

**NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION, NIPA**  
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## **ASSIGNMENT ESSAY**

It is widely accepted that the old policies administration dichotomy was an artificial one and that the higher civil servants exercise a great deal of influence in policy formulation. Do you agree with this statement? What are the merits and demerits of too much involvement of civil servants in the public policy formulation?

*“When things are going well with an organisation, it must be that it is well managed; when things are not going well, it must be that the organisation needs more or better trained managers.”*

*Shan Martin, 1983*

Policy not only determines what is to be provided, how much and to whom, but is directly related to how public sector bodies organise themselves in response to public policy initiatives.

Public policy formulation involves defining strategies or courses of action to be adopted and implemented in order to resolve or find a solution to a problem that affects the whole or a segment of the public. Every policy has objectives and these are made in line with the achievement of the solutions. Policy analysis is an essential tool in policy formulation.

It has been widely emphasised that several actors are involved in public policy formulation ranging from politicians to civil servants including the general public represented by elected members. Among the key players in policy formulation are the civil servants. They constitute part of the key policy makers. Their substantial role in policy making is that of their position at the core of government. The dominance of civil servants as key policy makers is highlighted through the influence of numbers, superior knowledge, control of information, permanence despite change of government and ability to work away from the glare of publicity that surrounds politicians.

Public policy defines the objectives and tasks of public bodies. Managers in the public sector are ultimately accountable to politicians or elected bodies. The public sector manager is likely to be influenced by legislation and constitutional considerations than his or her private sector counterpart. Statutes determine what public bodies do, if not the form they take, so that the organisation has an obligation to respond to changes in existing law or new requirements and regulations.

The public sector is the main provider of services that are regarded as vital to state security, the maintenance and promotion of public health, social and education provision, the environment and the running of industries and services, which are considered to be strategically vital. The public sector depends heavily on public funds and is more constrained by fiscal, which is part of the political sphere. According to Ian Taylor and George Popham, public policy-making belongs to the political sphere, and although senior civil servants, Chief Officers and professionals within government influence policy, their influence usually extends to the objectives of policy, although they are concerned crucially with its implementation.

In most developing countries, the role of the civil service extends beyond the traditional performance of bureaucratic functions. Most high-level bureaucrats find themselves in forefront of generating national economic development. In some cases the presence of higher civil servants has to be noticed without which a policy cannot be regarded as valuable. Their signatures and acknowledgement are also of great significance and therefore if they are not in full support of the policy objectives or details they may choose not to endorse the policy.

The old policies administration distinction was characterised by a separation between policy formulation and policy implementation. Top government officials carried out policy formulation and implementation was the task of civil service. It therefore meant that there was a lack of coordination between these two central aspects of public policy management. Implementators knew only how to carrying out the tasks and set targets to achieve these tasks even without appreciating or fully understanding the objectives of the policy made. This shows indeed that this administration feature was artificial, as tangible results could not be achieved.

In the public service, higher levels of bureaucratic authority exist. Bureaucratic authority refers to the principle of fixed and official jurisdictional areas, which are generally ordered by rules, that is, by laws or administrative regulations.

It constitutes of the regular activities required for the purposes of the bureaucratically governed structure are distributed in a fixed way as official duties; the authority to give the commands required for the discharge of these duties is distributed in a stable way and is strictly delimited by rules concerning the coercive means, physical, sacerdotal, or otherwise, which may be placed at the disposal of officials and lastly the methodical provision is made for the regular and continuous fulfilment of these duties and for the execution of the corresponding rights; only persons who have the generally regulated qualifications to serve are employed.

This shows the clear cut on how higher civil servants execute a great deal of influence in public policy making.

#### ***MERITS OF TOO MUCH INVOLVEMENT OF CIVIL SERVANTS IN PUBLIC POLICY FORMULATION***

1. An essential stage in policy formulation is accessing the necessary information. The dominance of civil servants as key policy makers is partially emphasised through the influence of having the control of information. Therefore their involvement would be of great significance as they provide a reliable source of the required information for the process of policy analysis.
2. Their involvement is crucial in the supervision of the control of the flow and application of policy ideas and decisions. This is owed to the span of control, which can be advantageous if strict control is required, as a large segment of subordinates will report to one higher authority.
3. As the civil service is the work force of government, it can be beneficial to include them in policy formulation, as they are also key players in implementation of public policy. Therefore their contribution is valuable as they too take part in both formulation and implementation.
4. Due to its huge size, the civil service can be an efficient tool in policy formulation when used for the manpower or workforce required for analysis and implementation.

5. Also due to their permanence in their positions, they acquire expertise skills and other technical attributes through the experience in policy formulation. They are therefore a good knowledge base on the strategies and results of past policies and can provide guidance not to repeat unsuccessful strategies for common problems.

### ***DEMERITS OF TOO MUCH INVOLVEMENT OF CIVIL SERVANTS IN PUBLIC POLICY FORMULATION***

1. Poor accounting and accountability in the public service has become a major issue for both discussion and action. Accounting systems are important to tighten the relationships between different parts of the public sector. They have been used as a means of restraint, to constraint expenditures, actions and policies. Information derived from accounting is essential for monitoring and evaluation of policies. Therefore the lack of this aspect is a drawback in policy formulation.
2. Traditionalism and sluggishness of decision processes is noted repeatedly in the civil service. The civil service continues to practice conventional systems not compatible with the features of effective public policy formulation.
3. Misadministration, inefficiency and waste have been associated with the civil service. For objective public policy formulation, these characteristics are undesirable. Continued economic restraint has given a new urgency to demands to improve efficiency of management in the public sector. Therefore involvement of the civil servant would run counter to the achievement of this goal.
4. The civil service lacks the application of management ideas and techniques. This is particularly important in areas of planning, organising, coordinating and directing. With the lack of such characteristics it makes policy formulation a difficult process.

5. There is a lack of empowerment of subordinates in the civil service.  
Empowering staff is a central aspect in policy formulation if the objectives are to be met. The involvement of all parties is vital. Allowing managerial decisions to be taken at lower levels and a flatter management structures is essential. *Willcocks 1995* suggests that public service managers should be transformed into coaches. Therefore pushing down authority and responsibility to staff empowers them and objectives can then be met as set.
6. Lack of flexibility. Civil servants tend to be interested in pure research. They tend to work in the same position for a number of years, and often specialise in very detailed and technical aspects of policy. Therefore policy formulation would be based on past experiences rather than the current environment in which it is required.

Appeals are now being made to the apparent inefficiency, accountability, lack of cost-effectiveness, unprofitability and waste associated with the civil service. The public service as a whole now aims to operate more like the private sector in their organisation by adopting systems that emulate efficiency.

The principles of office hierarchy and of levels of graded authority mean a firmly ordered system of super- and subordination in which there is a supervision of the lower offices by the higher ones. Such a system offers the governed the possibility of appealing the decision of a lower office to its higher authority, in a definitely regulated manner. With the full development of the bureaucratic type, the office hierarchy is monocratically organized. The principle of hierarchical office authority is found in all bureaucratic structures therefore offering an advantage of sufficient control in public policy formulation if the civil service is involved.

Various factors that contribute to successful policy formulation including a complete diagnosis of the problem and solutions weighed against achieving

success and the involvement of policy makers and analysts who have the skills and expertise to formulate successful policies.

Summarised, the obstacles faced in the involvement of civil service in policy formulation include traditional civil service culture with its emphasis on continuity, predictability and fairness, lack of senior management commitment, initiative fatigue, resistance to change, misunderstanding of the requirements of the organisation, unwillingness to take risks at senior management level and poor communication with staff.

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