

The Concept of Flexible Personnel Management in Civil Service: The American Experience and Its Implication

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Abstract

The 1978 Civil Service Reform Act (CSRA) provides the U.S. civil service system a legal framework which promotes management effectiveness. Unlike the “merit system” practiced by the American civil service after the Civil Service Act of 1883 which administered civil service examination and enforced rigid and systematic regulations on public servants, the CSRA allows the civil service system to explore and adopt management concepts and methods used in the private sector. Since 1978, performance-based compensation systems have either been adopted or experimented, and more public managers have been given greater discretion in motivating employees. Now, flexible personnel management systems, like Senior Executive Service and broad-banding systems, are getting wider acceptance.

It is suggested that public service can operate more effectively in a management environment comparable to that of the private sector. Flexible personnel management should have a legal basis and strong political support. Personnel management functions should be carried out by public managers and not by personnel specialists. As the information age will undoubtedly change the feature of the working environment everywhere, flexible management systems should be applied to all personnel functions.