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The modernization of the Mexican Government from its Management Improvement: Interview to Salvador Vega Casillas, Secretario de la Función Pública (Secretary of Public Function)

Interviewer: José Sosa

José Sosa: Appreciated Secretary, thank you for the opportunity that you give us of transmitting to the Public Administration Review (*Revista de Administración Pública*) readers' community, the actions that Public Function Secretary (Secretaría de la función Pública) have developed in order to improve the management of the Mexican Federal Public Administration (Administración Pública Federal Mexicana).

Salvador Vega Casillas: Good morning. Thank you for the invitation to participate in this reflective space, from which I allow myself to send a fraternal greeting to academics and civil servants. As well my recognition, since are researchers and civil servants the main actors of the Government tasks and who develop the construction of a better public function.

I also wish to tell before starting properly with this interview, taking advantage of the forum that *Public Administration Review (Revista de Administración Pública)* is giving me, for me, it represents big relevance the task of impulse and promotion of Public Administration that your magazine is doing, ordered and systematic study, and specially the promotion of quality research, upon the administrative development and government management opportunity areas. Tasks which represent spaces of convergence, interaction and debate along with the social performers in the time Mexico goes through.

Civil Society along with its educative and research institutions such as INAP, are acquiring paramount relevance every day on Government actions and projects. We are ruling with more participation of society every moment in the search of effective, consensused, viable and of long term and impact results to country's priorities.

José Sosa: Mr. Secretary, first of all I would like you to comment to us on which the main elements that guide the modernization of our Public Administration are.

Salvador Vega Casillas: To start with, I have to recognize the work of my predecessors in this Secretary, since when I was nominated Secretary; I realized that we had already advanced a long way.

In August 2006, the Mexican Government signed the Ibero-American Code for Good Government, and with this, we compromised to respect and promote fundamental principles of management improvement, among which I would like to enhance the government austerity, accessibility in public services, transparency, efficiency and efficacy. All of these related to administrative modernization.

We have to point out remarkably that in Mexico the democratic opening has allowed the incursion of social demands of all kind, and specially a more Public Resources efficient and rational usage in order to satisfy the citizens' demands.

We know that it is a reality in all World Public Administrations, that resources always result insufficient in order to answer our growing citizens needs, as from the quantitative and qualitative point of view, so it is imperative to ensure that the resources that the Government use is advantaged in the best possible way and without space for waste, corruption or inefficacy on society resources management. A recent document of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development points that the performance management is settled and is a key piece to strength the State, thus to increase the public confidence on their Governments and Institutions.

Today's Societies are too complex to be handled only for relative rules to goods, processes and internal control. It is necessary to measure now not only those parts concerning to internal control, not only goods, not only processes inside administration, but to measure the impact on their activity from the Society's point of view. That is why the Modern National States are forced to deliver value results to citizens.

That is to say, products that equal or overpass their expectations. This means to raise the efficiency and orientation to impact on organizations and public services. In addition to the viability and permanence of Governments depend more on their capacity to deliver

results with the maximum utilization of the available resources. This implies to found the legitimacy on votes, but also on performance and capacity as Govern.

José Sosa: Which is the situation, within the global reference that you comment, that the Mexican Public Administration is situated?

Salvador Vega Casillas: The Public Administration in our country is, as I see, in the crossroad of different administrative paradigms. The complexity of our government apparatus allows that live together, in one hand the administration bureaucratic model, with its controls, hierarchic organizational structure, closure to laws and rules; and on the other hand, the modern management system, that is known for the import of techniques from the Private Sector, standards definition and performance measures, budget control based on results, competence mechanisms on public sector and a big autonomy and flexibility on daily operation of dependences and entities.

This double approach should not confuse us or impede us from identifying the structural elements that condition the possibilities of administrative reform in Mexico. It is indispensable to act with pragmatism and recognize that not everything is applicable to the reality of our Administration. Neither quick nor simple victories can be reached; this is not a subject to be solved in an immediate and easy manner.

Nevertheless, we are fully aware that electoral democracy that we have achieved should be complemented with second generation reforms, targeting to the citizens' life quality improvement and opportunities, such as poverty combat and social inequality.

These reforms are part of an indissoluble link among Politics and administration, and are, as we see, the only track to avoid democratic disappointing and reverse temptations back to authoritarian government systems.

José Sosa: From your privileged point of view in matter of Public Administration; which are these reforms that will allow us to continue with the strength of our democracy?

Salvador Vega Casillas: The National Development Plan settles a clear and viable strategy to go ahead on the Government Apparatus transformation, which will allow us to fulfill with the citizen mandate, about having Governments with more capacity, which answer with efficiency and sufficiency to their growing necessities and demands, but above all support the growth and eradicate social asymmetries and generate wellbeing. The National Development Plan settles among

its objectives the Federal Public Administration obligation of improving the regulation, management, processes and results regarding to goods providing and public services.

Our purpose should be in order to consolidate a Public Administration which provide results, sensitive to citizen demands, transparent and professional, avoiding the dispend and corruption. A minds' transformation to a Public Service culture where the Government is the best citizens allied.

This approach shows our responsibility in orientating the public resources toward results, for reaching the results with more efficiency and in order to have as a fundamental principle on performance the transparency and counts rendition.

In the Public Function Secretary in order to fulfill with the National Development Plan and improve the Federal Public Administration, we have proposed ourselves practical strategies that we consider are contributing in a significant way to modernization.

Next I will mention the most important:

One, raise the efficiency standards and government efficacy, through administrative steps systematization and digitalization and utilization of information and communication technologies.

Two, continue with the Civil Officials professionalizing process and necessary adjustments for the optimal management.

Three, adopt a budget model based on results that ease the counts rendition and generate incentives in order that Federal Public Administration fulfills with the planned goals: and measure the efficiency and efficacy of the expenses on federal dependences and entities. In today's Mexico, is not enough measure how occupied has been the government but what have achieved and with which resources this has been achieved.

José Sosa: Mr. Secretary, one of the matters that more expectancy and discussions has generated in the *RAP* community readers is the Carrier Professional Service; could you tell us which are the actions taken regarding to Civil servants professionalizing?

Salvador Vega Casillas: We are renewing the Carrier Professional Service (CPS), in order to give more width; this means capture to young college students with the best academic merits to enter the Federal Government and improve the organic structures performance of Federal Public Administration. At the end of the last year a new CPS regulation was issued. This new regulation comes four years after beginning the CPS operation and after performing a deep evaluation

of its functionality, through National and International Institutions recommendations and proposals the result is the reform and strength of the Service on its whole with this law renewed that allow us to equilibrate, as Francisco Longo said, the “merit and flexibility”.

This equilibrium is a truly hard to conciliate subject on CPS. The decentralization of the CPS operation to dependences is searched with the new regulation, within a normative background that flexibilizes its implementation and that eases the information for analysis and evaluation.

We had a fully centralized process that made that all CPS processes passed for a Subsecretary Unit, on the Subsecretary; this meant not only a enormous delay, besides with filter processes within the Subsecretary; to say this processes in no way were ensuring what we wanted from a CPS; that the best men and women had access to public service, in order to form quality civil officials.

This system was not ensuring it, since they were filtered in a series of examinations that had anything to do with technical and in many occasions those who passed the examinations did not have the technical requirements, this is something we are changing and we are allowing the Institutions to define the technical requirements and afterwards another evaluation could be performed that allows among the best technicians, evaluate who is who have the best aptitude, best features and not on the contrary.

This allow us to count on also with a income sub system more effective that privilege the experience with selection modes that allow us to fill the positions in less time; this is also important. Settle a performance evaluation sub system as basis for the Professional Civil Officer development.

This allows us to impulse the career of civil servants professional development through training that allows the mobility on the system, based on merits. In the same fashion contributes to increase the participation of control internal organs on system functioning observance, this is, in one hand, we decentralize, but in the other hand we watch that no abuse exist on CPS.

We hope that this new regulation be a lever that in a synergic way, with the above measures, allow to our civil servants contribute in a important way to satisfaction of citizens' needs.

José Sosa: Another of the strategies of the Public Function Secretary, that you commented is modernize and improve the management by means of the use of Information technologies and raise the government efficiency and efficacy, which are the actions to be taken in this matter?

Salvador Vega Casillas: In matter of use and utilization of information and communication technologies we should be able to use these tools to promote the Government efficiency, efficacy and transparency by creating remote channels for public services access, easing the citizen to go to unique attention offices and decreasing their interaction with Government offices. Is not tolerable that the citizen has to deliver 4 or 5 times the same documents for the same process, and technologies are for revert it.

We are working hardly. Despite that exist a big gap in internet usage and information technologies, actually if we go through the country we will find that even in the smallest village there is an establishment with service of internet in which people from the furthest places may access, besides that the other strategies that the government is making in e-Mexico, in order that they have access to public services without many steps.

José Sosa: Regarding to the last point you have mentioned, Mr. Secretary about adopting a budget based on results and measure the expenses efficiency and efficacy, which are the measures to be followed.

Salvador Vega Casillas: Precisely, another measure that has been taken is to adopt a budget model based on results that ease the counts rendition and generate incentives in order that Federal Public Administration fulfills with planned goals and evaluate the performance of Government programs and their impact on population, under the transparency, impartiality, efficacy, competence and sustenance.

In the beginning I have to admit that during the last years the Budget process has been improved on federal ambit. On the late 90's the Federal Government assumed the budget model by programs by means of this these have been evolving the Budget practices of Public Administration toward a result oriented management; this is toward the efficiency of public funded politics, measured in terms of its competence to solve the social problems.

Nevertheless this orientation change is not accompanied of mechanisms to assess in a systematic way the programs impact and public politics, by far no right tools exist to allow feedback the Expense decisions.

In our country many tracking indicators and instruments exist, such as institutional performers, even international performers, which perform the assessments in different levels, but all these partial assessment efforts have not been translated, until today, in tangible improvements, in government programs efficiency.

The indicators that are handled in Government are not generally final results, but from activities and intermediate management, to say tasks are measured, not results; this is a very important matter in assessment matter.

Assessment or indicators are not linked with the improvements to the Management, nor Budget decisions; the assessments' resulting information is not used fully by Budget execution or control agents. That is why we need to impulse a coherent and coordinated politics from different performers and stratus of public management assessment.

The Federal Public Administration Organic Law forces us to enhance the control and assessment system and we want to walk toward that drift; fully tuned on International tendencies.

In that context, the Federal Government has determined to face the efficiency and efficacy improvement on the public resources use through three linked components:

First: a Budget System based on results for Federal Public Administration that consists in a whole of processes and instruments that will allow that involved decisions on budget gather, systematically, considerations on public resources usage.

Second, a performance assessment system that allows performing a performance objective evaluation, under the principles of goals and objectives fulfillment stage verification, based on strategic and management indicators that allow knowing the programs' social impact and projects.

And third: a Management Improvement Program that will be called MIP.

José Sosa: Could you talk us widely about the MIP?

Salvador Vega Casillas: This MIP has for scope promote the management modernization on public institutions, through interrelated actions on human resources matter, regulations simplicity, processes quality and public services, electronic government, austerity and discipline on expenses.

This program is intended to reduce expenses, from resource optimization and efficient processes operation; increase the productivity and provide more and better services to citizens. Particularly, the MIP should contribute to saving goals and operative expenses reduction and operation on management.

In budget terms, in order to give us an idea the net total expense raises up to, in a global way, to 2.2 billion pesos, from which only 10% of the programmable expenses is susceptible of reassignment, the

remaining 90% is unavoidable expense and is designated to personal services, or subsidies, transfers to States and Provinces, among others.

This program looks for improve these numbers; to say have more money for social programs which are those that truly impact the society and less money designated to bureaucracy management. This program looks for improve these numbers by means of real state and goods transfers, the rationalization of structures, regarding to public administration, the elimination of unnecessary steps, the services fusion with a common objective, the installation of multi steps attention centers and the hiring consolidation, among other topics and elements we have to improve.

José Sosa: Mr. Minister, what are, according to your judgment, the main problems to instrument the strategies?

Salvador Vega Casillas: The challenges to implement the modernization strategies are truly enormous, as enormous as the Public Administration. In first place we have to ensure the efforts coordination that allows us to increase substantially the services quality that the State provides us.

The processes improvement besides cannot be isolated from regulatory simplification, the adoption of information technologies is not understood without a restructuring of areas and processes and this is not possible without the necessary economical resources in order to fulfill it. In the same fashion the development of the human resources cannot be unlinked from the institutional planning and assessment systems evolution. In synthesis; persons, resources, norms, processes and technologies should be part of the same management improvement circle.

However, the services quality cannot increase working onto nothing, without the authentic citizen participation in the control of those. Today is not enough producing high quality public services, but is necessary to consult the citizens about these services and the way these are provided, even can be included on the rights. This is the philosophy that we have to assume.

The next challenge is an increase on our collaboration capability. We have to transit from imposition to negotiation approaches; from a Stated change to change driven by the Institutional experience and wisdom. Our obligation is create the conditions that allow us the innovation, that foment the creativity and impulse intensive systems on information, communication and knowledge.

Another imperative is improving the administration capabilities to plan strategically, in order to guarantee the alignment among the National priorities and Civil Officials.

José Sosa: What is the strategy that, from your point of view, should be adopted to face the modernization challenges?

Salvador Vega Casillas: Administration modernization and improvement begins linking the Institutions' strategic objectives with the National Development Plan goals, strategies and priorities, and the programs derived from this, such as orient government products to efficacy, efficiency and quality.

Improve the internal regulation and toward the citizen, is another action line that should be attended; is essential to reduce the administrative charges and transaction costs for Government benefit holders, de-bureaucratizing the processes that cannot be more important than the services themselves. In many occasions happen that is more important the process than the service that is provided. We should decrease the amount of procedures and improve which are necessary, the indispensable, these should be improved, always thinking and having the citizen as the center of the reforms.

With the MIP implementation is intended to impulse more rational paradigms on government. This is as it is, since we want to transit from an assigned inertial budget and based on the activities accomplishment, toward a system in which the information by results is considered for budget assignment.

I want to highlight that the information about the public management results should form, but not drive the decisions take, and this is very important, the budget control part, that the Deputies Chamber, the political control part, that the Chamber should have, should be respected, but it is also necessary that whomever takes the decisions, should have the right information about if this or that program is working and if is necessary to give more money to it or withdraw it or disappear it when assigning the budget, this last does not happen is made in a inertial fashion.

In the same way, we want to implement a solid System and technically reliable to assess systematically the Federal Public Administration Institutions performance, based on management indicators. We wish to develop the administration common tasks by means of best practices standardization that allow us to decrease the inequality on public organizations, to say, we have public organizations that are not efficient and have much technology and we have others that are

completely lagged behind, in which thing are currently performed by hand.

Best practices should be standardized, in a way that citizens have the facility to do all their administrative steps and free at all. We wish to induce a collective and individual performance culture, as a critical attitude and continuous perfecting of our human resources, and for last, we want to generate data about the Institutions and programs productivity; useful and verifiable information about how the Government is acting, that built an additional element for counts rendering. Not only which results the Government got, but how much was invented in order to get it, and how efficient every Institution was, that is other part that we need to develop, is not enough with delivering good results, should be done in economic manner, faster, more agile, that is the part that the MIP develops.

José Sosa: Mr. Secretary, I appreciate much this conversation, I wonder if you wish to send any message to our readers as a conclusion.

Salvador Vega Casillas: As a conclusion, I would like to highlight three concepts that according to me, we will contribute to the success of these our public administration modernization initiatives that as you will see, are not easy task, is a very complex work what we are about to do, nevertheless, I am convinced that these base ideas will help much in the success of these programs:

First: alignment and synergy of processes, norms, technology and human resources is indispensable to generate public value for citizens.

Second: The coordination among the different Federal Government Institutions, as Secretaria de Hacienda and Public Function, such as Union Congress, is fundamental in order to articulate the based on results budget, the MIP and the Performance Assessment System and in this order we are giving historical steps on promoting administrative reforms of enormous willingness.

Third: The flexibility on the implementation of these systems will allow incorporate the proposals, experiences and best practices generated on our Public Institutions.

Alignment, coordination and flexibility are the success conditions that allow us to be optimistic regarding to Public Administration in Mexico. I wish leave you the idea about that this Administration modernization is not achieved by using the resources we have, but spreading the Services quality and coverage and transferring resources of adjective processes to substantive processes. And this is a gradual developing

that requires the intervention of many public, private and social performers.

The quality and savings are result of the progressive and intelligent correction of the Administrative malfunctionalities, not only by the word or political harangue. This is the size of the challenge we have; that we have assumed for the next years, and that all academics, society and government employees have to participate.

I conclude pointing that me, as Jefferson, I believe that when someone assumes a Public Position should consider himself as public property. This is rightly the attitude that we should promote in all civil officials.

Thank you a lot.