

A PRELIMINARY REVIEW OF THE CIVIL SERVICE SECTOR IN SULTANATE OF OMAN

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Abstract

The paper is attempting to envision the functionality of the public entities within the Omani public sector. With a case study attempt as the general research design, a narrative approach was used, formed in a literature review, to explore and describe the Omani public sector and its underlying entities. It was found though that there are six entities within which the government exercises its autonomy upon the public policies and practices. These entities are: council of ministers, special councils and committees, ministries, regional public administration, public establishments, public institutes. It was also concluded that the Omani civil service system consists of three interrelating entities that are: civil service law, civil service council, and ministry of civil service. Hence, the paper avails further research initiatives upon the Omani civil service sector as it serves as a sound research platform.

Keywords: Omani civil service, review, law, council, public sector, Oman

1 INTRODUCTION

Public management practices were viewed differently as opposed to private enterprise management which resulted in different management thoughts along the literature determining and explaining proposed reasons for such differences. The major difference is in the purpose of the organization itself where public sector entities are geared towards serving the public community with general services whereas private sector entities are seeking profit in return for producing goods and services for their customers. Despite that countries had stated by practice the definition of the public sector, it is still held back to the country or the state to define its own understanding of its public service particularly when cultural compositions shape its daily life and practice. However, seldom Arab-countries focused on researching about their public sector system or at least its activities from a holistic perspective. Particularly, the Omani public management system was given less attention with very few serious studies that directly attempt to describe the Omani civil service system. This was sensed from the contemporary Omani social studies showing poor initiatives in studying the bases of the field. Hence, this paper and by utilizing the narrative approach of the case study research design would provide a condensed but intensive review upon the Omani public sector with due emphasis on the Omani civil service system and its main components.

2 SULTANATE OF OMAN

Sultanate of Oman is one of the ancient lands of Arabia where early inhabitants were recorded thousands of years ago and in the form of modernized cultures of every century and generation [1]. Yet, it was evident enough that this rich country of the past, present, and futuristic endeavor would be standing ahead for many concurrent challenges. Thus, it had

plethora aspects that qualified its strength to reach where it is now and plan for the best in the future [2]. Nowadays, Oman is standing amongst the developed and modernized nations in the world which pulled the respect and appreciation of other nations.

2.1 Provincial Distribution

The Sultanate of Oman has a different and a unique shape of regional structure as Omani tribes scattered themselves along the country in search for food and shelter which resulted in inhabiting different regions that was known lately as the Omani provinces [3]. These provinces are topographically divided into the following eight governorates and regions [2] [4]:

- Muscat: includes the capital area, major cities, and suburban towns in the governorate
- Al Batinah: includes the western coastal area from Muscat towards the city of Khitmat Al Milaha and the borders with United Arab Emirates
- Ash Sharqiyah: includes the eastern coastal area from Muscat towards Bur El Hakman area
- Ad Dakhliyah: includes the central area between the Al Batinah and Al Sharqiyah regions
- Adh Dhahirah: includes the south-western area from Al Batinah region
- Al Janubia (Dhofar): includes the southern region of the Sultanate
- Al Wusta: includes the area between Al Dhakhliyah and Al Janubia regions
- Musandam: includes the isolated area from the country that occupies the entrance to the Arabia Gulf by the Strait of Hormuz

2.2 Governorate of Muscat

The Governorate of Muscat is the country's political, economic, and administrative center. It is the heart of the government and the location of the capital area and the base of the headquarters of the administrative apparatus of the state [2]. These administrative bodies include the major state entities, civil service ministerial entities, and the other public authorities. Therefore, most of the research attempts were geared towards the applications that take place within the capital area [2] [4].

3 OMANI GOVERNMENTAL STRUCTURE

The public administration system is a multifaceted process covering a wide spectrum of mini-administrative bodies that share the same aim and are congruent to some extent but differ in pragmatism [5] [6]. That aim, although the specifics vary from country to another, is viewed in the seeking to improve governmental performance by emphasizing on customer service, decentralization, market mechanisms, cross-functional collaboration, and accountability for results [5]. However, the fact of the matter that Arab states have a different blend of protocols and practices, forced by their culture and language [8] [9], that shapes its public administration system and hence it's governmental structure [5]. Both, the purposes and the ambiance signify the uniqueness of the work sector in terms of the components that shape such a sector [5].

3.1 Public Administration Environment

The Sultanate of Oman, in turn, has a unique structure that resembles the traditional Arab-Muslim management system, covering every level starting at the top with His Majesty the Sultan and ending up with the normal citizens [2] [3]. The experience that the Omani

government had realized throughout the past three decades justifies the fact that it was successful in the way it administered the country given the challenges, opportunities, and the threats [5] [10]. As a matter of fact, His Majesty the Sultan had prioritized since the early days of the renaissance to form a government that could actualize the dream of the modernized Oman [2] but he was facing a complicated system of many other subsystems that need to consort with each other in a smooth-cyclical fashion. Hence, it is evident enough to explore the public management system that Oman had established even though it was too complicated in terms of the interrelations and the communicational structure in addition to the in-synchronous workflow in many cases particularly when two different work entities share the duties [5]. Yet, Mohammed (2005) had proposed a cyclical view of the administrative system in the Omani public sector by tying the governmental entities that have a communicational flow among them and that is based on the clear chain of authority.

3.2 Components of the Public Sector

Despite the entirety that Mohammed (2005) is providing in his cyclical model for the Omani public administration system, it is very cumbersome when it comes to comprehend the underlying technicalities of the system-environment and how it functions in reality where relying on the chain of command itself is not enough. Yet, His Majesty the Sultan had clearly elaborated his views, on the proper governmental structure, in the Basic Statute of the State or as named The White Book [10]. In fact, the Omani government could be easily viewed in terms of six organizational clusters or entities that support the Sultan and constitute the actual body of the current government by relating each cluster in terms of the main and the shared duties [11]. Those entities are: Council of Ministers, Special Councils and Committees, the Ministries, Public Establishments, Regional Public Administration, and Public Institutes [2] [5]. Figure 1 depicts the channel of order and the communicational protocols among these entities based on the researchers' thought.

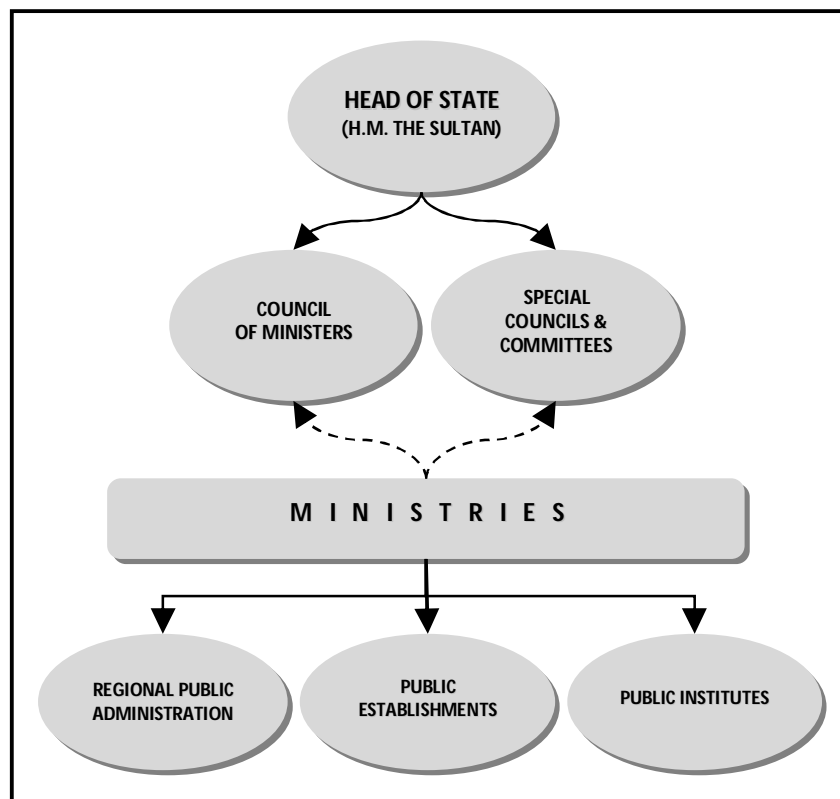


Fig. 1: The Governmental Structure in the Sultanate of Oman

Figure 1 denotes to the fact that His Majesty is the head of the state and he controls the government through two types of councils: council of ministers and special purpose councils and committees. These councils are established and formed by different ministers whom representing their seats upon their specialties and expertise [5]. Moving further beneath the ministries, comes the other entities of the government that the ministries would control fully or partially based on their significant role they play in the decision-making of the public organization in each of the three entities [5]. For example, a ‘*Wali*’ or the mayor of Barka city in the Al Batinah region is directly reporting the local activities to the minister of interior affairs because he follows the minister’s jurisdiction, and by the same token, he would report all activities pertaining healthcare to the ministry of health and so on. This channel of order had availed the Sultan and his government to develop every sector synchronously and thus, the country had developed dramatically till it reached its later state [2].

4 OMANI CIVIL SERVICE SECTOR

The civil service sector or as simply stated public sector and as opposed to the private sector, is an environment of people and organizations that work together under the name of the government to serve the community [5] [12]. It is comprehended that there are many differences between the two sectors given the characteristics that shape each one [13] but the cultural blend does affect the establishment of organizations [14] which means that every nation has its own agenda of running the civil service sector [5]. Nevertheless, it is generally accepted by scholars that the civil service sector is the heart of any governmental structure where executing the civil service duties is vital enough in attaining the supreme objectives of any nation that aspires for continuous development and prosperity [5] [15] where any surplus of revenue over expenditure may be reallocated by improved services or reduced charges [15]. However, the cultural differences shall be taken into consideration as said especially when moving towards the East [16].

4.1 Civil Service in the Arab World

The Arab World States are categorized as third world or underdeveloped countries [17] and that is due to the unresponsive governmental structures towards the dynamic changes and information revolution upon the current years [18]. The fact of the matter is that most of the Arabian governments are still resuming the classical bureaucratic system in administration and control [18] and others had blamed the richness of the culture and its characteristics [8] [14] which caused such an image. On the other hand though, and in terms of the civil service, Arabian countries had diverse experiences in formulating the regulations and policies, establishing, and administering a sound civil service structure where the difference is evident in the degree of authority the civil service unit is given in order to exercise its autonomy [5]. Table 1 shows the different formulations of the civil service entities in selected Arab countries.

Tab. 1: Civil Service Entities in Selected Arab Countries [5:234]

Serial	Country/State	Civil Service Entity
1	Saudi Arabia	The Council of Civil Service
2	Kuwait	The Council of Civil Service
3	Tunisia	Public Employees' Administration
4	Lebanon	The Council of Civil Service
5	Somalia	Civil Service Administration
6	Morocco	Public Employees' Administration
7	Jordan	Diwan of Civil Service
8	Sudan	Ministry of Public Service and Administrative Renovation
9	Egypt	Central Institute for Organization and Administration
10	Oman	(Ministry of) Civil Service (Council)

By

reflecting the objective of this paper, the discussion of the civil service entities will be focused on the Arab Gulf states where the Sultanate of Oman is part of. The Arab Gulf states though share much of the culture in the Arabian Peninsula [9] which led into a common trend towards the dealing with the civil service sector in each of the six states (Saudi Arabia, Oman, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain) besides the other neighboring Arab countries in the Middle East [5]. From a philosophical perspective, Arab management theories, practices, and organizations are the products of the contemporary Arab-political environment and its developmental aspirations [8] where the social and governmental matters were taken into consideration as a significant sector since the end of the fifties from the last century, particularly, when Great Britain had decided to withdraw from the Gulf States [19] [20]. This denotes to the fact that Arab Gulf states as other Arab states were also affected by the western schools of bureaucracy or the indulgence into a vague economic or governmental structures such as communism, socialism, or radicalism or even federalism [19] [21]. However, it is undoubtedly accepted that the civil service sector in the Arab Gulf states was affected by the political, economic, and cultural aspects of the existing milieu that shaped the civil service practices, with its necessary amendments, till today [5].

4.2 Omani Civil Service System

Any system consists of its components and yet the Omani civil service system is formed of one firm entity, another semi-firmed entity, and a charter. More specifically, the civil service system in the Sultanate of Oman is constructed through the interconnectivity among the three main entities that are: ministry of civil service, civil service council, and civil service law [5] [22]. These entities share and execute the civil service practices, and establish and develop the policies and regulations that control such a sector [5]. In a nutshell, it could be viewed as two bodies interact reciprocally within a set framework where the ministry of civil service is working together with the civil service council under and within the guidelines of the civil service law. Figure 2 illustrates the mentioned relationship among the three main entities in the civil service sector where an elaboration on each entity and the underlying technicalities is followed.

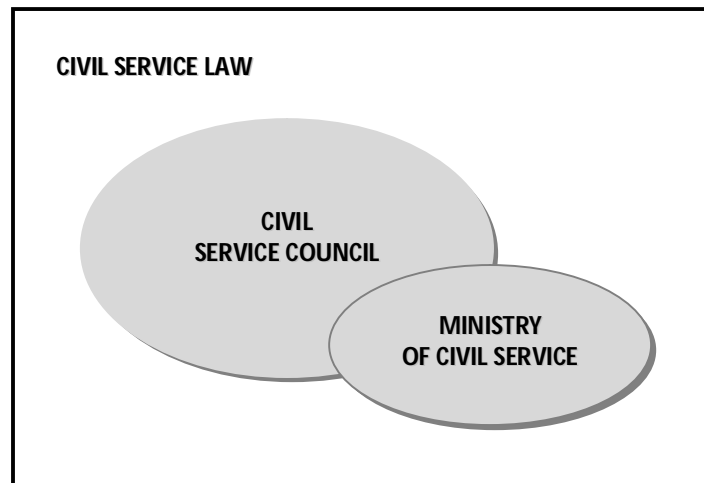


Fig. 2: The Omani Civil Service Milieu

4.2.1 *Civil Service Law*

In the early days of the renaissance, there were few regulations and laws that determined the administrative levels and their rights under the law [22]. This was carried on till the year 1975 where the first Royal Decree was issued to specify and demonstrate the civil service bodies and practices in the country as it was named “The Civil Service Law” [23]. However, and due to the dynamic nature of the society which entails a continuous attempt to reiterate and amend as necessary, and hence in 1980, another Royal Decree was issued to affirm the required changes [22]. Till that time, the civil service charter was included as subsections in the civil service law where in 1984; a Royal Decree was issued to account for the first executive charter of the civil service law as a separate regulation that governs the civil service entities till today [5]. In other words, the civil service law is considered as the framework that bounds the civil service sector and the civil service charter is a detailed handbook of all the significant technicalities that eases the comprehension and the implementation of the civil service practices [5]. Yet, the final amendments to the civil service law were recognized in the Royal Decree number 120 that was issued in the 28th of December 2004 outlining the following boundaries of the civil service sector [22]:

- Basic civil service terminology
- Objectives of the civil service entities
- Job distribution and description
- Recruitment policies
- Employee behavioral
- Assessment policies
- Work benefits
- Work conditions
- After-service conditions

Starting with the base of the law, specific and functional governmental bodies were mentioned to be acting under the civil service law [24] where it is noted that other governmental bodies that have been mentioned before were not included in the referred list. That was due to the sensitivity reasons and the nature of their operation where they are

excluded with a designated Royal Decree [5] [23] where trivial examples are as ministry of defense, internal security affairs, and state audit.

4.2.2 Civil Service Council

The civil service council is an isolated governmental body that holds the supreme responsibility for overseeing and developing the civil service sector in the country [5] [23]. According to the Royal Decree number 27 that was issued on the 28th of June 1975, the first civil service council was formed with its specialties [11] and it was accounted under the Royal Court [22]. Thus, in 1980, the civil service law had noted that the civil service council should report to the council of ministers and since then till the year 2002, the council had ran through many changes [22] where according to the Royal Decree number 17 that was issued on the 2nd of March 2002, the main responsibilities and duties of the civil service council were documented and also stating the council league as it should encompass the following members [25]:

- Minister of Royal Court (Chairman)
- Minister of Civil Service (Deputy Chairman)
- Secretary General – Council of Ministers
- Minister of Social Development
- Minister of Legal Affairs
- Minister of Education
- Minister of Workforce

4.2.3 Ministry of Civil Service

The Ministry of Civil Service was established with the Royal Decree number 17 that was issued on the 21st of February 1988 [22]. It is the third ministry in significance that comes after the ministry of finance and the ministry of foreign affairs as it is held responsible and accountable on deciding and processing all relative matters that come under the custody of the Omani civil service law [5] that shall be pinpointed as the ideal human resource management activities but on a wider sector-scale [26]. Those activities shall be summarized in the following points [5]:

- Formulating the civil service policies and its follow-up
- Structuring and analyzing ministerial hierarchies
- Analyzing jobs and the remuneration schemes
- Planning and executing the recruitment system and the Omanization plan
- Administering the performance assessment system
- Employee training and development
- Enhancing administrative communication and employee relations
- End of service, retirement, and pension schemes
- Fostering research on personnel affairs
- Analyzing and archiving records, reports, and statistics

The fact of the matter is that the ministry of civil service exerts all of the above efforts and responsibilities upon a total number of 118990 Omani and non-Omani public employees [24:14] where most of them are clustered in the capital area as it encompasses the major governmental buildings; the rest of the employees are distributed among the other regions of the country.

5 CONCLUSION

This paper provided a preliminary review on the literature that is pertaining to the civil service sector in Sultanate of Oman. It was concluded that the Omani public system is divided into six clusters through which the government controls the administrative policies and executes its practices that was formed into a simplified exhibit. It was also found that the Omani civil service system consists of three main interrelated entities that are civil service: law, council, and ministry. In short, this study could be utilized as a base for further administrative implementations within the Omani civil service system.

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