

Reform of Government in Vietnam

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Introduction to Changes in Development Policies

Public administration grounded in thoughtful philosophy and committed to “good” politics, “good” public policy, and “good” government may be the path to solving the important problems of the modern time which requires not only efficiency and effectiveness but also the still-important values of this society: freedom, justice and equality. In order to meet these requirements, public administration may need an intellectual reawakening, and we need to think anew about public administration (Whicker, 1990).

Public is now less concerned about what governments do than with how they do it. The central failure of governments today is one of means, not ends (Osborne, 1992). Governments everywhere are now facing various crises which require the only remedy of taking a comprehensive and committed approach to performance-based governance which promotes innovation and creativity, and facilitates flexibility in public administration (Carr, 1995).

In fact, governments constantly change. The term “public administration reform” was dated back in the 1970s in Vietnam. In recent years, there have been changes, more profound and faster than ever before, in internal conditions as well as in the international context which have had a deep impact on the Vietnamese development strategy that is leading to a new concept of public administration and state management.

In the initial stage of building the post-colonial independent State, the Government's top priority was to ensure her political stability, national unity and centralized power in order to mobilize the whole nation for the national construction and entire liberation. The great victories of the Vietnamese people in the resistance wars against the French colonialists and the US imperialists for national salvation and reunification reflect a good example of the concentration of the national will and efforts for the final goals. It is noted that the centralized role of leadership emerged from the demand of the historical reality for the purpose of accomplishing the historical missions.

From the mid-1980s, the Vietnamese government has worked out the most difficult but correct decision of transforming from the centrally planned mechanism into the state-regulated market mechanism (Callisto, 1992), and developing a multi-sector economy with the policy of opening and integrating into the world community. The top priority, subsequently, has turned into the socio-economic and democratic development facilitating all the rank and file and levels of authorities to participate in and contribute to the national development.

Various economic piecemeal reforms have been conducted since 1979. But the over-all reform process known as *doimoi* was not launched until 1986 which has soon

brought about profound effects in every area of life. The guideline of the renovation is to move towards a market-oriented economy, while in the field of public administration the direction of the renewal is to increase the efficiency and cost effectiveness of public sector operations. Successful economic management has resulted in macro-economic stability. From a country chronically short of food, Vietnam has been transformed to the third largest rice exporter worldwide years ago, and the second largest in 1997. The inflation rate has been substantially fallen from over 680% in 1986 to 18% in 1992 (Public Administrative Reform Document, 1993), and less than 5% by late 1997. The annual GDP growth managed to reach 8.3% in 1992, a sharp increase from 4.7% in 1991, and around 9%–9.5% at present, for the goal to double the living standard by the year 2000 (*Far Eastern Economic Review*, 1993; Nhandan Daily, various).

While the law of the market may apply everywhere, the same does not go for institutional structures (Sarageldin, 1992). The design for institutional renewal in Vietnam has to become from within. A series of fundamental policy and structural reforms in the contextual environment are urgently required in order to facilitate further improvements in competitiveness, trade liberalization and promotion of non-state sectors to push the economic expansion and growth. A public administrative reform programme has been embarked upon to focus on institutional review and redesign highlighted by the release of more than 150 legal texts during 10 years of renovation to create a supportive legal framework; but above all, the 1992 Constitution has come into being to reflect a strong commitment to the determined reform. Other changes have also been initiated on restructuring administrative apparatus, coordination between the levels of government, public service structural reframe, human resources development, and improved financial management and accounting practices.

By conducting the over-all renovation strategy with the strengthened macro-level management role of the State, improved status and role of different levels of authorities, mobilizing the participation of populace in the public management, as well as stimulating all the economic sectors for the sake of the all-sided flourishing, the country has overcome the serious socio-economic crisis, the development process has achieved a lot of remarkable strategic successes of the public administration reform in particular, and of the national development in general, i.e., building a wealthy nation, a strong state, a just and civilized society (Party Congress Document, 1996).

A New Paradigm of Governmental Changes in a Reform Perspective

All nations of any size and consequence confront one of the fundamental problems of governance-how will the relationship between central and peripheral authorities be resolved? Constitutionally, this issue is commonly framed in the legal terms: which jurisdiction has power (s) to do what, with what degree of discretion or autonomy? (Rabin, 1989).

It is the essence of development that requires a strong will and efforts, a rational

allocation of national resources in order to timely meet the social needs, a commitment to determined and quick policy making, which ask for a sound degree of centralized power in the central government. However, in order to bring into full play the creativity, potentiality and responsibility of the government machinery, there also needs a certain degree of decentralization and delegation in the public administration system. On such basis, different levels of local authorities would play a better role in the national political and socio-economic development, and subsequently democratization and populace participation be encouraged (Nguyen, 1996).

Decentralization is not merely a transfer of power from the central government to its lower levels without managerial supervision from the former, but implies a clear definition of authority and accountability of each level, a relevant devolution and delegation among the levels of government in the public administrative hierarchy. By this way, each level of government would be given a certain scope of autonomy to facilitate the local initiatives within the legal framework, and to enrich the diversification of different localities in a fully harmonized manner.

With the government apparatus being decentralized, the central government could be able to free itself from the fragmented works in order to concentrate to the focal undertakings which could not be carried out by the local levels and non-state sectors. Meanwhile, the latter, including the NGOs, are in preferable position and are fully capable to implement more effectively development programmes and service delivery in certain fields, thus help reducing red-tapism and corruption and conserving public funds. Devolved [...] authorities with improved incentives, better information, greater accountability, and the use of cheaper [non-state] supplies will all contribute to economy, efficiency and effectiveness (Hardiman, 1991).

In this point of view, it is the heart of the issue that the local authorities should be given full competence to fulfill their responsibility of the self-governed bodies. The central government is requested to provide them with sufficient resources basing on social, economic and cultural features, on potentials and advantages as well as short-comings of each territorial area, so that the given responsibility and authority will be optimized for better exploitation and utilization of resources, good delivery of public services, and great contribution to the national growth. The central government, in this context, should hold the leading role in formulating a relevant dimension and scope of decentralization, a rational degree of delegation to different levels, and in developing a mechanism to guide, monitor and control the lower levels, while ensuring a sound and effective system of coordination and operations (Nguyen, 1996).

Decentralization nowadays is obviously seen world-wide as a new but common trend which may enable a highly effective, efficient and responsive public administration. There have been a great deal of successful cases, but also many failures: for the over-centralized states, strong decentralization has been tried, or a combination of centralization and decentralization introduced; whereas for other states with loose management from the central government, administrative separation and localization have appeared to be a matter of fact. The next part of this writing will draw a picture of the government system reform in Vietnam which seems to be a mixed

pattern with which "Vietnam has emerged as the one with best potential for a rapid and successful transformation" (Smith, 1992).

Reform of the Functions and Structures of the Government

1. The success of the governmental development policy depends on the resolution of two basic issues: how government can mobilize and use its own resources more effectively to increase productivity and the income of population, and how government can organize its planning and administrative procedures to cope more effectively with the growing complexity and uncertainty of development problems. Government itself should be run with the entrepreneurial spirit, with proper attention to economy and efficient organization. Considerable intervention in the economic mechanism is needed to prevent the domination of selfish over public interests, and to ensure an adequate degree of economic democracy and an equitable distribution of incomes. Government should also be operated with humanitarian aims and regard for the welfare of the individual foremost (Simon, 1991).

We cannot make government "lovable" until we make it responsive to its customers (*Sam Nunn quoted in* Osborne, 1992). That "caring government" is described by Osborne and Gaebler with 10 principles, namely:

- (i) a catalytic government, steering rather than rowing,
- (ii) a community-owned government, empowering rather than serving,
- (iii) a competitive government, injecting competition into service delivery,
- (iv) a mission-driven government, transforming rule-driven organizations,
- (v) a results-oriented government, funding outcomes rather than inputs,
- (vi) a customer-driven government, meeting the needs of the customers,
- (vii) an enterprising government, earning rather than spending,
- (viii) an anticipatory government, prevention rather than cure,
- (ix) a decentralized government, from hierarchy to participation, and
- (x) a market-oriented government, leveraging change through the market.

Reforming the government in such orientations is, therefore, the only answer for the question of how to get a good governance.

2. It is all seen that political, economic and social trends all impact on modern governments. In addition, the challenges for the governments in transition are getting greater as they combine the need for change with the need for continuity and order. These demand major transformations of the functions and structures of governmental institutions.

The administrative activities in developing countries are not concerned merely with the providing a framework for and the maintenance of law and order and the execution of public policies, but also with modernization, economic stability and development and the extension of social services (Heady, 1996). The government should act as the engine of the public administration vehicle, using the tools of macro management to lead the pace of market growth rather than replacing or controlling the market, and to combine the economic development with the social justice and

progress.

To be fully aware of that critical and fundamental insight, the government machinery of Vietnam has been revitalized and reframed in many aspects.

3. A recent restructure of the government getting involved in the system rightsizing, functions reinventing and performance improving, includes:

- (i) the Council of Ministers being renamed the Government accompanied with the subsequent changes in regard of principles, organizational structures and working modality;
- (ii) the working style and relationship between the Prime Minister and his deputies being renewed, the collective responsibility and authority of the government being clearly distinguished from that of the individual Prime Minister, and of the Deputy Prime Ministers who, then, delegate the authority of settling concrete works to the ministers;
- (iii) the number of Deputy Prime Ministers being increased from 3 to 5 (in 1997) to lessen the heavy burden of work from the Prime Minister;
- (iv) the number of ministers without portfolio being minimized;
- (v) the number of ministries being reduced through merging several of them into new complex ones. In 1986, there existed 37 ministries, 40 agencies under the Council of Ministers, which were reduced to 22 ministries, 24 agencies under the Government in 1996;
- (vi) the report system being enforced for smooth feedback from lower levels;
- (vii) the consultant ad-hoc groups being formed to assist the Government and the Prime Minister, which consist of experts and representatives from various professional and social organizations related, the NGOs and the native-born Vietnamese from abroad;
- (viii) the participation of different target-groups in the institutional building being encouraged; and
- (ix) the public offices being modernized by computerization and applied information technology.

4. Public institutions in a modern government should be regarded as administratively flexible and adjustable to meet new demands rapidly, and subject to direct governmental direction. Ministries are basic organizational structure within the government which in comparison to more traditional ones, have special requirements with regard to structure design, planning capability, policy and programme implementing and evaluating, staff services and a variety of professionally trained personnel (*ibid.*). They all need to be transformed themselves from staid bureaucracies into innovative, flexible and responsive organizations that need to examine their structures to ask which of several options for management structures may be appropriated: centralized or devolved, programme-managed or matrix-managed, centralized or delegated financial controls... (Scott, 1994).

Decentralization between the central government and local authorities in terms of tasks, competence, budget and personnel is recently applied in the Vietnamese

reality of management. Regulation making power is grasped in the hand of the government and ministries, together with the planning, institutional building, strategy designing for the sectoral/branch and national development, coordinating the plans of different localities, monitoring and supervising and assisting as well as inspecting the implementation of the local units. Meanwhile the implementation is to be done by the local authorities to stimulate the participation of local population. The central can only make institutional interventions, but never interfere into the concrete activities of the local bodies.

Apart from the partial revenue and assistance from the central, the local is eligible to self-management over their budget, self-determination over the organizational structure and personnel of their specialized organs which are not the inferiors of the ministries anymore. These units are responsible to provide the local authorities with their specialized operations, while the latter are responsible to support the former in performing their work. This kind of relationship is not of the administrative hierarchy, but the statutory coordination. The administrative direction from the central and ministries towards the local authorities is exercised through the only focal point that is the local executive bodies.

This model of administrative decentralization has already shown positive results in the local administrative management, and also helps enforcing law obedience, encouraging responsibility and initiatives, avoiding inertia, minimizing administrative dispersion, localization and bureaucratic centralization.

5. Organizational structure of the ministries and governmental administrative agencies at the central level are being redesigned to satisfy the new designated tasks and functions in a decentralized system, including:

a) redefining tasks among some ministries to avoid overlapping, and changing the names of ministries: e. g. Government Committee for Organization and Personnel to be renamed Ministry of Home Affairs functioning as a state administrative organ on civil service and civil servants management, a focal point of the public administration reform ...; the existing Ministry of Home Affairs to be renamed Ministry of Police including the security and investigation police.

b) relocating some of the government agencies into ministries, remaining only a few agencies under government due to their specific characteristics and crucial importance, which require the direct supervision from the Prime Minister.

c) As for other special agencies, a special status needs to be granted to make them sufficiently responsive to new tasks: a highlighted legal status for the National Audit with its region-based constituent bodies to exercise the task of auditing over all the state budget funded units. The Chief Auditor is to be selected by the Prime Minister and ratified by the National Assembly, whose report is to be submitted to the National Assembly and opened to the public; A fully institutionalized national committee is being improved for the soon establishment of the stock market; The organization and operations of the inspection work is to be enforced to make it one of the most important tools of state management in a market economy. The ministerial inspection department is given the twofold status as a professional branch of the

State Inspection Bureau and a ministerial unit as well.

d) improving the institutional framework for better performance of the Administrative Courts system which was newly established in 1996.

e) transferring certain ministerial units to the relevant public enterprises or local authorities, such as hospitals, colleges, vocational schools, institutes of scientific research, separating the basic research and the technological development research to incorporate the former to the National Sciences Centre or universities, and the latter to the big-scale enterprises; For those still remain in the ministries, or the newly incorporated units, self-management and autonomy should be guaranteed.

f) The reform of administrative procedures has emphasized on simplifying the license granting procedures and registration for business/professional operations, construction, land title, import-export, immigration ... and delegating these functions to the local administrative bodies, as the lower levels seem to be closer to the population, thus serving them more conveniently and effectively. The pilot projects of one-door model is introduced in the administrative agencies, and the complex building model for administrative agencies is a good example of de-layering the administrative focal points for easier access to administrative permissions which is now already introduced in some places.

g) A new administrative pattern worked out by the National Institute of Public Administration is being experimented in a selected ministry, province and district, which is multipliable over the administrative system in some coming time.

Changes in the System of Local Authorities

1. The local administrative system in Vietnam consists of 3 levels: the provincial/municipal level, the provincial/municipal district level and its equivalent of provincial cities/towns, and the communal level and its equivalent of district towns and city wards. For the villages, there is no official level of administration, but selected officers are entrusted by the higher level of authority to take charge of the public management upon certain aspects of the local matters and link the authority to the local community.

Local authorities make the essential components of the national administration and the indispensable bridge between the State and the people which take the significant charge of consolidating democratization, managing all social, economic and cultural aspects of the locality. A strong effective and efficient system of local authorities will, therefore, greatly help improve the management productivity of the whole state machinery.

There are in Vietnam at present 57 provinces and 4 municipalities, almost 15 provincial cities, 70 provincial towns, around 600 districts, more than 10,000 communes, district towns and city wards, belonging to the 3 different local levels.

The local administrative system covers 80% of the national population and almost natural resources. Vietnam is an agricultural country and the agricultural products are vital to the whole society. The revenue from the agricultural area is also considerable to the state budget. In addition, the local authorities are pioneering

in the rural development, especially in the nation-wide movement of "famine abolishment and poverty alleviation", traditional heritage preservation, environmental protection ...

It is a matter of fact that a well-settled relationship between the central and the local levels will help accommodate the balance of centralization and decentralization, between the national interests and the local interests. The system of public administration should ensure the combination of the branch-based management and the territory-based management, a strong but harmonized and smooth hierarchy from the centre through all levels to the grassroots. While avoiding separation, fragmentation and localism on the one hand, the bureaucratic centralization inherited from the past on the other hand, should be checked.

2. There are two kinds of organizations in the existing structure of the local authorities: The People's Council is the local representing body but not the legislative body, elected by the local population, functioning as the state power body in the locality, and at the same time is the self-governed body ensuring the democratized participation of the local people in the state management, acting as the official channel to disseminate policy instructions and provide legal understandings to the masses, and as the decision-making body for the local socio-economic development. In the principle of strongly pushing ahead the socialization of the economic, cultural, and social activities, and the delegation of administrative responsibility and authority, the People's Councils should be acting as the elected bodies with real power to fully represent and safeguard the inhabitants' will and desire, and to be fully entitled to the decision making.

The People's Committee functions as the executive body of the People's Council of the same level, and at the same time, is the administrative body in the locality, representing the government and the superior administrative level in organizing the local people for the socio-economic development policies implementation, and realizing the state management functions in various aspects in the local areas.

3. The reform of the organizational structure of the state apparatus in regard to local levels is now undertaken in the direction of simplifying the system while diversifying the authorization and democratization, with the mandated principle of "known by populace, discussed by populace, done by populace, and controlled by populace".

4. Renewed patterns of the local authorities:

a) Province is always considered the keystone in the government system and is the first level to be decentralized. One of the tangible expressions of the local authority system reform is the re-dividing of provinces to form the smaller but more efficient units. The change in 1995 divided 44 provinces and municipalities into 53, and the latest change in 1997 resulted in 61 (57 provinces and 4 municipalities).

Among the most important and expensive activities of the provinces are elementary and secondary education, construction and maintenance of highways, delivery

of public welfare services... Provincial authority, in addition, operates extensive law-enforcement and ensures the implementation of central policies in a good manner. In order to provide for the sufficient funding of general governmental expenses and the delivery of services, provinces rely upon an assortment of internally generated and central revenue sources-mix of province and central funds.

The provincial People's Council should be reorganized in order to accomplish its delegated responsibilities and competence. In terms of the organizational and personnel affairs of the executive body, the Council approves the size of the administrative machinery including the provincial specialized departments, the district specialized divisions, the civil staff establishment from the provincial to the communal levels, taking into account the proposals of the heads of the executive bodies. It is proposed that the Council elect the chairperson of the provincial/municipal executive body to be appointed by the Prime Minister, approve the nomination of the vice-chairpersons; directors of the provincial/municipal specialized departments be also nominated by the Council at the proposal of the head of the provincial/municipal executive body.

b) Commune is an administrative unit and a state budget level getting closer to the local population in a limited area, characterized by the long-standing tradition with a self-management consciousness and high spirit of community. This is the grass-roots level to deal directly with the daily matters of the local people which plays a very crucial role in and makes a fundamental ground for the democratized administration known as the direct democratization.

The communal People's Council is representing the will and desire of the local community with a fully granted responsibility and authority of a self-managed unit, and is also a local supervisor upon the administrative activities in the communal area, including: to make open to public the revenue and expenditure operations exercised by the executive body for the direct surveillance from the local population; to announce the Council's meetings for direct observation, participation and hearings from the local population before decision-making; and to support the village chiefdom for a smooth bottom-up channel of public management.

c) District is an administrative level with the main functions of organizing the implementation of the tasks and decisions given by the province on the one hand, and on the other hand, supervising and assisting and controlling the communal level. The role of the district is necessary, but it is certainly not a level with cultural characteristics or community traditions. If being a self-managed administrative level in terms of budget and others like the province and the commune, it would, therefore, make the budgetary system more scattered especially when the provincial and district territory is getting constricted. The strong argument now is whether to need the People's Council at the district level. If not, there should be groups of the provincial People's Council members to take charge of their problems.

d) The organizational structure of the local authorities in the municipal dis-

tricts and wards should be basing on the typical characteristics of urban management. The administrative separation of districts and wards is a necessity for public administration, but all the economic, social, and infrastructural development activities are not confined within the administrative circumscription. Hence, the argument again is the Council may not be instituted otherwise the separation in urban development administration would occur. Meanwhile the groups of the People's Council deputies of the immediate superior level should take care of the municipal districts and wards.

5. Renewed functions and competence of the levels of local executive bodies:

The existing People's Committees should be renamed the Administrative Committees as during 1945 and prior to the 1980 Constitution. The administrative machinery of this body, in principle, should be restructured to support the renewed working style with strong individual competence and responsibility of the civil staff, contrary to the collective ones of the People's Council.

a) The Administrative Committees at the levels with the People's Councils (province, municipality, provincial city/town, district town, commune) are designed to:

collectively discuss and decide on the budget, and planning of the local development before submitting to the immediate superior administrative level for instructions, and to the People's Council of the same rank for ratification and approval;

collectively discuss on the organizational and personnel matters prior to the final decision by the Administrative Committee chairperson or prior to submission to the People's Council;

to have, as proposed, the Administrative Committee chairperson (now elected) nominated by the head of the superior administrative level, and the vice-chairpersons appointed by the chairperson in the agreement of the People's Council of the same rank:

* In case of the provincial/municipal Administrative Committee, the candidates for the chairpersonship are proposed to the provincial/municipal People's Council by the Prime Minister, and also by the Council itself. The Prime Minister will then release the decision of nomination basing on the result of the vote of confidence by the provincial/municipal People's Council. The chairperson of the Administrative Committee is within the surveillance of the People's Council. In case of being failed in the vote of confidence, the in-service Administrative Committee chairperson is to resign or be dismissed by the Prime Minister. By this principle, the consensus of the People's Council is respected which supports the unity of public administration in the decentralized context, and also facilitates the mobility of the capable administrators in the nation-wide personnel deployment in order to get rid of the localism and departmentalism bias for the local interests.

* For the communal level, the Administrative Committee chairperson may be directly elected by the local populace to enhance the role of the local authority, strengthen the close relationship between the local authority and the local popula-

tion, improve the mastership and participation of the local people. The election outcomes, by virtue of law, need to be ratified by the chairperson of the immediate superior level. The communal Administrative Committee chairperson is within the surveillance of the People's Council of the same level. In order to enforce the effectiveness and the objectiveness of the surveillance, the election should be midway of the People's Council tenure, so that the head of the Administrative Committee is to be within the surveillance by the 2 collegial bodies in his or her 2 halves of the office tenure.

* For the cities and towns, the heads may be directly elected by the local people and called mayors to facilitate the international integrity.

b) The Administrative Committees at the levels without the People's Councils (district and city ward).

The head of the provincial/municipal district Administrative Committee (now elected) is proposed to be appointed by the provincial/municipal Administrative Committee chairperson basing on the proposal of the representing group of deputies for district in the provincial/municipal People's Council, and the vice-chairpersons be appointed by the chairperson in conformity to the views of the provincial/municipal Administrative Committee. For the special case of the city ward in terms of infrastructure development and urban management, the executive body is to take charge of the management upon the local social orders, socio-culture and urban sanitation, rather than other activities not being confined within the ward circumscription. The Administrative Committee should not be instituted, whereas a head and some other administrative officers might be appointed and recruited by the superior administrative level.

6. Specialized bodies of the Administrative Committees:

a) In the provincial/municipal level, the specialized units of the Administrative Committee, called departments, are constituted to cover the fields vertically not to be managed by the central. It is stipulated that certain departments ought to be instituted, whereas other departments might be created by the provincial/municipal People's Council at the proposal of the provincial/municipal Administrative Committee, which reflects a great simplification compared to the past with the existence of the ministerial lower-ranked units system at all levels of authority (relevant departments of all ministries at the provincial level, and their relevant divisions at the district level). The renewed main principle of their operations is to function the state management in a broad field of activities. For instance, all the activities of urban planning, public construction, public transportation, water supply and sewerage, garbage collection, lightening... may be included in a unique department (e. g. Urban Management Department) to ensure a harmonized management. In case of no need to institute a department, a group of experts might be established as an internal unit inside the general office of the Administrative Committee to assist the specialized activities of the local socio-economic development. The directors of the specialized departments report for the final decisions by the Administrative Committee

chairperson upon the matters within the realm of authority entitled to the provincial/municipal level. In case these decisions run counter to the related ministry's point of view, the judgment should then be given by the Prime Minister, or by the Administrative Court. The organizational structure and personnel of the specialized departments are decided by the local authority to meet the needs of the real situation according to the local financial resources, while the general guidelines are stipulated by the government.

b) In the level of provincial/municipal district, provincial city/town, certain specialized divisions need to be instituted in conformity with the typical characteristics of different local areas. The heads of these units are appointed by the district Administrative Committee chairperson in the agreement of the provincial/municipal Administrative Committee; or by the Administrative Committee chairperson of the provincial city/town in the agreement of the People's Council at the same level.

c) The Administrative Committees of the communes, district towns, and city wards are assisted by a certain number of the professional officers who are proposed to be included in the civil service hierarchy, to be recruited and appointed and paid salary for by the commune or district town, while those working for the city wards to be paid for by the administrative body of the superior level. The decentralized budgetary system is to be strongly improved to support this renewed pattern.

Building Up a Modern Civil Service with a Stable, Professional and Transparent Civil Staff

Civil Service and Civil Servants

1. The whole function of the civil service depends largely on an authoritative competence to know and do things and on the powers exercised as a consequence of managing public explicit grants of authority (Baker, 1994). In this respect, civil service exercises a governance function which is bound by rules of law (Fry, 1989).

The civil service of today will have to meet several requirements including the ability (i) to be held accountable for its action, (ii) to implement responsibly and intelligently the policies of the renewed government without losing the inherited traditional public service values, (iii) to adapt to the changing role of the state, and (iv) to provide an effective, economical and equitable service to citizens. Such an effective, accountable, adaptable and responsive civil service will, therefore, require suitable structures to create the framework within which to determine policy, suitable procedures to devolve or control resources to give the best scope for releasing the talents of civil service, and suitable personnel with high morale and motivation to work for the public good (Scott, 1994).

The civil service implies all activities and behaviours of the administrative civil staff in performance of their designated public management functions, and in direct handle of all day-to-day relationships between the State and the people as clientele.

All of these activities and behaviours should be controlled by the civil service regulations as the backbone for the institutionalization of all administrative actions and administrative organizations. A perfectly and stably well-performed civil service is expected to consist of different crucial factors: a well-qualified contingent of administrative staff, a well-designed training system of public administration, a well-organized system of public agencies, and a well-composed file of regulations for civil service performance.

The followings are some of the recent reforms in the field of civil service: the Civil Service Bill has already been built; a modern civil service is being developed on the foundation of a well-implemented process of entry examination for recruitment, training/retraining for civil service standardization, evaluating/assessing for promotion ...; further steps of salary reform are also remarkable element in the civil service improvement with the purpose to ensure a normal living standard, as well as a reasonable disparity of earnings in the entire state system and in the administrative machinery per se; a decree on anti-corruption is soon being submitted to the National Assembly ...

2. Public administration is the concern of all those who act on behalf of the public — on behalf of society in legally mandated way — and whose actions have consequences for the members of society, singly or as a group (Harmon, 1986). In order to get the best of the dedication from the administrative staff, a clear identification of their status and functions needs to be discussed to make the foundation for a civil service of professionalization, stabilization and continuity, to ensure the effectiveness and efficiency and productivity of the public administration system, and to form the basis for developing systems of civil service ethics that set standards of behaviours (Hardiman, 1991).

A definition of the administrative civil staff, distinguished from public servants, was made clear. With that, we have the total number of 1.18 million public servants, in which the administrative staff occupy 180,000. A remarkable outcome of the public service reform is the downsizing of the public servants establishment by 8.5%, (while the norm put forth by the National Assembly is 20%).

Services of different kinds also need to be institutionalized to match the typical characteristics of different categories of cadres in the political system, such as those from the party units, socio-political organizations, military and police forces, public utility units, enterprises ... Taking into account the special characteristics of the Vietnamese situation with only a portion of the National Assembly deputies serving on a full-time basis, there needs a separate Act on the service of the National Assembly deputies and the People's Councils members without holding any administrative positions.

Civil Service Training

Training is always the everlasting need of the development process and is deeply impacted by the internal changes of the public service and also the challenges in the broader nationwide environment. The final goal of training is to meet the badly

needs of the standardized public service by providing and upgrading its staff with the modern managerial knowledge and skills, and at the same time consolidating the appreciated set of ethical values for better performance. A well-qualified and dignified highly responsive staff, sufficient in quantity and quality, in the context of the ever emerging challenges is the target of the training policy in general, and the management capacity building in particular. It is, therefore, imperative to set up a training strategy to meet the requirements of building an effective and modern public administration.

The existing civil staff in Vietnam is coping with the most serious problem of knowledge obsolescence and shortage. It is a matter of fact that with the significant changes in the socio-economic structure when turning into the market economy, not only do they lack basically and systematically trained knowledge in terms of state management and law, but also necessary skills and experience of the managerial work, not to say about other up-to-date issues of public administration and management, thus resulting in the ineffectiveness and inefficiency of the state management. [Officers] at all levels deal with different types of problems and decisions, so different skills are required, although all need the same combination of skills: conceptual skills, human skills, technical skills and drive (Hay, 1990).

Being imbued with this rationale, a nation-wide strategy of public administration training has already been wrought out which emphasizes the role of the National Institute of Public Administration (NIPA) in the human resources development for the national renovation process. The renewal of the training curricula and methods is designed in the following bases: (i) the merit-based principle, (ii) the harmonized civil service with 2 systems of career and employment, (iii) the combination of traditional public administration understanding and development administration experience to fit with the renovative reality in Vietnam, (iv) and the client-oriented training programmes.

Various training courses have been designed and redesigned for relevant target-groups, namely: (i) the 6-week training programme for top officials including deputy ministers and provincial/municipal People's Committee chairpersons; (ii) the 12-week training programme for high- and mid-ranked officials ranging from heads of district level to vice-chairpersons of the provincial/municipal People's Committees, directors of the specialized departments in the local level; the equivalents of deputy minister, directors-general and deputy directors-general of the ministerial departments, senior/principal experts in the central level; and (iii) long-term pre-service and in-service training programmes leading to BA and MA degrees in Public Administration for recruitment and promotion in the civil service system.

Besides, different systems of the provincial/municipal schools of public administration all over the country (now 61) and the ministerial schools of management in most of the ministries (now around 20) all make a network of public administration and management training to provide training services to the grass-roots level officers and the specialized staff respectively.

Remarkable achievements have been made. A training needs survey in 1993 shows the percentage of the existing civil staff with graduated and post-graduated

qualifications at the central level and local levels at 64% and 49% respectively. In terms of public administration training, 186 training courses have been opened for about 16,000 participants during 1995–1996. As instructed by the Prime Minister, at least 20% of the in-service high-and mid-ranked officials need to be trained/retrained per year, together with more degree training for others, so that by the year 2000, the entire staff would be totally trained to meet the requires of the national renovation.

Conclusion

The master key to the government reform success is likely the coordinative working style in the whole system. Tasks and efforts can be made compatible by coordinating them. Bottlenecks and disjunctures can be eliminated, so coordination is obviously leading to efficiency. Without coordination also results in conflicting objectives, chaos and inefficiency. Administrative means need to be brought to bear if coordination is to be effectively achieved (Thompson, 1991). So does administrative culture with its authoritatively allocated set of values (Vasu, 1990). The coordination between and among the levels of government in the public administrative system is, undoubtedly, a precondition of the public policy administering for the sake of good governance. The changes of government in Vietnam, as mentioned above, have reflected a mixed trial of improving the government in the market context, and developing a market economy in a unitarian socialist state. Challenges have been coped with, but achievements have been recognized. The renewed government has become more and more an impetus and also a nucleus of the *doimoi* process which has created a solid foundation for “a State of people, by people, and for people”, and a new status for a revitalized country on the way to modernization and industrialization.

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