

Conclusion

Public services are provided by public servants. State departments rely on the personnel system to help them attract, hire, train and reward the best public servants. When that system fails to deliver, manage and motivate competent and dedicated individuals, public services flounder – public costs increase and the quality of services decreases.

This report documents what to insiders are well-known failings of the State’s personnel system, particularly as it applies to managers. State officials acknowledge these dysfunctions. Senior managers who have been trying to make the system work have sounded their own alarms.

The growing cost of providing services and the lagging performance of so many important government operations should be enough to capture the attention of those responsible for balancing budgets and who are ultimately held accountable by the public.

But there is another factor that should increase the interest of policy-makers: Over the next five to 10 years a substantial number of the State’s veteran managers will retire. They will be replaced. The question is who will replace them.

If the State relies on current practices, virtually all of these managers will be people who have been in state service most or all of their careers. While many are talented and ambitious, none of them were initially selected because of their management potential. And few of them will have benefited from the strategic development programs that successful organizations rely on to groom the next generation of leaders.

Unless the system is significantly reformed, few of tomorrow’s leaders will be top graduates recruited and mentored in the difficult tasks of managing critical government operations. Even fewer will be experienced managers, from other public agencies or the private sector, who want to spend a part of their career returning California to greatness.

Think of one important challenge facing state government that can be solved with mediocre management. Think of one meaningful policy initiative that will not require skillful hands to be successfully implemented. Now consider the Commission’s recommendations to

systematically craft a personnel system that attracts, selects, assigns, manages, develops and rewards those trusted with transforming public ideas into public programs.

Attempting to reform civil service rules is not for those motivated by high-profile causes or unwilling to work collaboratively with traditional adversaries who have fashioned the deadlocked status quo.

Nevertheless, many other local, state and federal agencies have taken on these challenges because of the imperative between good management and good government. In 1999, the Commission compiled the lessons learned in those other governments in a report titled: "Of the People." In preparing this report, the Commission found that many of those governments have persisted in the difficult task of modernizing management systems.

The recommendations in this report are not radical. They have been modeled in other states, the federal government and the private sector. And some of these reforms are based on practices already in place in some isolated pockets of excellence within state government.

Recognizing the challenges of simultaneously changing collective bargaining and civil service that govern rank-and-file workers, the Commission focused on managers. Moreover, managerial reforms are an appropriate place to begin the system-wide changes that are ultimately needed to transform state operations, reduce costs and improve outcomes.

In decades past California was the vanguard of quality public programs. In those days – believe it or not – “good enough for government work” meant that the highest standard for quality had been met. Somehow, in the eyes of the public, public service has slipped from first class to second rate.

The State can recapture the spirit and commitment responsible for past accomplishments and focus those energies on future goals. The place to start is with a corps of talented managers who soon will be assuming the responsibilities of running state government.