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**THE SENIOR EXECUTIVE SERVICE
IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA:
STRUGGLE FOR CONSOLIDATION**

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INTRODUCTION

What is supposed to be a higher executive service? And who is supposed to be a public servant? Are there any requirements needed to make part of a public career? Can everyone, given a certain level of expertise and knowledge, at any time, by any situation, be a public servant, occupying high positions into the public administrative structure of a federal government?

These questions have more difficult answers than they are supposed to. The public servant is definitively a different type of worker, since he or she is a professional that is not “in the market” just selling his or her labor force in order to have conditions for living, and this labor force is being used to produce an economic output that generates an economic surplus. By the Marxist concepts, the public servant is an unproductive worker, since he or she is not involved on a manufacture of a real good. By any other approach, the public servant is also a very peculiar type of worker, since even being a participant of the labor force available at the labor market, one cannot expect correlated or high pecuniary remunerations, independently of the relevance of the job.

This situation acquires special controversies when it is related to highly qualified professionals, whose technical and/or managerial expertise could be addressed to the market, reverting to this professional probably much higher wages and much direct responses to his or her performance.

So, what drives one to the public career when this person has acquirements that could return, at first sight, much more in the private sector than into the government service? As a matter of fact, there are many reasons that could lead one to the public sector. Weber identifies many aspects of this professional activity that have to be taken under consideration. The sentiment of power, of influencing other human beings' lives, of participating in wide social decisions and the conscience of being a participant on the history's "démarche" are instances that can compensate that lack of monetary returns for the qualifications of a professional. But the public servant also has to have i) passion, in order to accomplish the public goals; ii) sense of responsibility, which make him or her an instrument to the public cause, and not the contrary, and; iii) sense of proportion, that permits the public servant maintain the necessary distance from men and things involved at the public activity.¹

The truthful public servant must, above all, administrate by a non-partisan means, performing his or her mission *sine ira et studio*, without resentment or preopinions. The honor and integrity of the public servant stays on his capacity of executing scrupulously an order (political or technical) of a superior authority, despite of its wrong way or in contradiction to his positions.²

Placed these affirmations, one can understand and accept the idea of a high public civil service where highly skilled professional take place in order to run a public structure that is far more complex than it was at Max Weber's times. But,

¹ Weber, Max – A Política com Vocação; pp. 105-106 (free translation)

because of the very nature of this activity, the high civil service has been object of conflicts and contradictory opinions, specially in the United States, because of its inherent power, not rare contesting positions against inappropriate political interferences and undesirable conditions of work.

It is in this scenario that the Senior Executive Service (SES) is placed. If the Senior Executive Service engenders contradictory positions and opinions, it is not a unique characteristic of this public system. Actually, most of the features involving public administration were, since from the beginning, conceived with contradicting ideals. The idea of an administrative cadre was always, at least to the American people, contradicting to the idea of a democratic society. So as the idea of the need for specialized expertise to run the “public business” stayed in opposition of the need for “wide-public-expertise” generalists. Another contradiction perceived is the public servant position between the political authority pressure and his institutional mission.

Those contradictions were, somehow, minimized by providing a service comprised with both career and noncareer (it means political) personnel, and allowing mobility between the executive positions into the federal government. To the third kind of contradiction, there was not an easy consensus. At a first instant, the loyalty and responsiveness to the President and/or the Congress became the usual standard. But then, deficiencies of managerial skills of the political appointees, as well as problems involving these compromising liaisons - deeply

² Weber, Max – Ibid.; p.79.

expressed in public scandals, like the Iran-Contra's - exposed the violations of law and against-society measures taken by the public authorities, both political officials and also administrative executives, because of the excess of political commitment between higher public servants and political interests.

Again, Weber identifies many aspects of the public and of the technical (or "scientific") professional that must be considered. First, the public activity at the higher levels requires specialized intellectual workers that are stimulated by a very developed sense of corporate honor and proud, where integrity takes an important part. If such felling of repute would not exist among the public servants, the state would threatened by an amazing corruption, being captured by non-public interests.³

These contradictions persist, and they still struggle the Senior Executive Service for a definition of for what purposes this cadre was created. The answer in part is: For all of the purposes above mentioned. Is it possible? With some significant differences between this system and others at the developed and democratic countries, we can say that it is possible to have a high civil service that is capable on serving the political elected authorities, being committed to the public interest, using technical and managerial valued skills that could be highly demanded also in the private sector.

³ Weber, Max – Ibid.; p.69.

THE MAKING OF THE SENIOR EXECUTIVE SERVICE

The Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 had, as one of its main goals, the objective to create a pool of competent experienced executives in order to increase management competence, independence and flexibility, having the British executive system as a desirable pattern of what should be an elite of public executive generalists.

The proper conditions to the making of a Higher Civil Service came by a series of scandals and turmoils that took place in Washington D.C. in the early 70's. Not just the bulky political costs of the Vietnam war, but also the Watergate scandal, the CIA's sponsored coups and other confusions held by the federal government, on its executive and legislative branches - not to mention the huge costs of media-oriented politics and elections leading to a new spoil-system era - created a propitious atmosphere to rethink the administrative conduction of the federal government of the United States of America.

It was by the President Carter's administration that a review of the federal personnel management organization took place. In order to achieve this goal the Carter administration established the Executive Service Task Force, which produced a report trying to identify the problems in the federal branch that could not produce an efficient administration of the government programs. Some of the problems detected were:

- Lack of control over the total executive cadre;

- Most of the executives had little relationship to current needs, making difficult adaptation to program changes;
- Many executives had little adequate managerial expertise in terms of managing high-budget programs or supervising a large number of employees;
- Authorities were hired with different requirements and provisions to similar positions, as the compensations had different standards;
- Career employees had little opportunity to undertake positions of higher responsibility without relinquishing their career tenures;
- Whenever there was a change in political leadership, there was a period of time of work disturbance, where no new actions held place nor the ongoing programs would operate efficiently;
- Managers were functioning less optimally, because of greater demands on them, or because of a lack of incentive to do their best. Still, it was difficult to remove those managers;
- Compensation was a serious problem, with frozen pays for long periods;
- The process for establishing and filling executive positions was time-consuming and inefficient;
- Minorities were virtually excluded from top management ranks.⁴

The final conclusion of this Task Force was that it would be almost impossible to remove these problems with only a simple revision of the existing system of

⁴ Huddleston, Mark W.; Boyer, William W. – The Higher Civil Service in the United States: pp 97-98.

executive personnel management, and an entirely new Executive Service should be proposed.

By this time, a configuration of how should be this new career started to be established, designing the profile and characteristics for this new service. The conception of a high level public administration was mostly based on the ideals of a system composed mainly by “generalists - professional experts, disciplined by education and experience for responsible administrative leadership”.⁵ As described by Huddleston & Boyer, among the most important recommendations, there were:

- The service would encompass both career and noncareer appointees;
- No more than 10 percent of the overall Executive Service would consist of noncareer members, and more 5 percent could be fulfilled by limited or emergency appointees for a short period of time;
- Certain positions covered by the Service, particularly those involving audit and inspection, contracts and grants, investigations and security, and so forth, would be designated “career reserved”, which meant that could be only filled by a member of the Career Managerial Service. The remaining positions would be designated as general, to be filled by career and noncareer officials;
- Member of the Career Managerial Service would attain tenure in the Executive Service after serving a one-year probatory period;

⁵ Newland, Chester A. – The American Senior Executive Service: Old Ideals and New Realities; p.625.

- No involuntary reassignment or transfer could take place within 120 days of the appointment of noncareer employee who was closest and above to him or her in the supervisory chain. Similarly, no performance ratings would be made within 6 months of a change in administration;
- A rank-in-person classification system would prevail in the Executive Service, with three compensation levels, designated A, B and C. To guard against uncontrolled grade escalations, there was a recommendation of limiting A level to 8 percent of the service, and B level to 37 percent, with C members constituting the remaining 55 percent;
- Longevity increases would be prohibited. Pay would instead be pegged solely to individual and organizational performance, which would be evaluated annually by panels in each agency. Top performers could expect to receive bonuses up to 20 percent of base pay. Additional benefits and incentives would be made available to increase the attractiveness of the service so as to enhance recruitment and retention;
- To maintain the overall level of excellence, participation in executive development programs would be mandatory for both career entry and continuation.⁶

The award system is also a very important part of the compensation system of the SES. Because it defines not a very extensive range of possible awarded servants, the system is understood as an effective way of promoting and rewarding the most productive and efficient executives available. By this

methodology, only 1 percent of the total effectives of the system is eligible to be rewarded to the highest prizes.

It is important to remark that two alternatives were considered to redesign the Higher Executive Service. One considered the shape of the private executive market, consisting of free assigning, paying and removal of the executives. The other considered shaping the Executive Service system like the European civil service model, where public managers were in permanent cadres, with service tenure, in a highly structured career system. In both cases, problems were identified in applying to the North-American case. In consequence, it was understood that the better option would be the construction of a new system that would contemplate both of the systems' characteristics.

There are two categories of positions within the SES: the career reserved and the general positions. Career-reserved positions must be occupied by career appointees who have competed for initial entry into the SES. General positions can be filled either by career and noncareer appointees.

By this aspect, the Senior Executive Service of the United States of America differs expressively from other executive civil services of the developed countries. Generalizing the idea, one can say that in all democratic and developed countries, the higher civil services seen as a reservoir of highly qualified civil servants, able to occupy the very top of the public posts, offices and

⁶ Huddleston, Mark W.; Boyer, William W. – The Higher Civil Service in the United States; pp 98-99.

tasks requested to the public activity. In these countries, there is not much space for political appointees, since that there are qualified personnel to run the job of public administrative. These political nominees concentrate themselves in functions like personal advisers, consultants or assistants.

In the United States, however, the number of political appointees is sensibly bigger than other developed countries, not only at the secretary level, but also in many other sub-levels. Into the US federal government structure, the secretaries of the Departments are, as ministers in other countries, political nominees. Nevertheless, the top management team uses to be composed also by political appointees. This type of fulfillment could be even more intense if there was not an obligation by law that 50 percent of all SES positions should be career reserved, and only 10 percent of its cadre could be fulfilled by noncareer appointees.

According to Huddleston, an embracing definition of a higher civil service would be “an elite corps of career public officials who will fill key positions in governmental administration”.⁷ The positions occupied by the SES officials are indeed of high level. However, in many cases of the United States departments, the top management team tends to be composed by political appointees (noncareer appointees).

⁷ Huddleston, Mark W. – Is the SES a Higher Civil Service?; Policy Studies Journal; p. 407

If, by one hand, the experience of transition of the chief of government is a painless experience into the democratic world, by the other hand, in the United States of America, this change provokes huge changes at the administrative structure. The reason for that is because the government is not managed just by public career professionals; which is a key aspect in terms of the managing and directing positions.

ANALYSING THE SENIOR EXECUTIVE SERVICE

Since 1979, no substantive changes occurred into the SES regulation. They were just at the procedural levels, concentrating their alterations in payment matters or adjustment of rights.

Because this new organization had yet no time to be entirely understood and evaluated by its performance, there is no precise idea of what has been in fact the Senior Executive Service, and of what it really consists in. Many comprehensions took place in order to explain this young system. So, it is still viewed as an European-like corps of elite generalist civil servants. It is also viewed as just the continuation of the Federal Executive Service, which was committed to guarantee institutional space for the political appointees, which would provide and make effective the political priorities into the federal bureaucracy. There is still a vision that would define the SES as just a vehicle of adopting private sector management techniques to the public sector in order to raise specific salaries and increase efficiency.

But, after all, what could be understood as an accurate image of what is the Senior Executive Service? Perhaps the answer would be: it is a blend of all these understandings. This answer does not come incidentally. It is a result of hundreds of consultations made by the Federal Personnel Management Task Force to four hundred executive groups and two hundred executive individuals, in their objective of identifying what the executive environment would considerate

necessary to the improvement of the executive activity in the United States federal government.

Because each one of these consulted individuals and groups would have a different approach and comprehension of the problems and needs of this system, their contributions had to have different ideas of what they could find important to the frame of this service. The result of this broad survey was the modeling of a career with distinct, and, at the same time, combined features, trying to mirror the statements made by the surveyed. As a matter of fact, these understandings of what would consist to be a Senior Executive Service quite often were conflicting views, where one can deny or contradict other. By the Huddleston's formatting, four main types, or archetypes, can be visualized into the SES core characteristics

By the Agencies perspective, the SES can be assumed as an *Agency Specialists career*. It means that these servants are simply upper-level employees, which in the case of the Federal Agencies, they would be specialist professionals who could be in managerial positions. These servants should be loyal to the agency on which they are attached, so that interagency mobility would be viewed as not desirable. What is interesting to underline in this archetype is that the managerial skills and authority have no big significance. They may or may not be used or necessary. Their identity is not characterized by their professional status of public servant, but by their expertise on professional specialties.

Another archetype – and perhaps the most significant and important – is the understanding of the SES professional as a *Public Elite Corps career*. In this point of view, the system is consisted by highly qualified public administrators, and they are public administrators above all. Their identifications are not with the agency on which they are working at this moment, but with the idea of a broad public service. Another great difference is that they are viewed as administrative generalists, not technical specialists. The reason for that is because only generalists would have the ability to transform public goals into government action. To do so, the executives have to be committed with public service. These specific public managerial skills and public commitment can be gained only by a well-structured career system, where promotions by merit are the general rule. In opposition to the first archetype presented, mobility is important and desirable; in order to the public servant acquire the public “ethos”, and the embracing view of the public sector. Finally, and just like the first archetype presented, this vision of a public executive assumes that political appointees should be reduced to the minimum number possible, basically by two reasons: in order to reduce the turnover of higher positions, that produces certain inefficiency because of the turnover in itself and because that these political appointees frequently have little experience in public service; and in order to provide these challenging and more interesting positions more available to the servants who prepared themselves for a whole period of their professional lives, which could be understood as a way of valorize the public executive.

The third image of the US higher civil service opposes the view of the public executive as a public elite corps. By this opposition, we understand the SES as a *Political Executive system*. This view is related with the necessity of broadness of perspective, flexibility and political coherence that should function into the public system. It is also related with the necessity of political commitment of the highly positioned authorities with the “commander” in charge, in order to exist a syntonization between the shaping of public policies and their execution. To this belief, the idea that bureaucracy is naturally resistant to political authorities can be added. It would be particularly harmful to democratic systems, where free elections are the only legitimate vehicle for the articulations of public interest.

At last, there is the idea of a Senior Executive Service as a *Corporate Managers career*. It reports to the idea that, albeit the government’s objective is not to make profit, it is also an activity that has to achieve goals. Like any other organization, administrative efficiency is an important way of maximizing the results, getting the higher results with the same amount of resources allocated. The need of this “private-business-like” management can be exemplified with the problem of the lack of incentives to public servants, that would not be willing to perform at high levels of productivity, since there are few chances to connect their work or production with bonuses, promotions or even also the simple recognition of a job well done occasionally. So, to this point of view, the performance of higher civil servants should be measured by the achievement of established goals, where cash bonuses and prizes of this kind of shape should be available and encouraged.

In this manner, what had been recommended to be set up into the SES structure was a sort of combination of a little of every archetype, in order to shape a system that would contemplate any of the points of view existent or demanded. Thus, by the idea of a career for *Agency Specialists*, certain notions of central controls, such as approval of nominees for positions within the system, were removed. As well as the designing of a system that could include virtually all-functional specialties.

The same happened with the *Elite Corps* idea of a Senior Executive Service. By this approach, the SES design contemplated mechanisms like rank-in-person system and merit principles, so as the establishment of career-reserved positions and protections against political threaten. To the perspective of a need for *Political Responsiveness*, a major flexibility to fill positions with non-career professionals (i.e., political appointees) took place in order to mitigate the problems between political leadership and bureaucracy.

At last, the idea of a *Corporate Managers* career rendered strengthened the importance of the efficiency, accountability and performance to the public managing activity, as well as mechanisms of rewarding the better managers.

What is interesting and has to be taken into consideration is the fact that, despite this huge effort of constructing a career that could enable the characteristics of a highly consolidated career of public managers, such as the high civil service in

virtually every developed country, not all of these characters were assimilated into the SES system. Actually, many of these features miss in the SES, such as prestige, “esprit de corps”, and predomination into the highest public managerial positions.

The reasons for such difference rely not only on specific nowadays questions, but even the history of the North American public sector in it. Unlike other developed countries, which public sector managerial careers were consolidated by time and by the “*démarche*” of their social and political histories. It means that public administration preceded public participation, differently of the United States, where public participation came before the construction and consolidation of a public structure. It seems that, on those countries, when a public civil service was established, there already was a public structure that were in conditions to resist to “political molestation”. This resistance did not mean that these public structures were rigid and unchangeable; on the contrary, it means that they were capable to adapt themselves to the changes of society and reality. So, the more democratic the societies were becoming, the more participative the respective public sectors became too. However, this participation used to happen in terms of the improvement of a public “ethos”, compromised to the new ideals of democracy and public interest, instead of a broader “popular” participation in the higher civil service cadres. In this manner, if the public structure was an extension of the countries’ elite (as reflex of the secular and often noble and sovereign image they carried), it continued to be like this, despite its capability to serve to the public interest and democratic goals.

That was not the case of the United States' civil service. In the United States of America, the administrative structures were shaped by the popular wills, which meant that it could be less prepared or educated, however it was far more participative and, by many means, more "popular". One of the most important consequences of this slowdown formation was that there was the idea that government is in hands of those who are governed. This idea keeps coherence with the North American culture of equality (at least to the white people) and equal opportunities, so as the occupations that have their importance at all levels. Thus, the American higher civil service had to be as important and noble as other types of work, since the duty of the public officials is nothing but execute the policies that the elected authorities shape and determine. They are not the public power, they are seen as employees designated to do a specific job, just like any other employee. Which such effort to label the public civil service, even the higher public civil service as an ordinary work, not special, not different in its ethos, not peculiar because of its magnitude and the amounts dealt, and not honorable by the purposes of its objectives, it tends to be very difficult to a system like the Senior Executive Service to prosper and gain the respect it needs to achieve its purposes.

THE SENIOR EXECUTIVE SERVICE TODAY

The SES continues to struggle in order to consolidate itself as a real system composed mostly of highly qualified public servants, ready and prepared to assume the very top positions into the federal government, giving to this administrative the reliability, neutrality and performance necessary to resolve the demands that a governmental structure is supposed to answer.

Many problems have been faced by this service since its creation, and still today not just the old problems persist, but new challenges defy this higher civil service, imposing immediate and continuous work. However, perhaps some roots are on their way, and perhaps the first signal of these changes can be identified at the National Performance Review (NPR), a commission organized by the newly elected vice-president Al Gore, in 1993, with the objective of identifying the problems of inefficiency and ineffectiveness of the federal government, but with a new approach, that is, calling the public officials to identify these problems, instead of contracting consultants or outside organizations to give answers about problems that only the inside personnel can have the straight idea of.

At this commission, a specific team was composed to study the Human Resources question, and among many aspects reviewed, one special conclusion was achieved: the SES must have a sense of ownership over any wide-government process.⁸

⁸ Weller, P.; Davis, G., eds. – New Ideas, Better Government; p. 210.

As a result of this inquiry, a specific recommendation to the NPR stated the necessity to “strengthen the Senior Executive Service so that it becomes a key element in the government wide culture effort” (NPR, 1993 cited in Weller et. Al., 1996). Still more important was the identification of the SES as a new vector into the federal government capable to proceed changes in the United States public sector culture, through three basic actions: i) creating and reinforcing a corporate perspective within the Senior Executive Service that supports government-wide culture change; ii) promoting an agency corporate executive level successions planning model, and; iii) enhancing voluntary mobility within and between agencies for top senior executive positions in government.

What these recommendations really meant was that improvements into the Senior Executive Service could be done without profound structural changes, where aspects like expertise *versus* generalization, and career *versus* noncareer dichotomies assigned space to the quest for *leadership*. And more, such changes should come by initiative of the own executive civil service.

So, the important legacy that the NPR left on its report was to stick out the importance of institutionalizing the necessity of change, empowering the employees to get desired results, and developing and effecting the means in order to ensure achievement of results. By this sentence we find the key words that lead the desired changes to the higher civil service into the United States federal government: commitment, empowerment and accountability. Certainly an

indispensable requirement to do a job like such is the ransom of the career's morale, as well as the respect it deserves from the political authorities, the public service and the society.

ACTUAL REQUIREMENTS TO THE SENIOR EXECUTIVE SERVICE

In this part, several characteristics considered as the key qualifications for the Senior Executive Service are transcribed from the *“Guide to the Senior Executive Service Qualifications”*. Although the transcriptions take a large part of this work, it is not just helpful, but also essential to present them literally, so that a better view of what is expected and required today to form and to be a part of the Senior Executive Service can be taken.

In this document, there is a brief description of the profile of who should be considered a professional qualified to integrate the SES. According to this description, these professionals “should be visionary leaders with a strong commitment to public service, (being able) to apply people skills to motivate their employees, build partnerships, and communicate with their costumers. Finally, they need solid management skills in order to produce optimum results with limited resources. (There is also a need of a) “SES corporate culture”. This concept holds that the government needs executives who can provide strategic leadership and whose commitment to public policy and administrative transcends their commitment to a specific agency mission or an individual profession.”⁹

The basis for recruitment to the Senior Executive Service is by merit competition. After a selection process, which contents analysis of applications, the candidate to the SES has to be certified by an independent Qualifications Review Board

⁹ OPM – Guide to the Senior Executive Service; p 4.

based on certain criteria defined by the agency responsible for human resources in the federal government; the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). Today, yonder many criteria used to evaluate the candidate's potential to the career, the OPM identified five key skills called the Executive Core Qualifications, which are competencies based on the attributes of successful executives of both private and public sectors. These attributes are designed to establish the experience and potential of the candidate, not regarding much attention to her or his expertise. The reason for that is because what is wanted is broad executive skills, and not just a better rank for a particular position. Next are presented, exactly as they are in the SES Guide, the Executive Core Qualifications identified by the OPM as the key requirements for the Senior Executive Service, with their key characteristics and competencies.

1. LEADING CHANGE

This core qualification encompasses the ability to develop and implement an organizational vision that integrates key national and program goals, priorities, values, and other factors. Inherent to it is the ability to balance change and continuity, to continually strive to improve customer service and program performance within the basic Government framework, to create a work environment that encourages creative thinking, and to maintain focus, intensity and persistence, even under adversity.

Key Characteristics:

- a. Exercising leadership and motivating managers to incorporate vision, strategic planning, and elements of quality management into the full range of the organization's activities; encouraging creative thinking and innovation; influencing others toward a spirit of service; designing and implementing new or cutting edge programs/processes.
- b. Identifying and integrating key issues affecting the organization, including political, economic, social, technological, and administrative factors.
- c. Understanding the roles and relationships of the components of the national policymaking and implementation process, including the President, political appointees, Congress, the judiciary, State and local governments, and interest groups; formulating effective strategies to balance those interests consistent with the business of the organization.
- d. Being open to change and new information; managing ambiguity; adapting behavior and work methods in response to new information, changing conditions, or unexpected obstacles; adjusting rapidly to new situations warranting attention and resolution.
- e. Displaying a high level of initiative, effort, and commitment to public service; being proactive and achievement-oriented; being self-motivated; pursuing self-development; seeking feedback from others and opportunities to master new knowledge.
- f. Dealing effectively with pressure; maintaining focus and intensity and remaining persistent, even under adversity; recovering quickly from setbacks.

Leadership Competencies - Leading Change

Continual Learning – Grasps the essence of new information; masters new technical and business knowledge; recognizes own strengths and weaknesses; pursues self-development; seeks feedback from others and opportunities to master new knowledge.

Creativity and Innovation – Develops new insights into situations and applies innovative solutions to make organizational improvements; creates a work environment that encourages creative thinking and innovation; designs and implements new or cutting-edge programs/processes.

External Awareness – Identifies and keeps up to date on key national and international policies and economic, political, and social trends that affect the organization. Understands near-term and long-range plans and determines how best to be positioned to achieve a competitive business advantage in a global economy.

Flexibility – Is open to change and new information; adapts behavior and work methods in response to new information, changing conditions, or unexpected obstacles. Adjusts rapidly to new situations warranting attention and resolution.

Resilience – Deals effectively with pressure; maintains focus and intensity and remains optimistic and persistent, even under adversity. Recovers quickly from setbacks. Effectively balances personal life and work.

Service Motivation – Creates and sustains an organizational culture which encourages others to provide the quality of service essential to high performance. Enables others to acquire the tools and support they need to perform well. Shows a commitment to public service. Influences others

toward a spirit of service and meaningful contributions to mission accomplishment.

Strategic Thinking – Formulates effective strategies consistent with the business and competitive strategy of the organization in a global economy. Examines policy issues and strategic planning with a long-term perspective. Determines objectives and sets priorities; anticipates potential threats or opportunities.

Vision – Takes a long-term view and acts as a catalyst for organizational change; builds a shared vision with others. Influences others to translate vision into action.

2. LEADING PEOPLE

This core qualification involves the ability to design and implement strategies that maximize employee potential and foster high ethical standards in meeting the organization's vision, mission, and goals.

Key Characteristics:

- a. Providing leadership in setting the workforce's expected performance levels commensurate with the organization's strategic objectives; inspiring, motivating, and guiding others toward goal accomplishment; empowering people by sharing power and authority.
- b. Promoting quality through effective use of the organization's performance management system (e.g., establishing performance standards,

- appraising staff accomplishments using the developed standards, and taking action to reward, counsel, or remove employees, as appropriate).
- c. Valuing cultural diversity and other differences; fostering an environment where people who are culturally diverse can work together cooperatively and effectively in achieving organizational goals.
 - d. Assessing employees' unique developmental needs and providing developmental opportunities which maximize employees' capabilities and contribute to the achievement of organizational goals; developing leadership in others through coaching and mentoring.
 - e. Fostering commitment, team spirit, pride, trust, and group identity; taking steps to prevent situations that could result in unpleasant confrontations.
 - f. Resolving conflicts in a positive and constructive manner; this includes promoting labor/management partnerships and dealing effectively with employee relations matters, attending to morale and organizational climate issues, handling administrative, labor management, and Equal Employment Opportunity issues, and taking disciplinary actions when other means have not been successful.

Leadership Competencies - Leading People

Conflict Management – Identifies and takes steps to prevent potential situations that could result in unpleasant confrontations. Manages and resolves conflicts and disagreements in a positive and constructive manner to minimize negative impact.

Cultural Awareness – Initiates and manages cultural change within the organization to impact organizational effectiveness. Values cultural diversity and other individual differences in the workforce. Ensures that the organization builds on these differences and that employees are treated in a fair and equitable manner.

Integrity/Honesty – Instills mutual trust and confidence; creates a culture that fosters high standards of ethics; behaves in a fair and ethical manner toward others, and demonstrates a sense of corporate responsibility and commitment to public service.

Team Building – Inspires, motivates, and guides others toward goal accomplishments. Consistently develops and sustains cooperative working relationships. Encourages and facilitates cooperation within the organization and with customer groups; fosters commitment, team spirit, pride, trust. Develops leadership in others through coaching, mentoring, rewarding, and guiding employees.

3. RESULTS DRIVEN

This core qualification stresses accountability and continuous improvement. It includes the ability to make timely and effective decisions and produce results through strategic planning and the implementation and evaluation of programs and policies.

Key Characteristics:

- a. Understanding and appropriately applying procedures, requirements, regulations, and policies related to specialized expertise; understanding linkages between administrative competencies and mission needs; keeping current on issues, practices, and procedures in technical areas.
- b. Stressing results by formulating strategic program plans which assess policy/program feasibility and include realistic short- and long-term goals and objectives.
- c. Exercising good judgment in structuring and organizing work and setting priorities; balancing the interests of clients and readily readjusting priorities to respond to customer demands.
- d. Anticipating and identifying, diagnosing, and consulting on potential or actual problem areas relating to program implementation and goal achievement; selecting from alternative courses of corrective action, and taking action from developed contingency plans.
- e. Setting program standards; holding self and others accountable for achieving these standards; acting decisively to modify standards to promote customer service and/or the quality of programs and policies.
- f. Identifying opportunities to develop and market new products and services within or outside of the organization; taking risks to pursue a recognized benefit or advantage.

Leadership Competencies - Results Driven

Accountability – Assures that effective controls are developed and maintained to ensure the integrity of the organization. Holds self and others accountable for

rules and responsibilities. Can be relied upon to ensure that projects within areas of specific responsibility are completed in a timely manner and within budget. Monitors and evaluates plans; focuses on results and measuring attainment of outcomes.

Customer Service – Balancing interests of a variety of clients; readily readjusts priorities to respond to pressing and changing client demands. Anticipates and meets the need of clients; achieves quality end-products; is committed to continuous improvement of services.

Decisiveness – Exercises good judgment by making sound and well-informed decisions; perceives the impact and implications of decisions; makes effective and timely decisions, even when data is limited or solutions produce unpleasant consequences; is proactive and achievement oriented.

Entrepreneurship – Identifies opportunities to develop and market new products and services within or outside of the organization. Is willing to take risks; initiates actions that involve a deliberate risk to achieve a recognized benefit or advantage.

Problem Solving – Identifies and analyzes problems; distinguishes between relevant and irrelevant information to make logical decisions; provides solutions to individual and organizational problems.

Technical Credibility – Understands and appropriately applies procedures, requirements, regulations, and policies related to specialized expertise. Is able to make sound hiring and capital resource decisions and to address training and

development needs. Understands linkages between administrative competencies and mission needs.

4. BUSINESS ACUMEN

This core qualification involves the ability to acquire and administer human, financial, material, and information re-sources in a manner which instills public trust and accomplishes the organization's mission, and to use new technology to enhance decision making.

Key Characteristics:

- a. Assessing current and future staffing needs based on organizational goals and budget realities. Applying merit principles to develop, select, and manage a diverse workforce.
- b. Overseeing the allocation of financial resources; identifying cost-effective approaches; establishing and assuring the use of internal controls for financial systems.
- c. Managing the budgetary process, including preparing and justifying a budget and operating the budget under organizational and Congressional procedures; understanding the marketing expertise necessary to ensure appropriate funding levels.
- d. Overseeing procurement and contracting procedures and processes.
- e. Integrating and coordinating logistical operations.

- f. Ensuring the efficient and cost-effective development and utilization of management information systems and other technological resources that meet the organization's needs; understanding the impact of technological changes on the organization.

Leadership Competencies - Business Acumen

Financial Management – Demonstrates broad understanding of principles of financial management and marketing expertise necessary to ensure appropriate funding levels. Prepares, justifies, and/or administers the budget for the program area; uses cost-benefit thinking to set priorities; monitors expenditures in support of programs and policies. Identifies cost-effective approaches. Manages procurement and contracting.

Human Resources Management – Assesses current and future staffing needs based on organizational goals and budget realities. Using merit principles, ensures staff are appropriately selected, developed, utilized, appraised, and rewarded; takes corrective action.

Technology Management – Uses efficient and cost effective approaches to integrate technology into the workplace and improve program effectiveness. Develops strategies using new technology to enhance decision making. Understands the impact of technological changes on the organization.

5. BUILDING COALITIONS/COMMUNICATION

This core qualification involves the ability to explain, advocate and express facts and ideas in a convincing manner, and negotiate with individuals and groups internally and externally. It also involves the ability to develop an expansive professional network with other organizations, and to identify the internal and external politics that impact the work of the organization.

Key Characteristics:

- a. Representing and speaking for the organizational unit and its work (e.g., presenting, explaining, selling, defining, and negotiating) to those within and outside the office (e.g., agency heads and other Government executives; corporate executives; Office of Management and Budget officials; Congressional members and staff; the media; clientele and professional groups); making clear and convincing oral presentations to individuals and groups; listening effectively and clarifying information; facilitating an open exchange of ideas.
- b. Establishing and maintaining working relationships with internal organizational units (e.g., other program areas and staff support functions); approaching each problem situation with a clear perception of organizational and political reality; using contacts to build and strengthen internal support bases; getting understanding and support from higher level management.
- c. Developing and enhancing alliances with external groups (e.g., other agencies or firms, State and local governments, Congress, and clientele

- groups); engaging in cross-functional activities; finding common ground with a widening range of stakeholders.
- d. Working in groups and teams; conducting briefings and other meetings; gaining cooperation from others to obtain information and accomplish goals; facilitating “win-win” situations.
 - e. Considering and responding appropriately to the needs, feelings, and capabilities of different people in different situations; being tactful and treating others with respect.
 - f. Seeing that reports, memoranda, and other documents reflect the position and work of the organization in a clear, convincing, and organized manner.

Leadership Competencies - Building Coalitions/Communication

Influencing/Negotiating – Persuades others; builds consensus through give and take; gains cooperation from others to obtain information and accomplish goals; facilitates “win-win” situations.

Interpersonal Skills – Considers and responds appropriately to the needs, feelings, and capabilities of different people in different situations; is tactful, compassionate and sensitive, and treats others with respect.

Oral Communication – Makes clear and convincing oral presentations to individuals or groups; listens effectively and clarifies information as needed; facilitates an open exchange of ideas and fosters an atmosphere of open communication.

Partnering – Develops networks and builds alliances, engages in cross-functional activities; collaborates across boundaries, and finds common ground with a widening range of stakeholders. Utilizes contacts to build and strengthen internal support bases.

Political Savvy – Identifies the internal and external politics that impact the work of the organization. Approaches each problem situation with a clear perception of organizational and political reality; recognizes the impact of alternative courses of action.

Written Communication – Expresses facts and ideas in writing in a clear, convincing and organized manner.¹⁰

¹⁰ OPM – Guide to the Senior Executive Service; pp. 10, 14, 18, 21, 24.

CONCLUSION

The ideal of an highly-positioned administrative category into the public service still did not concretize, so as the idea of the Senior Executive Service as a generalist division. The expertise and specialization characteristics took a more important role in respect to the broad vision of the public administrative. In a certain way, one of the reasons for such occurring is the fact that the authority, value and respect given to specialists in the United States is much more higher than to a specific social group, specially on the public sector. So, if there is respect and even admiration to the public executives, it comes not because of their responsibility, or administrative skills, but because of their expertise in some subject. But the existence of a public administrative elite as it is understood in all other developed and democratic countries is highly improbable in the United States of America because of its history and culture.

It is essential to remark that all studies held into to public administrative problem get to the positive conclusion that no nation can prosper in modern world without a neutrally qualified, competent, efficient, well structured and well payed higher civil service, as the key personnel instrument into the government's core. So as it is clear that sudden changes into the executive administrative positions because of oriented political changes work like poison to the effectiveness of governmental activity. The Volker Commission identified the attacks to the public service by some presidents as factors of corroding the already long distrust of

American people of the capacity, importance and public concern of the government staff.

Although many of the instruments of the SES legislation did not achieve their prime objectives (mostly because of occasional and political problems), as sabbaticals, mobility, etc, the instruments needed to provide a high quality executive service are still present to play their role in the improvement of the governmental system.

It also seems that, despite the career system is being difficult to construct, once it is not consolidated (with, for example, decades of “smooth” functioning), it still is vulnerable to suffer hard effects of dismantle if there is a will to do so by the authorities who have the power. The most notorious example is what the Reagan’s administration had done with the Senior Executive Service, when there was a deliberate movement to weaken the career personnel and strengthen the political appointees, resulting, as described by Huddleston, in often poorly informed decisions and plummeting morale at the service. Such actions sturdily compromised the conditions of success of the new system. At that period, the number of career professional fell in almost 20 percent, while the number of political appointees increased in more than 160 percent.

It is also necessary to emphasize that the United States of America seems to be the only example of the democratic and developed countries where the number of political appointees is larger than a minimal or residual percentage. More, in

principle, the political appointees tend to occupy most of the top management positions. This reality faces no equal or similar in the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, France or Germany. At these countries, the higher civil service servants reach the very top of their public structure, being responsible for the designing and implementations of the public policies, and serving as permanent heads of the bureaucratic structures, as deputy ministers, chief executives or permanent secretaries.

What is most interesting is that, despite the fact that in the United States the presence of political appointees is much more spread and clearer and not just at the first-grade positions, it is just in the United States that the relationship between career and noncareer executives tends not to be well “fused” as it happens in other countries which have an institutionalized executive public system. In the United States, these professionals tend to work separately. Such separations lead to a conflict between the necessity of political responsiveness and the need of technical competence.

Particularly in the United States, the wage question has a special relevance. The maintenance of the salaries' levels being barely compared to the private sector is a crucial question, once in the United States the notions of *market competition* and *market value* are absorbed by all in society since their early years of age. Still, to the North-American people, work to the federal government does not mean a special, respected or noble work. On the contrary, it can mean in many cases, inefficiency, corruption or lack of competence.

Nevertheless, if by one hand a consolidation of a public executive career leans against the cultural aspects of the North-American society, by the other hand it passes by the key necessity of a state prepared, capable and instrumentalized to perform its activities with competence, efficiency and democratic commitment to the people's demands. As it appears in other developed and democratic countries, the existence of a high civil service is a necessary (although not sufficient) condition to the development and growth of a country and its society.

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