

The Process and Analysis of the National Civil Service Reform in Japan

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The Japanese civil service system was reformed in 2014 by the amendment of the National Public Service Act. The amended act covers a wide range of areas, but the key point is the new appointment process for executive officials. The introduction of this new process changed the relationship between the Prime Minister and executive officials drastically. This article first describe the reason why the Japanese government had to undertake the civil service reform. This article will then analyze the content and process of this reform in two dimensions (i.e., transformational factors and transactional factors) by applying Burke-Litwin Model, after which it will explain how the reform changed the relationship between the Prime Minister and executive officials.

INTRODUCTION

Japan has one of the most successful economies in the world. It is often said that the success is partly due to the activities of bureaucrats, or executive officials. For example, Johnson states that they played important roles in Japan's economic development (Johnson, 1982).

It is true to say that executive officials, who are career civil servants, at the executive branch actually governed Japan. The portion of executive officials is very small. While the number of public employees (regular service, excluding prosecutors and employees of specified incorporated administrative agencies) was around 275,000, only around 600 people were appointed as executive officials in 2014¹. Even if the number of executive officials was small, their power was huge.

They had been insulated from direct political pressure because political appointments were extremely exceptional. The appointments of executive officials were actually determined by themselves. Due to these facts, they had enjoyed autonomy and sought the interest of their own ministries for a long time.

Therefore, the national civil service reform had been regarded as taboo for years. Successive cabinets could not tackle this issue because it had been expected that bureaucrats would have resisted against the reform so severely that the cabinets could not work anymore.

However, the government took on this difficult task under the leadership of Prime Minister Abe during the first Abe Cabinet (2006-2007) and the second Abe Cabinet (2012-) because, from the viewpoint of national interest, it was believed necessary to strengthen the power of the Prime Minister to decrease the problem of bureaucratic dogmatism and sectionalism.

¹ The National Personnel Authority. (2015). Annual Report FY2014. Available at: <http://www.jinji.go.jp/en/recomme/annual2014/index.html> (accessed 19 August 2017)

The aim of this article is to explain the content and process of this reform and to analyze whether the reform changed the relationship between the Prime Minister and bureaucrats, or executive officials.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

For the purpose of this paper, the process and content of the reform will be examined by applying the Burke-Litwin Model, which is a theoretical framework (Burke, 2002).

The Burke-Litwin model is one of the most comprehensive and practical models (Figure 1). This model is systemic; that is, when some factors of the system are changed, other factors eventually will be affected.

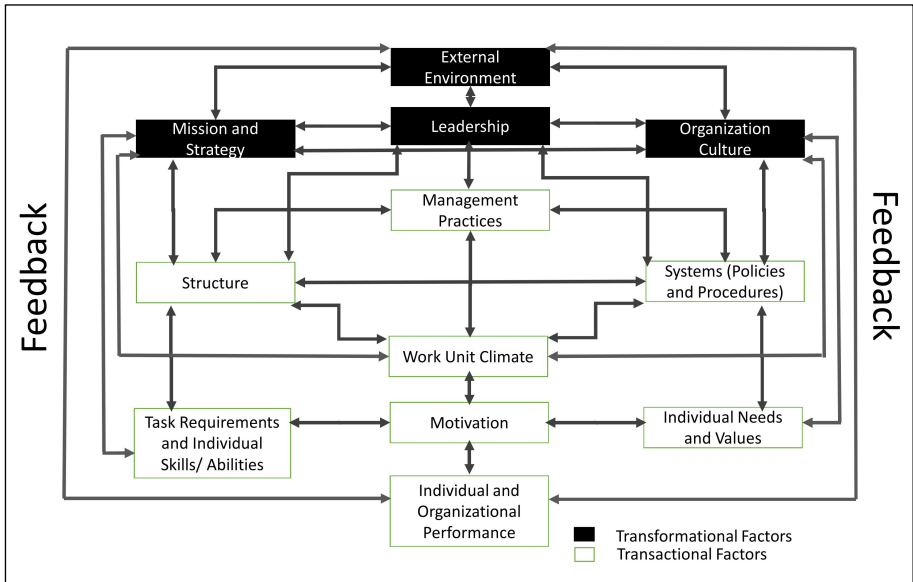
The model is also versatile and international. For example, the analyses of Dime Bancorp (the holding company for The Dime Savings Bank of New York) and British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) were made based upon this model demonstrating its usefulness (Burke, 2002).

This model is suitable to analyze this civil service reform because it can explain the process of how organization change occurs, especially when the change is planned. As stated below, the civil service reform was planned and a hybrid of first-order change and second-order change.

According to organization change research and theory, there are useful distinctions about organization change: planned versus unplanned change and first-order versus second-order change (Burke, 2002).

Planned change means a deliberate, conscious decision to change the system in a deeper, more fundamental way, while unplanned change occurs when the organization has to respond to some unanticipated external change. First-order change refers to “continuous improvement,” while second-order change is radical, more fundamental change that is paradigmatic.

The transformational form is a second-order level of change, which is discontinuous and revolutionary, while the transactional one is a first-order change, which is continuous and evolutionary.

Figure 1 – Burke-Litwin Model

Source : Burke (2002)

Before applying this model to civil service reform, each factor should be defined (Burke, 2002).

External environment, mission and strategy, leadership, and organization culture are referred to as transformational factors.

External environment is defined as forces or variables outside the organization that influence or will soon influence organizational performance. In general, an organization is open because of its dependency on and continual interaction with the external environment.

Mission and strategy, leadership, and organization culture immediately and directly respond to the external environment.

Mission indicates the purpose and primary goals of the organization, while *strategy* indicates how the mission is to be accomplished.

As for *leadership*, leaders create new realities and transform status quos. There is a discontinuity between the extremely high uncertainty of success before the fact and the obviousness of the solution after the fact. *Leadership* is the art of transcending this discontinuity (Noda, 2004).

As Robbins and Judge state:

Transformational leadership inspire followers to transcend their own self-interests for the good of the organization and are capable of having a profound and extraordinary effect on their followers. They pay attention to the concerns and developmental needs of individual followers; they change followers' awareness of issues by helping them to look at old problems in new ways; and they are able to excite, arouse, and inspire followers to put out extra effort to achieve group goals. (Robbins and Judge, 2010)

Organization culture refers to the group and organizational norms to which members conform. The concept of *organization culture* closely associates with the concept of learning organization. Learning organizations use double-loop learning, which challenges deeply rooted assumptions and norms within an organization. In this way, it provides opportunities for radically different solutions to problems and dramatic jumps in improvement (Robbins and Judge, 2010).

Structure, management practices, systems (policies and procedures), work unit climate, task requirements and individual skills/abilities, motivation, individual needs and values, and individual and organizational performance are referred to as transactional factors that indicate the day-to-day operations (transactions) of the organization.

Structure refers to the arrangement of organizational functions and/or operational units that lead to implementation of the organization's *mission and strategy*.

Management practices address what managers do each workday to carry out the organization's strategy. Transformational factors are more closely linked with *leadership*, and transactional factors are more closely associated with *management*. *Leadership* is different from *management*. *Leadership* and *management* are two distinctive and complementary systems of action.

Leadership is about coping with change, while *management* is about coping with complexity (Kotter, 1990).

Systems (policies and procedures) are designed to help and support organizational members with their job and role responsibilities.

Work unit climate is the collective perceptions of members within the same work unit.

Task requirements and individual skills/abilities is job-person match: the degree to which there is congruence between the requirements of one's job, role, and responsibilities, and the knowledge, skills, and abilities (competence or talent) of the individual holding the job.

Individual needs and values concern the extent to which one's needs are met on the job.

Motivation is defined as the processes that account for an individual's intensity, direction, and persistence of effort toward attaining a goal. There are two types of motivation: intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation occurs when people are motivated to engage in an activity for its own sake such as participate in decision making, greater job freedom and discretion, more responsibility, and more interesting work. Extrinsic motivation occurs when people are motivated to perform a behavior to earn a reward or avoid punishment such as payment and promotion/demotion.

Individual and organizational performance can be expressed as the ratio of output to input. For example, in higher education program evaluation, the number of teachers and the amount of their salary is input and the number of the student who can graduate is output. The output should be consistent with an organization's *mission and strategy*.

A fundamental premise of the Burke-Litwin model is that planned change follows the flow from the top, or external environment, to the bottom, or performance, and that change in transformational factors leads to change in transactional factors such as *management practices, work unit climate, motivation of employees*, and finally *performance*.

The external environment had the greatest impact on the civil service reform. The external environment stimulated the transformational factors of the civil service system, which had influenced over transactional factors.

EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT TO PROMOTE CIVIL SERVICE REFORM

As Japanese society changed, the Japanese government system, which used to function well, became outdated and no longer dealt with new social problems such as the declining birth rate and aging population.

The policies that the Japanese government planned and implemented were sometimes dogmatic and totally divorced from the needs of the people. Thus, the government had been criticized for causing “the lost two decades.”

There were several reasons why the Japanese government has malfunctioned.

One of the reasons is the “bureaucracy-controlled cabinet system.” It refers to the situation that most policies are planned and implemented by government officials, who are not elected by the people.

The bureaucrats’ behavior in the process of legislation was a distinctive feature. In the Japanese Government, there were many draft bills from various ministries. For example, in Diet Session No. 186 (held from January 24 to June 22, 2014), about 50% of the total number of draft bills that were submitted to the Diet were not originally made by the Diet members but by the Cabinet, in other words, government officials in the executive branch. About 80% of the total number of passed laws were made by the Cabinet. Therefore, the executive branch of the government had formulated most policies. It should be noted that in administrative organizations like ministries, Directors or those of lower level positions are in charge of compiling draft bills.

The system brought about the “principal-agent problem” (Milgrom and Roberts, 1992). Government officials (agents) were able to make decisions on behalf of ministers (principals), and sometimes the agents deviated from

pursuing the interest of the principals to satisfy their own interest and were motivated to act in their own best interests rather than those of their principals, or officials who were their superiors. It led to the problem of moral hazard, or the risk that an individual or organization would act irresponsibly or recklessly if protected or exempt from the consequences of an action. Therefore, government officials sometimes sought their own ministerial interest instead of the national interest because each ministerial personnel division tended to evaluate its executive candidates from the viewpoint of the interest of its ministry.

Sakaiya, who was a former government official and the chairman of “A Panel of Experts on Comprehensive Civil Service Reform” (explained below), criticized the bureaucracy in an interview in his later days²:

Japan's bureaucracy engages in behind-the-scenes dealings with Diet members. Bureaucrats make direct appeals to Diet members, urging them to vote in favor of a certain piece of legislation or allocate a budget for a certain program. Diet members become dependent on the information they get from bureaucrats. The cabinet is reduced to the role of facilitator, pulling the political strings on behalf of the bureaucrats and ensuring that the bureaucrats' agenda gets through....In Japan, being a civil servant is more like a prestigious social position than a job. Civil servants' career paths are largely determined by their exam results at the outset of their professional lives. After that, they progress smoothly up the ladder, enjoying steady pay rises regardless of talent or hard work. As a general rule, civil servants also enjoy lifelong job security.

Sakaiya also criticized that³:

Japan's political system and practices are controlled by the bureaucracy. Diet members are divided tribally according to government ministry and agency. Their main job is lobbying [the bureaucracy] on behalf of their representative special interest. In so doing, they have lowered themselves to become “branch

² Sakaiya T (2012) Hashimoto Tōru, the Osaka Restoration Association, and the Move to Transform Japan. Nippon.com 15 February. Available at: <http://www.nippon.com/en/currents/d00015/> (accessed 28 August 2017).

³ Sakaiya T (1993) Sankei Shinbun 28 April

members” of the Diet ministries. As a result, the Diet members and parties have virtually no ability to write policies or legislation.

Another problem derived from the “bureaucracy-controlled cabinet system” is the difficulty of the Japanese government to plan and implement assertive policies.

Government officials, who are not entrusted by the people through election and have no legitimacy established by the public’s decision, cannot assertively plan and implement any policy from which would arise sharply divided reactions if the policy were planned or implemented. In the past “catch-up era” of high economic growth, government officials could have found policies from Western countries that had already been successful, from which divided reactions might not arise. Therefore, government officials had not had so much difficulty to plan and implement these policies. However, since the 1990s, the Japanese government has been facing a range of problems that no other country had faced yet, such as declining birthrate and regional depopulation. Thus, the government officials came to feel at a loss and became reluctant to make and implement policies that did not have a precedent of success.

This problem is partly explained in the report “A Panel of Experts on Comprehensive Civil Service Reform⁴” as seen in the following extracts:

Since the Meiji era, the status quo of Japan's national civil service system was based on the original philosophy of “catching up and overtaking the developed Western countries,” so a centralized system was taken and established in the period of high economic growth with the aim to establish a modern industrial society. In the catch-up era, the system made a great contribution to promoting the standardized mass production system. However, now, having become a front-runner, our country has not conformed to a human civilization that is determined by diverse intellectual value creation. For this reason, it is also difficult to satisfy peoples' needs for diversity and ready public service. Even if

⁴ The report of “Koumuinseido no sougoutekina kaikaku ni kansuru kondankai” (A Panel of Experts on Comprehensive Civil Service Reform) is available at: <http://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/singi/koumuinkaikaku/pdf/houkoku1.pdf> (Japanese, accessed 28 August 2017).

every civil servant is competent, if his/her organization does not follow the direction of human civilization and the people's needs, it is impossible to produce results and is evaluated as poor.

The second reason that the Japanese government malfunctioned is called “trained incapacity.” Trained incapacity refers to actions based upon training and skills, which have been successfully applied in the past, which may result in inappropriate responses under changed conditions (Merton, 1957).

This occurs when formalistic goals become more important than the main substantive goal of an organization. As Merton says:

The process may be briefly recapitulated. (1) An effective bureaucracy demands reliability of response and strict devotion to regulations. (2) Such devotion to the rules leads to their transformation into absolutes; they are no longer conceived as relative to a set of purposes. (3) This interferes with ready adaptation under special conditions not clearly envisaged by those who drew up the general rules. (4) Thus, the very elements which conduce toward efficiency in general produce inefficiency in specific instances. Full realization of the inadequacy is seldom attained by members of the group who have not divorced themselves from the meanings which the rules have for them. These rules in time become symbolic in cast, rather than strictly utilitarian (Merton, 1957).

“Trained incapacity” leads to the phenomena of “depersonalization,” which is the specific nature of bureaucracy. It is also called “banality of evil.” The term was used by Arendt for describing people who work at an organization and carry out unspeakable crimes yet may not be monsters, but rather ordinary individuals who ignore their moral responsibility, being uninspired bureaucrats who simply sit at their desk and do their work⁵. Milgram also explains the behavior:

⁵ In her book, Arendt described Eichmann, a top administrator in the machinery of the Nazi death camps, as follows, “Except for an extraordinary diligence in looking out for his personal advancement, he had no motives at all. And this diligence in itself was in no way criminal; he certainly would never have murdered his superior in order to inherit his post. He merely, to put the matter colloquially, never realized what he was doing” (Arendt, 1963).

There is a fragmentation of the total human act; no one man decides to carry out the evil act and is confronted with its consequences. The person who assumes full responsibility for the act has evaporated. Perhaps this is the most common characteristic of socially organized evil in modern society (Milgram, 1974).

“Groupthink” also depersonalizes government officials. Groupthink is described as situations in which group pressures for conformity deter the group from critically appraising unusual, minority, or unpopular views. As members of an organization, most of them tend to desire acceptance by the other members. Because of their desire for acceptance, they are susceptible to conforming to other’s assumptions, no matter how strongly the evidence may contradict the assumptions. Groupthink hinders the performance of the group. Those who have doubts or hold differing points of view seek to avoid deviating from what appears to be group consensus by keeping silent about misgivings and even minimizing to themselves the importance of their doubts (Robbins and Judge, 2010).

Kurokawa, who was the chairman of the National Diet of Japan Fukushima Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission, said that the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant after the earthquake and tsunami of March 11, 2011 was “Made in Japan” and “reflexive obedience; our reluctance to question authority; our devotion to ‘sticking with the program’; our groupism; and our insularity” caused the accident.⁶

“In-group bias” also strengthens bureaucratic behavior. Part of our self-concept (or identity) is defined in terms of group affiliations, and we can relish being a member of the group when our own group can be perceived as superior on some dimension of value. Therefore, there is a preference to view those in-groups positively rather than negatively. The bias can produce a dogmatic attitude. It is explained by Merton:

⁶ The National Diet of Japan Fukushima Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission (2012), Kokkaijikocho Houkokusyo (The official report of The National Diet of Japan Fukushima Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission). Tokyo: Tokuma Shoten. Available at:

<http://warp.da.ndl.go.jp/info:ndlip/pid/3856371/naic.go.jp/en/about/chairmans-message/>
(accessed 28 August 2017).

There may ensue...the process of sanctification. This is to say that through sentiment-formation, emotional dependence upon bureaucratic symbols and status, and affective involvement in spheres of competence and authority, there develop prerogatives involving attitudes of moral legitimacy which are established as values in their own right, and are no longer viewed as merely technical means for expediting administration. One may note a tendency for certain bureaucratic norms, originally introduced for technical reasons, to become rigidified and sacred (Merton, 1957).

These biases bring the sense of not being responsible. The attitudes and actual behaviors of government officials while working are consistent with a role, and they create the role identity. The officials view themselves as the instrument for playing the assigned role. By their lack of imagination, they cannot put themselves in others' shoes. Therefore, they can devalue people and do harm to them without the prick of conscience. Their moral concerns shift to a consideration of how well they can live up to the expectations that the organizations have of their assignment.

Government officials tend to have the sense of a common destiny for all those who work together. They feel as if they were members of a family. In such a homogeneous group, most officials have an in-group bias. They tend to think much of the interest of their own group rather than the interest of the people.

For such reasons, the Japanese government system fell into malfunction.

TRANSFORMATIONAL DIMENSIONS OF CIVIL SERVICE REFORM

To solve the problem of the "bureaucracy-controlled cabinet system," it was important for government officials, who are entrusted by the people through election, such as ministers, to have the power to control bureaucrats. In other words, there was a need for a transfer of the initiative from the bureaucracy to politics and a shift from a bureaucracy-controlled cabinet system to a genuine parliamentary cabinet system.

In order for the principal to seize power over the agent, the principal has to devise schemes that will induce the agent to act in ways that the principal prefers (Dutta, 2000). Often, the principal attempts to offer incentives to the agent to encourage the agent to act in the principal's best interest. It was deemed that the authority to manage personnel affairs such as the discretionary power over the promotion and demotion of bureaucrats was one of the most effective schemes.

The authority to manage personnel affairs is at the core of administrative management and the most important in human resource management. Promotion and demotion is the most traditional and popular means to encourage employees to exert their effort to work. Han Fei Tzu, the foundational China's political philosopher of the Warring States period (475-221 BC), states that the lord of men (principal) controls his ministers (agent) by means of chastisement and commendation. Supposing the ruler cast aside the handles of chastisement and commendation and let the ministers use them, the ruler would in turn be controlled by the ministers (Liao, 1939).

Besides, ministerial sectionalism had to be overcome. This ministerial sectionalism has caused the lack of a coherent strategy to manage the segmented system. Thus, it was necessary for the Prime Minister, who is in charge of the entire country and the national interest, to seize authority over executive officials and to exercise strong leadership over them based upon his/her clear vision and strategy.

Therefore, it became one of the most important *missions* of the first Abe Cabinet. The civil service reform started in 2006 due to the strong *leadership* of Prime Minister Abe. One of the most important purposes of this reform was to make a new *structure and systems (policies and procedures)* to shift the power from bureaucrats to the Prime Minister and to get rid of ministerial sectionalism, which would change the *management practices and motivation* of executive officials.

A Cabinet decision called "Toward civil service reform" was made on April 24, 2007. The cabinet decided to draft a "package" of measures to reform the civil service system. The cabinet decision states that the government shall establish "A Panel of Experts on Comprehensive Civil Service Reform" under

the jurisdiction of the Prime Minister. This comprehensively discusses the issues regarding the civil servant personnel system from recruitment to retirement. Based upon the discussion, the panel shall submit a draft bill, tentatively called the “Basic Act for Civil Service Reform” that incorporates a guideline to reform the civil service system comprehensively. By this decision, the government was supposed to submit the bill to the Diet at its next ordinary session held in 2008.

According to the aide of the minister in charge of administrative reform, the reason that this “package of reform measures” was incorporated in the cabinet decision is explained as follows:

The idea of the "package" was at first brought into the discussion in order to postpone the ban of amakudari (a practice of shifting retired bureaucrats to industries related to the public sector work that they retired from). This was intended to make the excuse that the ban of amakudari could not be made until the entire personnel system had been reformed. Even after it was decided to prohibit amakudari, the issue of reforming the entire personnel system remained. "Many a true word is spoken in jest." This has unexpectedly lead to a drastic reform of the civil service system (Hara, 2010).

Some government officials at the Office for the Promotion of Administrative Reform under the Cabinet Secretariat, which was in charge of the civil service reform, shared the awareness that the Japanese government was not functioning as well as it had previously. Therefore, they tried to take advantage of this unexpected opportunity to promote the *mission*, or a drastic reform of the civil service system to change the “bureaucracy-controlled cabinet system.” The idea of civil service reform was shared with the Prime Minister and the minister who was in charge of administrative reform. It means that the change in the *external environment* surrounding the civil service system influenced part of the *organization culture*.

Under the *leadership* of Prime Minister Abe and the minister, the *strategies* to accomplish the *mission* to reform civil service system were incorporated at the Office for the Promotion of Administrative Reform. The tactics of “pre-persuasion” were used as one of the *strategies* in the transformational dimension.

“Pre-persuasion” is a term that refers to the process of taking control of a situation to establish a favorable climate of influence by using this character of human beings. Pratkanis and Aronson explain “pre-persuasion” tactics:

Through the labels we use to describe an object or event, we can define it in such a way that the recipient of our message accepts our definition of the situation and is thus pre-persuaded even before we seriously begin to argue (Pratkanis and Aronson, 1992).

“Agenda Setting” is also used for pre-persuasion. This is very important because it determines what issues will be discussed. Issues placed on an agenda appear important and deserve thorough discussion. Therefore, other issues are not worth discussion (Pratkanis, 2014).

These stratagems were used during the process of incorporating the civil service reform plan.

The 1st Panel of Experts on Comprehensive Civil Service Reform was held based on the above cabinet decision on July 24, 2007. Even if it had been decided to discuss the “package” at the panel, there was no idea what the “package” was at the beginning of the panel discussion. Therefore, the Office for the Promotion of Administrative Reform, which was responsible for organizing the meeting at that time, distributed “Items that were pointed out regarding the national civil service reform” in order to lead and limit the discussion by members of the expert panel. These materials contained the “system of personnel management of executive officials (including the batch management system).” This is a technique of “agenda setting” for pre-persuasion. Based upon the distributed materials, the topic of “executive personnel management” was discussed in the later panels.

Based on the discussion, the expert panel submitted the report “A Panel of Experts on Comprehensive Civil Service Reform” to the Prime Minister on February 5, 2008. The report incorporated the installation of the centralized personnel management system of executive government officials.

The “Basic Act for Civil Service Reform” (hereinafter referred to as the “Basic Act”) was drafted on the basis of the report. Despite bureaucrats’ stout resistance, the bill was submitted to the Diet and enacted on June 13,

2008. The accomplishment was mainly due to the *leadership* of the Prime Minister and the minister who was in charge of civil service reform. The act laid down the fundamental concept and guideline of reform, and other acts were needed to implement the reforms.

After the Basic Act was passed, the bill to amend the National Civil Service Act was drafted at the office in order to incorporate the concept of the Basic Act into the act. The bill was submitted to the Diet on March 31, 2009. However, after Abe had resigned as Prime Minister, the momentum of the reform had waned. Therefore, the bill submitted to the Diet was not passed.

In 2010, the bill called “Partial Amendment to the National Public Service Act” was submitted again to the Diet; however, it was not passed.

In 2011, the “Four bills concerning National Civil Service Reform” were submitted to the Diet, but these were not passed either.

In December of 2012, Abe was appointed the Prime Minister for the second time (the second Abe Cabinet). The momentum for the reform increased again.

In June of 2013, the Prime Minister held the first meeting of the Headquarters to promote Civil Service Reform. During the meeting, the civil service reform of the future was discussed and decided. Following the day’s decision, the Prime Minister said in his address;⁷

Today, “Civil Service Reform of the Future” was approved. I recognize that creating a new civil service system whereby civil servants are able to take proactive action for the country and for the people, with a sense of mission and pride as professionals in administrative affairs under true political leadership, is an urgent task. Therefore, under the reform on this occasion, we will promote a unified management of executive officials, which has been a challenge since the first Abe Cabinet.

⁷ Quoted from the government home page titled “The Prime Minister in Action” (as of 28 June 2013). Available at: http://japan.kantei.go.jp/96_abe/actions/201306/28koumuin_e.html (accessed 28 August 2017)

Under the *leadership* of Prime Minister Abe, as stated above, the “Partial Amendment to the National Public Service Act, etc.” (hereinafter referred to as the “Amendment Act”) was eventually enacted on April 11 and promulgated on April 18, 2014. The text of the Amendment Act is almost the same of the act which was submitted to the Diet in 2009.

It clearly shows how the *leadership* of Prime Minister was important to promote this civil service reform.

TRANSACTIONAL DIMENSIONS OF CIVIL SERVICE REFORM

The Amendment Act covers a wide range of areas, but, from the viewpoint of presidential power, the key point is the “introduction of centralized personnel management system of executive government officials.”

The Amendment Act provides the *system (policies and procedure) and structure* of civil service reform.

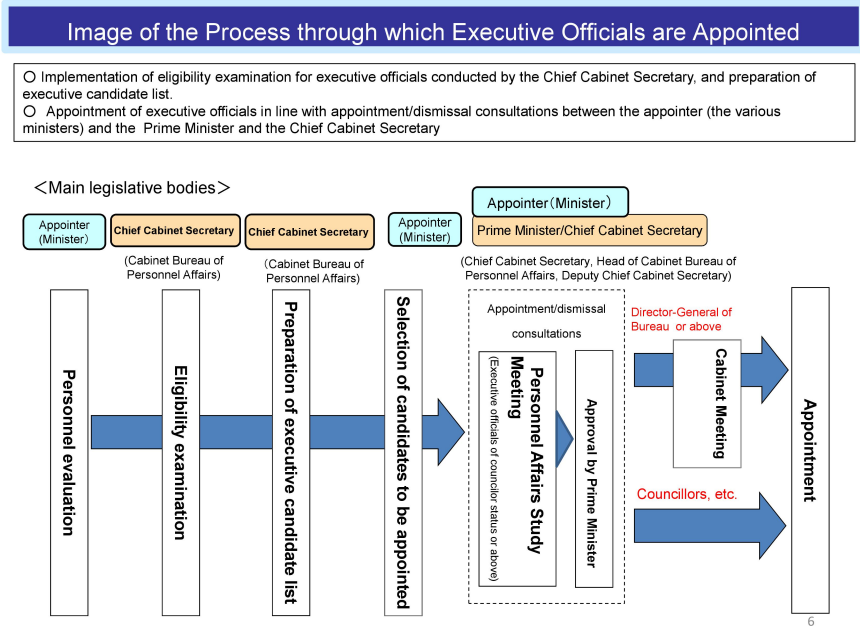
Articles 61-2, 61-2, and 61-3 of the Amendment Act provide for the centralized personnel management *system* of executive government officials⁸. The Chief Cabinet Secretary, as delegated by the Prime Minister, shall conduct screening to confirm if the active executive officials and people who are expected to have abilities suitable for executive officials can perform standard duties of government positions in the executive service (hereinafter referred to as “eligibility examination”). In addition, the Chief Cabinet Secretary, as delegated by the Prime Minister, shall make a list of executive candidates who pass the eligibility examination.

Executive officials are appointed to executive service positions from among those who are on the executive candidates list and have the aptitude required for the said position based upon his/her personnel evaluation only

⁸ The law is translated into English by Ministry of Justice, Government of Japan. Available at: <http://www.japaneselawtranslation.go.jp/law/detail/?id=2713&vm=04&re=02> (accessed 28 August 2017)

after consultation with the Prime Minister and Chief Cabinet Secretary (See Figure 2).

Figure 2: Appointment Process for Executive Officials



Source: Documents made by Cabinet Bureau of Personnel Affairs.

Available at:

http://www.cas.go.jp/jp/gaiyou/jimu/jinjiyoku/jinji_kanbu_kanri.html
(accessed 28 August 2017)

Given that the Chief Cabinet Secretary is appointed by the Prime Minister, introduction of this system makes the Prime Minister the only person in the government who has the power to veto the nominees of executive officials.

Prior to the reform, the Prime Minister and ministers could not interfere in personnel affairs of government officials. Although the power to appoint

executive officials legally belonged to the ministers (the power to appoint civil servants still lies with ministers under current law), there was an unwritten rule that politicians should not interfere in the personnel affairs of government officials. Whenever the ministers meddled in personnel affairs of the bureaucracy, incidents occurred (Hara, 2010).

The Amendment Act changed the situation that ministerial interests were given precedence, which impeded the national interest. Now the Prime Minister can exercise the power to veto the nominees who have pursued the interest of their own ministries at the cost of the national interest.

The Cabinet Bureau of Personnel Affairs was launched on May 30, 2014 to help the Prime Minister to establish a comprehensive personnel strategy for this government and to achieve the strategic placement of personnel suited to key government positions. The head of this bureau is the Deputy Chief of the Cabinet Secretary. The total workforce of the bureau is around 160 people.

The new *structure* and *system* changed the *management practices* and the *motivation* of the officials, especially executive officials.

By setting an eligibility examination and consultation process with the Prime Minister and Chief Cabinet Secretary, *task requirements and individual skills/abilities* required for executive officials have changed. They have to adjust their attitude and train their abilities in accordance with the *mission* of this civil service reform.

Every candidate for an executive official position has a keen interest in what the Prime Minister thinks and wants to do. It becomes difficult for executive officials to ignore or object to the instruction of the Prime Minister without a sound reason.

Promotion is one of the most important *individual needs*, and it is able to increase individual extrinsic motivation as well as intrinsic motivation.

Motivation to seek the national interest is encouraged by this *structure* and *systems*. Therefore, the *work unit climate* in each ministry has changed gradually through the day-to-day operations (transactions), which in turn has changed the *organization culture* of each ministry.

CONCLUSION

The Amendment Act changed the *management practices* of personnel affairs in the Japanese government. The impact of the reform was immense. The 2014 reform transferred the power to determine personnel affairs from executive government officials to the Prime Minister⁹.

In May of 2017, Abe became the third-longest serving Prime Minister in post war Japan. That shows a sharp contrast with the years before his return to power, when Japan had six Prime Ministers in six years. It seems that the civil service reform resulted in establishing the basis for a long-term stable government.

Abe's grip on power over executive officials became so tight that they could not resist against his leadership and seek their own ministerial interest. Therefore, he could push through controversial reforms over the objections of key government agencies and ministries. The emergence of a stronger Prime Minister replaced the cumbersome, bottom-up, consensus-building, fragmented model of management with a more agile top-down decision-making process. He got to maintain centralized control over the ministries and carry out policy-making in a responsive and decisive manner.

However, this strong exercising of power by the Prime Minister seemed to provoke a backlash from executive officials.

Former top education ministry bureaucrat Maekawa claimed that “the education ministry today cannot resist the intentions of the nerve center of government, nor can it make responsible decisions on its own, which is highly problematic¹⁰.”

⁹ Yoshida R (2014) Abe moves to boost control of bureaucrats. Japan Times 27 May. Available at: <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/05/27/national/politics-diplomacy/abe-inaugurate-new-office-exert-control-bureaucrats/#.WaEwTD5JaiM> (accessed 28 August 2017).

¹⁰ Quoted from the article of The Mainichi Newspapers, titled “Ex-top bureaucrat's bombshell hints at pressure from PM's office to distort truth” (as of 26 May 2017). Available at:

An article describes the new relationship between the Prime Minister and executive officials:¹¹

Since the establishment of the second Abe administration, the Prime Minister's team is overconfident from its experience of success over a period of four and a half years. The Cabinet Bureau of Personnel Affairs has control of the officials at government ministries and agencies, and has controlled bureaucrats through political leadership. The Prime Minister has said that bureaucrats don't pay special consideration to him, but this is coming from the person receiving special consideration merely appears as obstinate insistence.

The reason that Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga became so angered by the charge divulged by former education Vice Minister Kihei Maekawa (the former top bureaucrat in the ministry) over the Kake issue is probably that it looked like a "bureaucratic coup d'etat." The Kasumigaseki district (where central government organizations are located) that had been held down in the past may no longer pretend to obey the Cabinet Office.

These articles, which describe the resistance from bureaucrats, reveal the fact that the *mission* of the civil service reform, or solving the problem of the bureaucracy-controlled cabinet system, has been accomplished and the “principal agent problem” has disappeared. In that sense, the civil service reform has been successful so far.

However, these articles also indicate that the reform gives rise to the risk that the Prime Minister dominates executive officials and abuses his/her power, which is not beneficial in terms of the interest of the People. As the founders of US say, “the structure of the government must furnish the proper checks and balances between the different departments” and “ambition must be made to counteract ambition.”¹²

<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20170526/p2a/00m/0na/010000c> (accessed 19 August 2017)

¹¹ Quoted from the article of The Mainichi Newspapers, titled “Overconfident Abe, weak opposition: Mainichi reporters delve into irregular Diet dealings” (as of 22 June 2017).

Available at: <https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20170622/p2a/00m/0na/019000c> (accessed 19 August 2017)

¹² Hamilton A, Madison J, and Jay J (1787), The Federalist papers. Available at: <https://www.congress.gov/resources/display/content/The+Federalist+Papers#TheFederalistPapers-51> (accessed 19 August 2017).

It is still uncertain whether the relationship between the Prime Minister and executive officials changes to be “checks-and-balances” or “dominant-subservient.”

From this point of view, future progress of their relationship should be carefully watched.

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