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UniDem Med

**“ TRANSFORMATION AND INNOVATION IN THE SENIOR
CIVIL SERVICE : CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES”**

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**GOOD DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION:
WHAT MISSIONS FOR THE SENIOR CIVIL SERVICE?**

by

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TRANSFORMATION AND INNOVATION IN THE SENIOR CIVIL SERVICE : CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The role and function of the senior civil service with
respect to good (multi-level) governance and the need for
loyal contradiction

Role of and demands to senior civil servants in a responsive system of governance: topics to be discussed

- Demands made from politics and society towards the senior civil service: a double bind and related to this.
- Civil servants and their role in guaranteeing good governance as discussed yesterday.
- The need for loyal contradiction as an important civil service virtue and a precondition for good governance and civil servants acting as *pro-active public servants*
- Limitations to loyal contradiction.
- How to overcome these difficulties?

In realizing the values / tasks mentioned yesterday
there are twofold demands that have to be
reconciled

- (Top) civil servants have a duty to their political office holders and through them to Parliament and to society.
- They have to balance those two responsibilities.
- As such they are public servants not servile officers or independent professionals.
- Public servants need to contradict sometimes their superiors (and colleagues) but from a loyal attitude: Loyal contradiction below we discuss this civil service virtue in detail.



Demands

As such they are public servants not servile officers or independent professionals

We return later to what this implies and requires.



A Difficult balancing act

- Serving both the political masters and the public but also
- Operating between unquestioning loyalty and absolute autonomy is a difficult balancing act.



What do you need?

- Political administrative and societal knowledge and a perceptive antenna is imperative.
- Qualified and experience (top) civil servants appointed on merit and not on political patronage is essential.



What is needed?

- Political and (intra) societal neutrality is also an absolute requirement.
- but this is not sufficient.
- What also is needed is to be versed in what can be called the political-administrative craft.



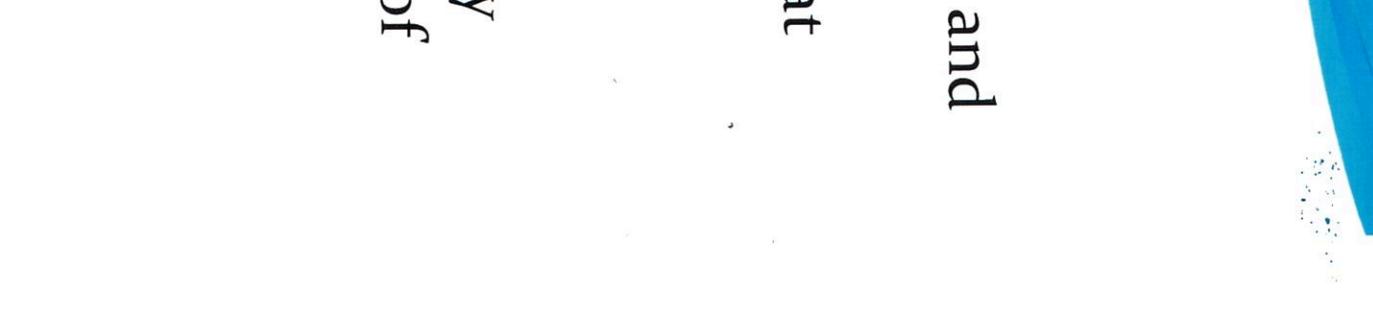
Essential values

- Yesterday I discussed what can be called good governance values in relation to the (senior) civil service but now I will go more deeply in on:
- Openness to politics, leadership and society in terms what I call loyal contradiction.
- This is almost a material precondition for the others how difficult in practice it may seem to upheld.



Loyal contradiction, what does it imply?

- Loyal contradiction involves *ex ante* voice and appraisal by civil servants by expressing their opinion on policy (alternatives) and implementations proposals and issues with as purpose to enhance decision making and performance.
- Loyal contradiction is sometimes (but controversially to some) formulated as the obligation: speaking truth to power.



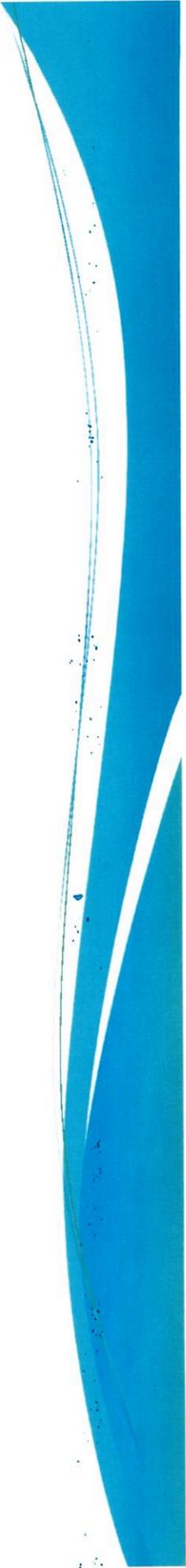
A second issue the audience: loyal contradiction to who?

1. The relationship between (mainly but not only senior and top) civil servants on the one hand and political officeholders, their political advisors and appointees at relevant levels of government on the other.
2. Internal hierarchical relationships within bureaucracy itself: between leaders and subordinates at all levels of the hierarchical chain.



Loyal contradiction to who?

3. Horizontal relationships: between colleagues at an equal hierarchical level within the organization.



Not always the case why?

First we can find three different forms how this decreasing scope might express itself:

1. Limitations regarding voice pertaining to civil servants not being allowed to express their honest opinion and concerns, but it might also have involved.
2. Civil servants might refrain from it for a variety of reasons as for instance being scared or not being disposed to these activities.



Why?

3. Civil servants not being able to express these kinds of opinions by lack of expertise, experience and political-administrative skills.



Necessity of maintaining and safeguarding loyal contradiction

- As loyal contradiction is considered essential for maintaining and safeguarding organizational performance and legitimacy, a declining scope will in the end be self-defeating to politics, management but also the organization as a whole.
- When the scope for loyal contradiction and appraisal between politicians and officials and between officials is reduced political-administrative crises and organizational incidents can increase.



Solutions 1

- 1 Civil servants but also political leaders have to be aware that an open attitude and sufficient leeway for productive criticism is essential for longer term success.
- 2 That demands a open organizational culture and attitude and political- administrative courage.
- 3 Recruiting, training and maintaining committed, 'crafty' and perceptive civil "servants" operating and balancing between politics, organisation and society should a primary (organizational) concern.



Solutions 2

4. The same applies, with all due caution, to political officeholders.
5. The need for adequate legal and organizational protection for these pro-active civil servants to match their role mentioned under point 3.



Finally, the need for confidentiality

- As said extremely important with respect to voice and appraisal being heard is that those expressions are made behind closed doors as openness has a negative effect on the sender and the receiver.
- Civil servant might become more cautious to give their views and political officeholders might be more refraining from asking or accepting it.



Rounding-up and what to do

- It might sound easy but how to implement these matters in what might seem at first unfavourable conditions?
- It applies to all the civil service values and essentials.