position to another.

Vacant positions are filled from a pool of internal candidates drawn from the immediate rank/grade below. In China, Malaysia, Mauritius and Korea, there are centralized personnel records, including performance appraisals, which make it possible for the agency responsible for promotion to draw up a list of candidates due for promotion from all departments/ministries. Final selection from the list is through interviews or a competitive promotion examination.
Predictable career paths

The career paths of public servants are predictable because they don't compete with outsiders for promotion. Predictable career paths for public servants are also not limited to the public service, especially for the bureaucratic elites. Upon retirement, senior and top bureaucrats from government are able to move to positions in business, business associations, banking, politics, think tanks and State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs). Bureaucrats are not left to fend for themselves, but government makes sure they have a post-retirement career. This is a deliberate policy of government in these states.

Rotation between departments and other agencies

In most developmental states, there is considerable inter-departmental movement. Malaysia is a good example because in the first ten years of their appointment, public servants are transferred from one ministry to another, spending an average of two years in each ministry. The logic is that departments in Malaysia are not autonomous and therefore officers recruited into a particular occupational category are, within their occupational category, transferable to any department. Chinese public servants are also transferable throughout their career. This movement between ministries (and, at times, agencies) enables public servants to gain considerable knowledge and experience of how the government works. This process enables public servants to work across ministries and thus helps to break a culture of “silos” that characterise most bureaucracies.

Promotion and career path in the Republic of South Africa

Key features of the career system in South Africa

In South Africa promotion posts are advertised and anybody, not just career public servants, can apply. Promotion is treated as an appointment and therefore the same requirements as for appointment apply. It is an open system. However, in most cases appointment is permanent, until retirement.

Typical criteria for selecting candidates for promotion are the following: (In this case applied by the South African Police Service as quoted in *South African Police Service v Solidarity obo Barnard* (2014) ZACC 23):

(a) competence based on the inherent requirements of the job or the capacity to acquire within a reasonable time, the ability to do the job.

(b) prior learning, training and development.

(c) record of previous experience.

(d) employment equity in line with the Employment Equity Plan of the relevant business unit.

(e) evidence of satisfactory performance.

(f) Suitability.
(g) record of conduct.

The promotion requirements are left to departments (decentralised to departments). The discretion for determining these requirements rests with the relevant executing authority, working within the parameters of a Code of Remuneration prescribed by the Minister for Public Service and Administration. Chapter 1, Part III, Section I.1 and I.4 of the Public Service Regulations determine as follows:

I.1 For each post or group of posts, an executing authority shall establish a job description and job title that indicate, with appropriate emphasis on service delivery –

(a) the main objectives of the post or posts in question;

(b) the inherent requirements of the job; and

(c) the requirements for promotion or progression to the next salary range, in accordance with a relevant career path.

I.4 For each salary range in a CORE, the Minister may provide advice on –

(a) the possible job content;

(b) the necessary and desirable competencies for the job;

(c) indicators of those competencies; and

(d) desirable characteristics for employment and promotion within the occupational category.

This has resulted in such requirements being applied inconsistently and not strictly.

In South Africa promotion is in many cases not based on well-specified career paths. This began to change with the introduction of the Middle Management Service (MMS), Senior Management Service (SMS), Occupational Specific Dispensations (OSDs) and the HR Connect project (which specified task, knowledge and skills requirements).

Building careers is a key mechanism for building and retaining skills. In order to plan and build careers, occupations need to be defined much more tightly, which would include specifying the following:

- The entry requirements.
- Promotion requirements.
- Career progression and succession planning.
- Mobility into and out of the occupation.
- Continued professional development requirements.
- Testing or certifying that a member of the occupation can do a specified list of tasks or scope of work. It would also mean giving the member of the occupation the opportunity to gain experience in the range of tasks of the occupation and to consciously manage the process of building experience.
Several assessments of the capacity of the public service have been undertaken over a number of years (DPSA, 2004 to 2008). These assessments looked at capacity in a broad sense and were not specifically skills assessments. Data about skills is not readily available in the South African public service. The capacity assessments revealed weaknesses in relation to the management information contained in the Personnel and Salary System (PERSAL) (DPSA, 2007). This in itself says something about the public service’s attitude towards skills. To address this information gap, a skills data base (HR Connect), which collects data on the task, skills and knowledge proficiency of public servants, has been launched, but an analytical report on the data contained in the data base has not yet been published. The capacity assessments recognised that they did not definitively answer the question whether the public service has the capacity to implement government’s socio-economic programmes. They nevertheless concluded that “resources do not present the most serious challenge; what are lacking in some areas are the skills (especially professional skills), systems, co-ordination and institutional arrangements to efficiently and effectively deploy these resources” (DPSA, 2008). The capacity assessments also found a sharp and alarming decrease in the percentage of public servants who have between 5 and 10 years’ experience (DPSA, 2008).

In comparison to the practice in developmental states, South Africa therefore needs a much more tightly defined career system. This especially applies to professional and technical staff and categories of staff from whose ranks people are promoted to middle and senior management positions.

**Problem Statement/ Evaluation**

When posts are created specific attention is not given to the future career of specific occupational categories. Career paths and succession planning are determined largely by the individual who applies for posts to further his/her career. This has led to a high turnover of staff of the rank of Assistant and Deputy Director (levels 9 to 12 – middle management). Staff are not building careers in specific departments, whilst at the same time experiential learning is not structured well enough to enable the transfer of skills from one department to another. People move from one job to the other in the public service, many times on promotion, before becoming proficient in specific tasks. Ministerial directives tried to put a damper on this job-hopping in the public service.

If all posts are advertised outside the public service, the risk of appointing someone not meeting task, knowledge and skills requirements increases. Since key posts are advertised outside the public service, promotion is not restricted to a pool of people with specific experience and qualifications and proficient in specific tasks, knowledge and skills. In any case were such pools of skills not deliberately and systematically built. There is consequently a shortage of professional skills in the public service.

The specification of occupations with regard to task, knowledge and skills requirements was decentralised to departments. This resulted in many cases in inconsistent, inappropriate and inadequate entry and promotion requirements, which resulted in poor appointments and promotions.
Recommendations

In order to achieve a capable, career-oriented and professional public service in South Africa, the following recommendations are made:

Advertisement of posts

It is recommended that –

• heads of departments should have the discretion to advertise selected posts within the public service only. This means that, besides the entry level, vacancies of selected posts should be filled internally first. In the case of recognised professions/occupations, this should include advertisement outside the public service aimed at candidates from within the profession/occupation.

• the regulation that SMS posts should be advertised nationwide be reconsidered in the light of the above.

Promotion requirements

It is recommended that –

• a minimum number of years of service be set for promotion from one rank to the next.

Promotion/ entry requirement for the Middle Management Service (MMS) and Senior Management Service (SMS)

With regard to appointment/promotion to the MMS and SMS, the following options can be considered:

• A promotion exam as a requirement for promotion into the MMS and SMS;

OR

• a prescribed course (or courses) in relevant fields of study, designed by the National School of Government, as a requirement for promotion into the MMS and SMS.

Specification of occupations

It is recommended that –

• all occupations in the Public Service be specified with regard to the following:

  • The job content.
  • The entry requirements with regard to task, knowledge and skills proficiency.
  • Promotion requirements with regard to task, knowledge and skills proficiency.
  • Career progression and succession planning.
  • Mobility into and out of the occupation.
  • Continued professional development requirements.
  • Testing or certifying that a member of the occupation can do a specified list of tasks or scope of work. It would also mean giving the member of the occupation the opportunity to gain experience in the range of the tasks of the occupation and to consciously manage the process of building experience.
• Occupations that serve as feeder for the MMS and SMS should be prioritised.
• The power to specify posts and occupations currently rests with the relevant executing authority (the power has been decentralised to departments). The Minister for Public Service and Administration can only provide advice on such occupational specification – Public Service Regulations Chapter 1, Part III, Section I.1 to 1.5. In the light of the above recommendation on the specification of occupations, this regulation may have to be reviewed.

The principle should be to recruit and retain the best possible people into key professions/occupations and into public service management without excessively restricting mobility between occupations, and between inside and outside the public service, and remunerate them accordingly.