

## What Does It Take To Achieve Successful Civil Service Reform Implementation? A Review of Relevant Empirical Studies

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### Abstract

This paper reviewed relevant empirical studies on civil service reform, its implementation, as well as management in the case of public sector organizations. The finding indicates that, civil service reform implementation can be generally determined by four major areas: civil service reform design process, internal organizational factors, change management, and politico-administrative context. However, civil service reform studies, as reviewed in this paper, were dominated by qualitative and anecdotal analysis and thus lacked quantitative rigor. Literature on reform in the case of Ethiopia was underdeveloped and empirical facts were not established. Investigations on politico-administrative factors as well as issues of reform management were inadequate. Future research endeavor (including in Ethiopia) should focus on: quantitative studies, developing analytical tools for reform evaluation and analysis, further investigation on the effect of politico-administrative context has on reform design and implementation, and explore reform management.

**Key Words:** Civil Service Reform, Implementation, Determinants, Literature Review

### 1. Introduction

Civil Service Reform (CSR) can be defined broadly as ...deliberate changes to the structures and process of public sector organization with the objective of getting them (in some sense) to run better (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011, p.2). Many of CSRs in the world, though they may achieve some modicum of change in activities and procedures, did not succeed (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011). However, examination and analysis undertaken on existing studies of reform and its management were incomprehensive as well as inadequate. In addition, reviews of relevant empirical studies of CSR, for the purpose of drawing a general implication for Ethiopia's case, were few. This paper is therefore an effort to examine and review relevant empirical studies on

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CSR in order to identify key issues and variables responsible for reform implementation, which will have an implication to CSR in the case of Ethiopia.

In this paper, 39 sample published research articles, the overwhelming majorities of which focused on reform in public sector organization, were selected and reviewed. In addition, relevant books and research articles, retrieved in person and from websites, were also incorporated for review. This study will inform future research endeavors in the field of reform in general and reform in Ethiopia's case in particular. And this paper is organized in four major sections: introduction, analysis on empirical literature, suggestion for future studies, and conclusion.

## 2. Analysis on Empirical Literature

### CSR Design

Organizational diagnosis and analysis:- As per Brunsson and Anderson (2000), the design and content of many reform initiatives (including New Public Management [NPM] driven public sector reforms) did not fully consider all aspects of organizations, rather they epitomize some particular features of an organization. Oluwu (1999) also revealed that many of the reforms in African countries (in the 1980s and 1990s) were based on faulty and poor diagnosis and prognosis<sup>4</sup> of the civil service sector. Like in many African countries, the CSR program in Ethiopia (introduced in 1997) contained flawed measures in addressing the challenges in the civil service due to, in part, erroneous diagnosis of the problems underlying the civil service in the country (Chanie, 2001). These studies imply that proper analysis and diagnosis of civil service organization and its environs is significant for reform design and by implication for reform implementation success.

**Reform operationalizability and integration:** The difficulty and complexity of tools and techniques of reform was an important factor in implementation success (Laking & Norman, 2007). Tamekou (2008) revealed that difficulty of operationalizing the NPM techniques was one of the significant factors for failure of NMP reform in Cameroon (in the period 2006-2010). Another significant feature of CSR is its capacity to integrate with other existing administrative, social, and economic policies. In this regard, Alam (2010) found that implementation of reform program in Malaysia was below satisfactory due to lack of integration of the reform program with existing policies and practices. Referring to the works of Mesfin (2009) and Teka et al. (2007), Nigussa (2014) also indicated that CSR implementation in Ethiopia suffered from lack of proper integration and logical sequence of reform ideas and was constrained by inconsistent performance measurement tools. These studies signify that the capacity of CSR ideas and tools to be operationalized and integrated with existing policies, laws, and regulation in the civil service—can determine reform implementation.

**CSR implementation approach:** Implementation approach, as per Stewart and Kringas (2003), can be categorized as: top-down or bottom-up; negotiated or imposed change; and incremental or wholesale change. They revealed that appropriate change model is necessary to further reform implementation. Peled (2002) concluded that participatory and open reform implementation approach was highly effective than pursuing closed, nonparticipatory, and centralized approach. Implementation approach is also concerned with how much reform should be pursued at a time. In this respect, Chanie (2001) demonstrated that the civil service in Ethiopia did not have the necessary organizational capacity to implement broad-based reform measures across its entire administrative domain. As a result, he recommended that CSR should

pursue a step-by-step incremental implementation approach considering the existence of low organizational capacity in the civil service. These studies suggest CSR implementation approach can determine reform implementation effectiveness in public sector organization.

## **Internal Organizational Factors**

**Organizational capacity:** Studies showed that inadequate organizational capacity such as: lack of adequate incentives and regulation, weak administrative capacity, and shortage of financial and human resources—were among the key challenges hindering reform implementation process in Malaysia as well as in many African countries including South Africa and Cameroon (Alam, 2010; Webb, 2010; Tamekou, 2008). Similarly, Nigussa (2014) concluded shortage of implementation capacity was one of the challenges inhibiting effective utilization of Citizen's Charter in Ethiopia. In addition, Miruts and Asfaw (2014) found that poor CSR implementation in Tigray Regional State was attributed (among other things) to poor infrastructure in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) system. Further, Debela (2012) argued the existence of unattractive and low salary in Ethiopia's public sector undermined professionalism and reform implementation. These studies imply that the existence of strong organizational capacities in the civil service is a prerequisite for effective reform implementation.

**Top management support:** Stewart and Kringas (2003) underlined the need for continuing support and commitment (to change from top management) for the success of change implementation in public sector organizations. Alam (2010) indicated the declining enthuse' for change among top management hindered, *inter alia* with other factors, reform implementation process in Malaysia. In addition, Hailemariam and Common (2006) and Nigussa (2014) discovered the commitment and sense of ownership of the reform by top management and their perseverance (and commitment) in reform implementation was the major attribute for the reform success achieved in two ministries in Ethiopia. These studies imply that continuous support and commitment from top management in the civil service is vital ingredient for reform implementation success.

**Employee's attitude:** Kurt Lewin emphasized the need to address change resistance and cynicism in order to effect change in an organization (as cited in Spector, 2010). In addition, studies urged change leaders to work on improving employees' attitude towards change by combating cynicism in an organization, including in public sector organizations (Bordia, Restubog, Jimmieson, & Irmer, 2011; Kotter, 1995). Bordia et al. (2011) revealed that failed change efforts in the past could result in cynic attitude among employees, which should be dealt with to further change implementation in an organization. Debela (2012) discovered the civil service in Ethiopia had unfavorable environment including the existence of political affiliation and nepotism', hostile political environment, and political interference. And the prevalence of these conditions, as per Debela, was believed to bog down reform implementation in the civil service. Therefore, in the process of CSR design and implementation, it is imperative to undertake thorough diagnosis on organizational environment especially employee's attitude towards reform and change.

## **Change Management**

**Change leadership: competency, leadership style, and resource:** Competency and qualification of change leaders as well as leadership capacity could determine change management effectiveness (Peus, Frey, Gerkhardt, Fischer, & TrautMattausch, 2009; Jørgensen,

Owen, & Neus, 2009). Gilley, McMillan, and Gilley (2009) concluded that the ability of change leaders in inspiring, communicating, and building teams were important factors for successful change management. Miruts (2015) also underscored lack of competent leadership as one of the major reason for poor implementation of CSR in Tigray. In relation to leadership style, participative leadership had a positive role in change management in public sector organizations (Gilley et al., 2009; Jørgensen et al., 2009; Stanleigh, 2007; Stewart & Kringas, 2003). To ensure change management effectiveness, Peus et al. (2009) underscored the role of change leaders to maintain fairness and trust in the process of change implementation. Edmonds (2011) also emphasized the necessity of team-work among change leaders in leading change in an organization. In relation to resource, availability of sufficient resources (to undertake change management functions) *inter alia* with other factors had significant impact on change and change management success (Jørgensen et al., 2009; Stewart & Kringas, 2003). Therefore, existing studies on change and change management revealed that—adequate resource to finance reform (or change) implementation as well as change management; competency and capacity of change leaders; and change leadership style— are critical factor that necessitates due attention for the success of reform implementation.

**Employees: participation, empowerment, and communication:** Studies indicated that successful organizational change requires motivation, empowerment, and participation of employees (Kickert, 2014; Sharma & Sahoo, 2014; Yilmaz, Ozgen, & Akyel, 2013; Edmonds, 2011; Jørgensen et al., 2009; Peus et al., 2009; Stanleigh, 2007). In the case of Ethiopia, Nigussa (2014) discovered lack of conceptual clarity on the essence of reform tools and appropriate consultation with stakeholders (including civil servants) were some of challenges inhibiting effective utilization of Citizen's Charter in Ethiopia. Studies (such as: Miruts, 2015; Sharma & Sahoo, 2014; Levasseur, 2010; Sutanto, Kankanhalli, Raman, & Tan, 2009; Peus et al., 2009; Stewart & Kringas, 2003) also showed communication was a critical success factor for change implementation and an important change management tool in the public sector organizations. In sum, these studies imply that change leaders in public sector organizations should strive to motivate, participate, and communicate employees during change implementation.

**Planning, monitoring, and evaluation:** Huq (2005) underscored the need to strategic planning to further change management and implementation. Likewise, Ahmad (2015) found that strategic planning was key to further the implementation of Business Process Re-engineering in the Ministry of Health in Ethiopia. In addition, Miruts (2015) underlined the importance of planning, monitoring and evaluation in reform management and implementation in the civil service of Tigray regional state. The implication of these studies is that effective change management requires effective and strategic planning, monitoring, and evaluation in an organization, including in public sector organizations.

## Politico-administrative Context

**General politico-administrative context:** Politico- administrative context refers the overall social, political, and cultural environment of a country, and it includes: the state structure, the relation between politics and civil service administration, the overall administrative culture, the ideology of the ruling party, the political atmosphere in the civil service, the inherited administrative structure and culture, the status and development of the private sector and civil society, and the development of democracy (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011). Studies have examined the effect of politico-administrative context on CSR implementation. As per Shih, Sun, and Wang (2012), the success of the consecutive administrative reform in Taiwan was attributed to the

presence of conducive political climate in the country. Likewise, Samaratunge, Alam, and Teicher (2008) found that country specific (or contextual) variables including—political history, party politics, and state tradition— did have significant role in determining the success of NPM reforms in four Asian countries, namely: Singapore, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh. Furthermore, studies revealed NPM driven reforms failed in many developed as well as developing countries (including South Korea, Bangladesh, Turkey, and Africa) due to their incompatibility to respective prevailed politico-administrative context (Christensen & Fan, 2016; Kim & Han, 2015; Sezen, 2011; Parnini, 2009; Tamekou, 2008; Laking & Norman, 2007). In the case of Ethiopia, according to Chan (2001), the CSR program (highly influenced by NMP ideals, introduced in 1997, and still under implementation) would be deemed to fail to tackle the challenges in the public sector—unless accompanied by additional measures targeting to change the prevailing political, administrative, and economic environment in the country. Therefore, it can be inferred from these studies that, the general politico-administrative context not only has an influence on the design of CSR but also its implementation.

**Politics:** The political ideology as well as the interest of the ruling party was a significant factor for administrative reform in the case of Germany and China (Götz, Grotz, & Weber, 2015; Xue & Zhong, 2012; Ngok & Zhu, 2007; Aufrecht & Bun, 1995). Ruling parties at times introduce reform measures to fulfill political interests or raise their popularity in society (Brewer & Kellough, 2016; Kim & Han, 2015; Ward, 2007). Political commitment (and pressure) was also a significant factor for reform implementation in the case of countries including: Australia, Nigeria, Uganda, Tanzania, Fiji, and Caribbean countries (Laking & Norman, 2007; Stewart & Kringas, 2003). These studies, therefore, imply that politics can play a key role in both CSR initiation as well as its implementation.

**Democracy:** Democracy can create an enabling environment for effective public policy making platform that encourages and allows legitimate and effective participation of government and non-government policy stakeholders; therefore, it contributes to further the design of effective CSR policy (or program). Empirical studies revealed that democracy could play a role in creating conducive atmosphere for better reform design, adaptation as well as implementation. In this regard, as per studies (Ohemeng, 2015; Kpessa, 2011; Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis, 2007), democracy is likely to lead to better public policy making framework. Democracy can also provide the necessary pressure on political parties and leaders to effort to effectively implement CSR programs provided the reform has public support. In this respect, Olushola (2016) argued that increasing democratization process in Nigeria could contribute to better implementation of civil reform in the country. Shih et al. (2012) also found democratic political environment was crucial to CSR success in Taiwan. Therefore, it can be argued that democracy can lead to better reform design and implementation.

### 3. Limitation in Previous Research

The existing studies on CSR had a number of limitations. The overwhelming majority of CSR studies (including studies undertaken in the case of Ethiopia) lacked quantitative and rigorous analysis. CSR studies in the case of African countries were few, and the literature was less developed. Studies on CSR in the case of Ethiopia were also few, with limited coverage. Many of these studies failed to thoroughly examine the effect of politico-administrative context has on reform. The issue of reform (change) management requires thorough investigation. As a result, literature on CSR in the case of Ethiopia is under developed and empirical facts on reform have not been established, yet.

#### 4. Suggestion for Future Research

Future studies on reform (to be conducted in Ethiopia and abroad) should focus on: employing robust quantitative models; developing analytical tools for reform evaluation and analysis; further exploring the impact of politico-administrative context on reform design and implementation; undertaking comparative cross-country analysis of reform practices; and finally further examining public sector reform management.

#### 5. Conclusion

Success in Civil Service Reform implementation in public sector organization can generally be determined by four areas: (1) the process of CSR design, including the CSR design approach, the quality of diagnosis and analysis, and the type of implementation approach; (2) internal organizational factors - organizational capacity, support from top management for reform, and employee's attitude towards reform; (3) change management factors such as - competency of change leaders, communication and participation of employees, availability of resource, and reform planning, monitoring & evaluation; and (4) politico-administrative system of a country, including politics and democracy.

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