

## **REFORM, ROUTINES, AND CAPACITY BUILDING: CIVIL SERVICE POLICY CHANGE IN THAILAND 1991-1992**

SURAPONG MALEE

*LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE*

***ABSTRACT:** This article explores the process of public management policy<sup>1</sup> change in Thailand between 1991 and 1992.<sup>2</sup> It deals primarily with civil service policy—conceived as a subcategory of public management policy—under the interim government of Anand Punyarachun. This period is historically significant because it was one of the most important civil service reform efforts in the history of modern Thai administrative reform. Despite the short life of the government, civil service policy during this period underwent considerable change. The outcome of Anand's civil service reform was a series of proposals related to civil service improvement—the most important of which was an employment freeze. These proposals entailed changes in rules, routines, and the practice of human resources management in particular.*

Organizational routine is a source of capacity (March and Olsen 1989). For the Thai Civil Service to formulate and implement reform policy, changing rules and routines to increase the efficient management of resources in the various administrative processes required for delivering outputs of government is a form of capacity building.<sup>3</sup> The attempt to build administrative capacity in order to fulfill the government mandate can be regarded as entrepreneurial behavior. Suffice it to say that many of these reform efforts, which may not necessarily generate such a high degree of change in civil service operations as in benchmark cases,<sup>4</sup> have been regarded as the genesis of, and paved the way for, subsequent reforms.

Civil service policy change in Thailand during the early 1990s, which represented a departure from the reform experience of earlier decades, is also of analytical interest. First, this case is instrumental in understanding, and provides insight into, the actual reform process; namely, setting the reform agenda, specifying reform options, deciding reform choices, and implementing reform programs.<sup>5</sup> Deconstructing civil service reform processes this way, in effect, provides a basis for comparing cases of reform in different countries at different times. This kind of comparison makes limited historical generalizations plausible. Second, although the main focus of this study is on processes, this particular episode offers an opportunity to examine a policymaking process within the

**Direct all correspondence to:** Surapong Malee, Interdisciplinary Institute of Management, London School of Economics and Political Science, Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE. E-mail: surapong@ocsc.go.th

institutional context of “bureaucratic polity”,<sup>6</sup> as opposed to democratic governance.

The analytical question this article asks is, therefore: What accounts for change and/or stability in Thai Civil Service policy? Employing a narrative mode of analytical presentation and explanation, this article tracks the evolution of civil service reform issues that were processed in different venues by various people. While the following narrative primarily reveals the careers of civil service reform issues, it also gives secondary importance to the actors in a so-called “reform battlefield.”<sup>7</sup> By balancing tensions between issue-centered accounts and actor-centered accounts in the narrative, the case is open to various interpretations, which can shed light on various aspects of civil service reform experiences.

### **ESTABLISHING AN INTERIM GOVERNMENT: THE SCENE**

In March 1991, Military Supreme Commander General Sundhara Kongsompong and his Army Commander in Chief General Suchinda Kraprayoon staged a bloodless coup and captured Prime Minister Chatchai, who was travelling to have an audience with HM King Bhumibol in the royal residence in the northern province of Chiang Mai. The coup leaders abrogated the constitution, dismissed Chatchai’s elected government, and established the temporary National Peace Keeping Council (NPKC) as the supreme guardian of the country. They also dissolved and replaced the Parliament with the appointed National Legislative Council, which was comprised mainly of current and retired civil servants, as well as military officers.

The NPKC did not face strong opposition from the general public, mainly because it raised people’s expectations that the rampant corruption in government and the civil service could be eliminated. Indeed, the middle class in urban areas rendered some support to the coup leaders, hoping that the old-fashioned politics dominated by provincial politicians could eventually be improved, if not replaced, by new-style professional politicians favored by the military and general public. From outside, some foreign government agencies, such as U.S. trade representatives, praised the coup as the way to clean up the rotten system of government and administration.

The broadly positive public response was a double-edged sword for the NPKC. On one hand, it legitimized the coup and facilitated a smooth transition of power. On the other hand, it compelled the NPKC to deliver what the general public was expecting: clean and democratic government. This expectation included demands for a new election from some pro-democratic groups including veteran political activists and academics that opposed the undemocratic means of a coup d’état. The NPKC responded to this pressure by installing an interim government as the first move to secure public support. They chose Anand Panyarachun, a bureaucrat-turned-businessman, to lead this government.<sup>8</sup> The NPKC gave Anand considerable power, although not a free hand, to form an interim government. Anand’s cabinet members were mainly civilian bureaucrats, while some strategic posts such as minister of interior and minister of defense were secured for the NPKC’s leaders. Most military leaders who were members of the NPKC declined offers of ministerial posts in hope of avoiding the allegation that they had staged the coup for their own benefit.

## DEFINING CIVIL SERVICE PROBLEMS

### Corruption Issues

Immediately after taking office in March 1991, Anand worked toward the NPKC's mandates, one of which was to curb corruption. Among the initial measures he adopted was scrutiny of alleged corruption cases. Many politicians in Chatchai's cabinet and some high-level civil servants, who were accused of unusual wealth, had their assets frozen unless they declared legitimate sources for their income. Some of the accused were put on trial by the anticorruption agency, and civil servants who were allegedly involved also faced disciplinary procedures.

The anticorruption issue dominated the interim government's agenda partly because the cabinet needed to be responsive to the NPKC, whose early promise of eradicating corruption raised public expectation. The prime minister promoted the issue himself by speaking publicly about a clean and transparent civil service. His remark was echoed and amplified by the mass media, which in turn reinforced the public mood. In effect, public attention toward problems in the civil service expanded from bureaucratic growth to include bureaucratic corruption—an issue that had previously gained little attention from Prem's and Chatchai's governments.

Although public attention on the issue of anticorruption remained high after members of the interim government assumed their offices, the government failed to prove that the accused were guilty of corruption—due mainly to the scarcity of evidence and the exploitation of some legal loopholes. Faced with a lengthy and ineffective trial, Anand realized that the NPKC's promise on anticorruption issues was not easily delivered.<sup>9</sup> He also felt that the tenure in office of his government was short and that his government would not be able to solve the corruption problem before calling a general election, which was scheduled for March 1992.

Abandoning the anticorruption issue in the midst of high public expectation might not only trigger public discontent, but might also upset the NPKC to whom his government was supposed to be accountable. Anand was not wholeheartedly convinced that it was politically wise to tone down the significance of anticorruption issues. Therefore, he decided that the issue would be kept on the public agenda, and the government would endorse any legal processes pursued by relevant agencies such as the Anticorruption Bureau and the police. By keeping these issues on his agenda, the government maintained popular support for being tough on corruption and having a clean and transparent image. But the prime minister's interest in corruption issues proved fleeting in the face of other problems that directly affected the operation of his government. The most important problem was the emerging issue of budget constraint.

### Bureaucratic Inefficiency Issues

On 2 April 1991, less than one month after its formation, Anand's cabinet convened to consider the government expenditure plan for the fiscal year 1991 proposed by the Ministry of Finance.<sup>10</sup> At this cabinet meeting, Anand learned

that his government faced tight budget restrictions, with a spending limit of 460,400 million baht, a reduction from previous years.<sup>11</sup> This expenditure plan was designed to balance the budget and decrease tax revenue due to tax cuts intended to stimulate a competitive advantage, as well as to decentralize taxing powers to local authorities. If this proposed expenditure was to be approved, Anand argued, government agencies had to be streamlined in order to reduce government outlays. As streamlining itself was not an easy task and the government could face bureaucratic resistance, Anand argued that the issue was unavoidable and could be a means of improving notoriously low civil service salaries. He blamed the overmanned civil service, and pointed out to his cabinet members at the meeting that

[T]he fast growing civil service has not only increased public personnel costs, but has also decreased the government's ability to improve civil service salaries and welfare benefits to the same level as the private sector. These uncompetitive salaries have contributed to the brain drain problem in the civil service.<sup>12</sup>

The urgent need to streamline the civil service naturally came to the prime minister's mind as a solution for budget constraint; civil service costs were about 40 percent of total government spending. This concern also put a brake on the dynamics of corruption issues on the prime minister's agenda. Streamlining would enable the government to improve civil service salaries and welfare benefits, allowing civil servants to live a decent life. This could be one way to reduce the corruption problem in the civil service. Therefore, the corruption issue could not be solved without resorting to a whole range of civil service reforms. As a result, Anand was to keep both anticorruption issues and bureaucratic inefficiency issues on his government's agenda, although he started to see the former problem as less pressing than the latter.

Anand's concern over bureaucratic inefficiency, therefore, formed a large part of the cabinet resolution of 2 April 1991. He made explicit that the growth of the civil service contributed to inefficiency in the public sector, a view that most academics and reformers in the civil service held. Anand proposed his solution, and the cabinet agreed that immediate action was to be taken to freeze civil service employment between fiscal year 1991 and 1992. In practice, this cabinet resolution, which offered more stringent measures, put an end to the two percent policy that had been used to limit the growth of the civil service since General Prem's administration. Anand asserted that during his interim government an increase in government personnel would not be allowed, and the proposed increase in the number of civil servants and employees, which had already been approved through the three-year manpower plans, was also to be frozen.<sup>13</sup>

At the meeting on 2 April 1991 Anand also laid out broad ideas about how government agencies were to deal with manpower problems that might arise during the course of implementing this resolution. He suggested that allocating or transferring personnel from overstaffed departments or projects to the understaffed ones was a potential solution. Another simple but logical solution he offered was partial privatization of government work. Drawing on his background as a diplomat and permanent secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, he was strongly convinced that both permanent and temporary personnel

in embassies and diplomatic missions around the world could also be substantially reduced.

The prime minister's remarks got agreement from his cabinet. They sparked and generated extensive discussion, which expanded to include the issue of employment termination. The cabinet, many of whose members had pursued careers in the civil service, felt that the ongoing retirement system, which guaranteed lifelong employment, should be redesigned to enable the government to get rid of unwanted and inefficient staff easily. They also called for the introduction of an early retirement program.<sup>14</sup>

The cabinet, with Anand's agreement, maintained that the problem of bureaucratic inefficiency could not be solved unless the civil service policymaking and implementation machine was reformed. As a result, Anand assigned his deputy prime minister, Meechai Ru-chubhan, in cooperation with the finance minister, to review the roles and responsibilities of the Civil Service Commission (CSC) and its secretariat office, the OCSC. So far, Anand was successful in keeping both the anticorruption issue and the bureaucratic inefficiency issue on his government agenda. The attempt to deal with both issues was evident in his first policy statement, which was delivered to the National Legislative Council two days after his budget meeting.

### **Addressing the National Legislative Council**

In the speech delivered to the National Legislative Assembly<sup>15</sup> on 4 April 1991, almost one month after the coup, Anand outlined how his government would handle the multidimensional problems of the civil service. Incorporated in his speech was a policy that would make his government accountable for a political mandate dictated by the NPKC, and that would secure public support: the promotion and exercise of preventive measures to suppress all forms of corrupt practices, as well as severe punishment for corrupt officials.

Although the prime minister added the anticorruption issue to his civil service policy, a large part of his administrative policy was still built around the problem of civil service growth and other problems related to public personnel administration. The government was to develop a system that would limit the number of civil servants and government employees, increase civil service salaries, and improve welfare benefits. The new work system would also be laid out to facilitate efficiency, which would result from the improvement of morale.<sup>16</sup>

Anand went on to call for administrative processes (which he claimed contributed to civil service growth and inefficiency problems) to be redesigned. Thus, processes which involved personnel, budgeting, and planning were to be improved to increase the speed and efficiency of governmental working practice and the effectiveness of the provision of services to the people. To achieve this, Anand announced that information technology (such as computers) was to be used widely in government agencies.

Another issue related to the inefficiency problem involved excessive bureaucratic rules and laws. The prime minister saw legal reform as another remedy for bureaucratic illnesses. According to his speech, administrative laws and procedures related to public personnel administration were to be amended. The aims of legal reform were threefold. First, personnel and financial powers were to be decentralized to both lower-rank decision makers as well as to

regional and local administrations. Second, bureaucratic red tape was to be cut and the problem of overlapping jurisdictions caused by legal ambiguity was to be solved. Third, outdated laws were to be reformed in accordance with the dynamics of the socioeconomic development of the country.

One question to be asked at this point is: Why did the issue of bureaucratic inefficiency and civil service growth remain on the government agenda despite the emergence of the equally pressing issue of anticorruption? The answer deals mainly with the nature of these issues and the way the prime minister treated these issues. First, the issues of bureaucratic inefficiency and bureaucratic corruption were not contradictory. They had their own issue careers, and they were to process in different policy venues (Baumgartner and Jones 1993). The inefficiency issue was to be processed mainly in the civil service policy subsystem, while the corruption issue involved legal enforcement agencies including the Anticorruption Bureau, the attorney general, the police, and the courts. As a result, the two issues coexisted.

Second, although no available evidence indicated what Simon (1997) called “the bottleneck of attention,” the prime minister swung his attention between the bureaucratic inefficiency and anticorruption issues. The shift of attention was due to Anand’s strategic calculations. During the first few months of his government, Anand focused on the anticorruption and transparency issue, in order to gain popular support as well as to be accountable to the NPKC. Once he saw the gloomy situation resulting from lengthy and complicated legal processes that could make his effort futile, the anticorruption issue became part of his policy on civil service reform.

Third, while the issue of bureaucratic inefficiency attracted the attention of the whole cabinet and was translated into concrete measures, the issue of anticorruption gained only rhetorical and symbolic support from the prime minister. Anand’s “rhetoric turnaround” (Baumgartner and Jones 1993) led one participant at the 5 September 1991 Harvard Club round-table meeting to ask if the prime minister and his government had given up the effort to curb corruption, after enjoying six months in office. Anand (1991) first admitted that:

I couldn’t remember how many ministers, permanent secretaries, directors, or military officers were found guilty of corruption and got punished. I thought less than ten. We have never had a legal or administrative structure to investigate and punish corrupt officials. In addition, if there are still bribe givers and receivers, and if we still respect rich people notwithstanding their sources of wealth, whatever legal or administrative structure we create would not solve the corruption problem. I am sad. I have no further answer...

Anand (1991) also brushed the issue aside when asked if he had any plan to promote transparency: “I don’t want people to think that the transparency policy belongs only to this government. Policy regarding public transparency must be embedded in every government. We need to establish some framework to work towards this aim. . . . Even if we have this, my government and I are not in a position to impose any anticorruption measures that can change the minds of those who are inclined to be corrupt.” The prime minister’s answers hinged on the fact that the corruption issue was, practically, no longer his priority. It was also politically harder to tackle powerful, corrupt officials and politicians than to

impose a job freeze on the civil service that would mainly affect young job seekers.

Lastly, the prime minister's attention to the issue of bureaucratic inefficiency was partly influenced by the legacy of civil service policy under General Prem and Chatchai's administration. From the beginning, the rationale for Anand to tone down the anticorruption issue and turn to the streamlining issue was similar to General Prem's efficiency-driven strategy for reducing waste on manpower.<sup>17</sup>

I have argued thus far how the issue of civil service efficiency survived the regime change and remained on the agenda of Anand's government. The reader should also grasp from this narrative that some changes in civil service manpower policy came from the cabinet resolution of 2 April 1991. The next questions we seek to answer include: how did regime change affect the civil service policymaking and implementation subsystem; and, how did the policy subsystem deal with the government agenda? In Kingdon's (1995) terms, the subsequent sections examine events within the policy stream. We now explore if there was any change in the civil service policy machine, and if so, why?

### **REORGANIZING THE CIVIL SERVICE POLICY MACHINE**

The prime minister's shift of attention to the issue of corruption during his first few months in office resulted in the discontinuity of civil service manpower policy and its policy community. As has been mentioned above, the two percent policy, which had been an instrument for curtailing the size of the civil service since the 1980s, was terminated. The Civil Service and Administrative Reform Committee (CSARC), the architect of the two percent policy, which had served as an administrative reform policymaking body since General Prem's government, was not reappointed, either.

In his term in office, Anand did not depend much on interdepartment committees to inform his decisions. The sense of urgency caused by the short-lived nature of interim government forced him to deal directly with the individual central coordinating agencies responsible for particular aspects of civil service management. In this period, central government agencies provided Anand with routine action channels for formulating and managing civil service policy. These channels included the Civil Service Commission and its servicing secretariat, the Office of the Civil Service Commission (OCSC). The Bureau of the Budget (BOB) and the Comptroller General's Office (CGD) were also employed. Although these public personnel and public finance agencies were closely related in terms of their routine functions and operation, the OCSC was the lead organization and at the center of civil service policymaking during Anand's administration because of its proximity to key members of the cabinet, namely, the prime minister and one of his deputies.

The prime minister's attention to the civil service issue could normally be seen by the amount of time he allocated to civil service-related committees. In spite of the strategic importance of the Civil Service Commission and its secretariat office, Anand did not chair the Civil Service Commission himself. In terms of administration, he assigned the job to his deputy prime minister, Meechai Ruchubhan, whose knowledge about administrative laws assured Anand that reform of the civil service policy machine as discussed in the cabinet

meeting on 2 April 1991 would be carried out effectively. In effect, Meechai was given a free hand in dealing with civil service issues: he served as the chairman of the Civil Service Commission, and oversaw the operation of the OCSC. But to accomplish what the government declared before the National Legislative Assembly with regard to the civil service issue, Meechai saw the need to get full cooperation from the OCSC's top executives in elaborating the government's ideas. Gaining top civil servants' cooperation needed some intervention, which resulted in a brief conflict between the OCSC's chief and its political master.

### **Politicizing Civil Service Policy Subsystems: Replacing the OCSC's Chief**

In late March 1991, one month after Meechai was put in charge of the civil service, it appeared that the secretary general of the OCSC, Samran Thavarayus, was not his favorite administrator. The deputy prime minister transferred Samran, whose remaining time in office was four to five months, to an inactive advisory position in the Prime Minister's Office. When announced, the move triggered some criticism from civil servants, and the media spoke of the return of old-fashioned, patron-client conflict. Concern that this conflict could destroy the civil service's trust in the government led the prime minister to intervene. Anand (1991), who also claimed to have experienced unfair treatment while permanent secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, used a televised interview to defend his deputy's decision.<sup>18</sup>

The civil service and state administration needs and relies on the OCSC, to start with. And the OCSC's secretary general [Samran] is a good person but he has three to four months left before his retirement. It was for this reason that Deputy Prime Minister Meechai, who oversees the OCSC, wanted to transfer him, since Meechai saw the need to implement the civil service reform and improvement project swiftly. Samran's short tenure could undermine the continuity of the project. Thus, appointing him as an advisor to the Prime Minister's Office did not degrade his position since it is the same PC [position classification] level as that of the OCSC's secretary general. It is understandable that he is upset...

Although Deputy Prime Minister Meechai could get along well with the higher echelons of the OCSC, in which some of his favorite deputy secretary generals were included, he did not choose any of them to replace Samran. Instead, he advised the prime minister to appoint Professor Wijit Srisa-arn, the permanent secretary of the Ministry of University Affairs, as acting secretary general of the OCSC.

Professor Wijit emerged as the deputy prime minister's first choice because of his past achievements. Apart from his experience as a senior bureaucrat, Professor Wijit was seen as the most successful education administrator in Thailand. He served as rector of many universities before getting promoted to head the civil servants in the Ministry of University Affairs. Throughout his career, he was energetically and creatively involved in the development and innovation of education, be it formal, informal, distance learning, or borderless. His image was clean and professional. It was his past achievements, leadership, commitment, vision, and enthusiasm that attracted the deputy prime minister.

In the Thai Civil Service, interministerial transfer and promotion was considered unusual during the democratic regime, since the standard operating

procedure was that promotion to a higher position was normally reserved for qualified candidates from within the individual ministry. However, Professor Wijit's appointment helped the deputy prime minister ward off the possible allegation of patronage personnel practice that would have arisen if he had replaced the ousted secretary general with one of the deputies he favored.

Realizing this was a politically motivated appointment, Professor Wijit, who still kept his post in the Ministry of University Affairs, made clear to the prime minister and his deputy that he would not accept any effort to make him permanent secretary general of the OCSC. His intention was clear when he declared that he would not intervene in the routine administration of the OCSC, and that deputy secretaries general would run its day-to-day operations. He also delegated all administrative routines in the Ministry of University Affairs to his deputies and assistant permanent secretary. The only mandate that Professor Wijit had to achieve was to realize the prime minister's policy statement concerning the efficiency and transparency of the civil service.

### **FORMULATING THE CIVIL SERVICE REFORM AND DEVELOPMENT PROJECT**

Once inaugurated in the OCSC at the beginning of April 1991, Professor Wijit already had clear mandates from the government: to freeze civil service employment, and to reform the civil service system. Freezing the number of civil servants and government employees in the fiscal year 1991 and 1992, a measure initiated by the prime minister in the cabinet meeting on 2 April, was seen by Professor Wijit as urgent. He was also asked by the prime minister and Deputy Prime Minister Meechai to develop a plan to overhaul the civil service system. These mandates were known as parts of the Civil Service Reform and Development Project (the Project), which aimed to turn the prime minister's policy speech into concrete measures.

Since the prime minister did not appoint a civil service reform committee to work on the detail of reform proposals as his predecessor did, the whole task was placed on Wijit's shoulders. In working out the detail of the Project, Professor Wijit formed a small working group on 29 April 1991. This group was comprised exclusively of high-level officials from the OCSC, including the deputies and assistant secretary general. The BOB and the CGD, which were normally present on civil service-related interdepartmental committees, were not invited. As a senior official who was part of the working group said: "It was our [OCSC] business, not theirs." The absence of representatives from those agencies in this preparation stage allowed the OCSC's officials to shape the content and direction of the Project at will.

Although the OCSC's working group announced that the Project aimed to modernize the civil service, and to improve its efficiency as well as the quality and standard of personnel within the civil service, the subjects they discussed were mainly about public personnel issues, ranging from restructuring the civil service to shortening and speeding up work procedures, from recruiting and promoting personnel to improving the civil service incentive system.

In sum, while personnel issues related to the prime minister's concern over bureaucratic inefficiency were widely discussed, the issues of anticorruption and civil service transparency, which were also part of the prime minister's policy

statement, were rarely mentioned. It was at this stage that the anticorruption issue was effectively pulled off the government agenda. Theerayudth Lorlertrat, a former deputy secretary general of the OCSC and a member of the working group, not only described the situation as a matter of “where you stand is where you sit,” but also as a matter of “do-able” (from the notes of an August 1999 interview by the author at the OCSC, Bangkok, Thailand). In other words, the OCSC did not have direct jurisdiction over anticorruption issues, and they lacked expertise on how to handle them.

The Project, according to the OCSC, contained both a short-term, immediate response and long-term reform strategies. Both can be seen as important events that reveal sources of change in civil service policy, with particular focus on manpower issues. Apart from exploring civil service policy change in general, the following sections seek to understand specifically how changes in manpower practice, routines, and procedures occurred, and why.

### **Freezing Civil Service Employment and Redeploying Staff**

Professor Wijit had no difficulty in communicating the government policy concerning the employment freeze and redeployment to OCSC top officials, since controlling civil service growth had been their main manpower policy since General Prem’s government. The OCSC’s working group not only welcomed government policy but also enthusiastically pushed it further, convincing Professor Wijit that although the employment freeze and redeployment policy applied only to ordinary civil servants and government employees under the personnel jurisdiction of the Civil Service Commission, it should be extended to cover all government agencies under the control of other central personnel agencies, as well. The OCSC working group also suggested that this policy would be effectively enforced if the OCSC were to have decisive power on requests for staff increases.

In the CSC meeting on 20 May 1991, Professor Wijit raised the concerns of his working group and received full support from Deputy Prime Minister Meechai, who was chairman. The CSC on that occasion, therefore, agreed that for effective control over civil service growth, other central personnel agencies should adopt the employment freeze and redeployment policy as well. But those central personnel agencies would abide by this policy only if the cabinet ordered them to comply. Deputy Prime Minister Meechai, therefore, raised this issue in the cabinet on 4 June 1991 and got approval with strong backing from the prime minister and the cabinet. In effect, the OCSC was successful in increasing its control over this aspect of manpower policy, and consequently other central personnel agencies lost their grip on staff increases.

The OCSC, with the cabinet’s approval, further encroached on the jurisdiction of other central personnel agencies by reserving decisions on exemption from the cabinet resolution on the employment freeze and redeployment policies. The cabinet decided on 30 July 1991 that government agencies in real need of manpower increases, after attempting all possible alternatives of redeployment, must refer their unavoidable need for staff increase to the CSC. The CSC would then inform the cabinet, where unavoidable requests could be authorized.

### Change in Manpower Policy Routines and Procedures

Changing personnel jurisdiction related to the employment freeze and redeployment strategy led to further changes in the structure of the Civil Service Commission and its routines. On 9 September 1991, the CSC established a special subcommittee on staff increase (or the Special Subcommittee) to perform new tasks emerging from this newly acquired authority. According to a personnel analyst who was involved in the request approval process, the OCSC's analysts were exclusively responsible for this task:

In practice, when government agencies [outside the jurisdiction of the CSC] requested exemption from the cabinet resolution [on the employment freeze and redeployment policies] to employ new staff for the fiscal year between 1991 and 1992, they had to send their requests to the CSC, and we [the OCSC] would analyze those requests and submit our opinion to the Special Subcommittee to approve. However, if the requests came from agencies under the CSC, the Subcommittee on Positions and Salaries, which was formally a part of the CSC, would still be responsible for analyzing them" (from the author's notes of a series of three interviews in September 1999 with Laddawan Tantithagurandonda at the OCSC, Bangkok, Thailand).

To standardize the approval procedure for an unavoidable need for manpower increase, the Special Subcommittee met on 8 October 1991 and agreed on the definition of the term "unavoidable need" that was to be used as a guideline for the approval of such requests. According to the guidelines for approval of unavoidable need for manpower increase, the Special Subcommittee would approve if the requests involved:

(a) tasks specified by government policy, or assigned by the cabinet, to fulfill legal requirements, with budgets already approved. Failure to perform these tasks could cause damage to the government and civil service; (b) tasks that cannot be privatized or contracted out to private companies; (c) tasks recently equipped with new machinery or technologies that need more personnel to perform them; (d) tasks that result from establishing new units, divisions, or departments; and, (e) tasks that emerge from increase in government functions involving tax collection and health service provision.<sup>19</sup>

In sum, by the end of 1991, the procedure for special requests to increase staff more than two percent (that had been used since General Prem's administration) was superseded when this guideline was implemented.

Since the OCSC was to get increasingly involved in the personnel request process of other central personnel agencies, it proposed that personnel analysts from the OCSC would be available to advise on how to effectively implement the policy on the manpower freeze and redeployment. By doing so, the OCSC offered ministries technical assistance involving, for instance, the techniques and methods of staff redeployment and reprioritization of tasks. The aim of this assistance was to ensure that ministries maximized their existing staff before requesting more personnel.

The last aspect of procedural changes involved the report and monitoring system. The OCSC required that permanent secretaries of ministries undertaking staff reallocation or redeployment send their report to the OCSC within seven days after the ministries' Manpower Development Committees (MDC) approved

their redeployment proposals. Tight control over the reporting system would enable the OCSC to monitor the civil service manpower status effectively.

### **Mobilizing Support**

To make sure that every ministry understood the policy on the employment freeze and redeployment, and consequently abided by the same rule, the OCSC translated the two page cabinet resolution (of 2 April) into a thirty-four page handbook. This handbook provided detailed reasons for making staff redeployment the first solution for staff shortages. It also contained procedures that ministries had to follow if they were to increase their staff. The handbooks were sent to every ministry on 21 May 1991.

About two weeks after distributing the procedural handbook, Professor Wijit organized a meeting between the OCSC's top officials and heads of personnel divisions from all the ministries on 31 May 1991 at the Civil Service Training and Development Institute. The aim of this meeting was to gain assurance that the policy message had gotten across to all ministries and that implementers understood the new procedures. Professor Wijit spelled out the need for exercising tighter control over bureaucratic growth by reiterating the prime minister's remarks:

Although the two per cent policy provides a framework for limiting growth, the civil service is still growing. If the growth continues, it will be beyond the government's capacity to improve civil service salaries and welfare benefits to the same level as the private sector. The only way the government would be able to do so is to delay new employment."<sup>20</sup>

At this session, Professor Wijit suggested that ministries could avoid new hiring by four methods. First, prioritize and then selectively eliminate unnecessary jobs. Second, simplify work processes and methods to reduce number of personnel needed to perform tasks. Third, bring technology such as computers and other forms of information technology into government offices. Fourth, privatize parts of the jobs that private companies could probably perform better, including cleaning, security, and vehicle service and maintenance. He closed his statement by emphasizing the role of the OCSC as the lead organization responsible for executing this policy, but he also pledged immediate action from ministries. Manpower allocation and redeployment both within and between departments and ministries was an urgent measure that had to be implemented according to the cabinet's will. Failure to do so would damage the civil service.<sup>21</sup>

The discussion in the meeting room was dominated by the details of the new procedure. The OCSC team also stood firm in the question and answer session. At the end of the meeting, Wilas Singhawisai, the deputy secretary general and OCSC's permanent secretary, admitted that this policy was not easy to implement: "Successful implementation had both arts and science elements. Leadership was so important that departments' executives had to be very decisive on their own manpower issue."<sup>22</sup>

So far, this article has told how the OCSC responded to government policy on the employment freeze and redeployment. As a short-term measure to overcome budget constraint, this policy was intended for fiscal year 1991-1992. But as

mentioned earlier, the government also aimed at improving the civil service system, which was a longer-term project. Since this project was carried out by the same working group in the OCSC, and started almost at the same time as the employment freeze, readers will find in the narrative frequent references to the events and activities related to the employment freeze policy.

### **Formulating a Medium-term Plan for Civil Service Reform**

Improving the civil service system was one of Anand's policies incorporated in the speech he delivered to the National Legislative Council on 4 April 1991. It became the most important mandate that Professor Wijit was determined to achieve on the acceptance of his appointment as acting secretary general of the OCSC. The point of departure of this reform project was to specify the direction of civil service reform, and then to get the cabinet to agree in principle with that direction. This was known among the OCSC's staff as Project Guideline. Theerayudth Lorlertrat, one of OCSC's deputy secretaries general who participated in the working group, told how they went about formulating Project Guideline in the August 1999 interview previously mentioned:

First, we extracted the government's policy statement concerning public service improvement and broke it down into categories of issues, in order to make it manageable and easy to consider appropriate solutions. Then we established working measures to achieve improvement of the specified issues. These measures were precisely defined, and the methods (or 'how to') were described. Last, we specified activities that needed to be carried out."

This guideline, Lorlertrat recalled, was "developed from two combined sources: the prime minister's policy aspiration, and the OCSC's ideas of improving public personnel functions, aiming to consolidate the public personnel authorities."<sup>23</sup> Professor Wijit accepted this guideline from the outset, as he saw it would enable him to achieve the mandates assigned to him by the prime minister. Including the OCSC's personal agenda at that time, the guideline would also please his senior officials, who were to carry out the project.

Professor Wijit and his working group managed to complete Project Guideline within six weeks, and it was published in the form of a 21-page booklet. It was composed of 7 civil service policies, 13 administrative issues, 32 measures, and 109 how-to activities. In mid-June 1991, the OCSC submitted this guideline to the cabinet. Again, with full backing from the prime minister and Deputy Prime Minister Meechai, the cabinet approved the guideline and its proposed reform direction.

But the approval of Project Guideline was only a steppingstone for the OCSC to achieve its own reform agenda. To ensure that the crucial issues of consolidating fragmented personnel jurisdictions, downsizing the civil service, and improving civil service salaries and welfare benefits were to be realized, the OCSC's working group saw the need to strictly control the process of translating Project Guideline into actionable plans. But how did the OCSC manage to achieve its own reform preference? The answer emerged from two main events; namely, formulating the plan for improving the civil service system and public personnel management, and amending the Civil Service Act of 1975. It is the former event that we will next explore.

## **Formulating the Plan for Improving the Civil Service System and Public Personnel Management**

As we have seen, the development of the civil service reform Project Guideline was exclusively the brainchild of OCSC's top officials, and personnel-related agencies were excluded from the process. After the cabinet endorsed the guideline, the OCSC immediately set up another ten working groups, comprised of seventy-three middle- and high-ranking officials who were drawn mainly from related divisions within the OCSC. These working groups were asked to study and propose ways in which the civil service could be improved. The OCSC also set a November 1991 deadline for them to complete their proposals. It hoped that the cabinet would approve the reform proposal by the end of the year.

The tasks of these working groups were framed by the approved guidelines, which reflected the division of labor within the OCSC. In effect, they were instructed to formulate reform proposals in such narrow but important areas as the role and responsibilities of the CSC and the OCSC, the organization and staffing of the civil service, the salary and welfare benefits system, the training and development system, the decentralization of public personnel management, and the revision of the Civil Service Act. In short, the target areas for reform were well defined. Narrating activities in those areas of reform will enable readers to understand the processes by which these working groups came up with their reform proposals.

### **Controlling Civil Service Growth**

#### *Direct Control over Manpower Increases*

For members of the OCSC's working group, the most pressing problem of the civil service was its excessive growth, though its size was not unduly large by Southeast Asian standards. In 1992 the Thai Civil Service had approximately 1.2 million employees, roughly 2 percent of the total population. Improving the civil service, for them, initially involved making it smaller, or downsizing. The unanimous acceptance of problem definition, as well as their substantive knowledge of the issue, directed the attention of the OCSC's working group to civil service manpower policy, the first area they sought to reform. As one personnel analyst who later became head of the manpower planning unit put it, "We are familiar with the issue and the problem [of civil service growth]. We have information about the number of civil servants and employees, their position levels, and the increase in government structures. No doubt, the OCSC already has the motivation to deal with this issue. And the transition to Mr. Anand's administration opened up the opportunity for us to rigorously control civil service growth" (from the author's notes, August 1999 interview with Jarinee Iam-sa-ard, personnel analyst and head of the manpower planning unit, at OCSC, Bangkok, Thailand).

By applying their knowledge of organizational procedure concerning civil service manpower policy, the OCSC dominated working groups effectively. The limited policy alternatives they discussed were how to control the proliferation of administrative structures and the number of civil servants and government

employees. The working groups decided that one of the solutions to the problem of staff increases was to freeze civil service recruitment, which was the short-term measure that Anand had introduced during his first few months in office.

Since freezing civil service employment was the most decisive policy that the Thai government had ever made in this area, these working groups agreed that Anand's initiative was to be continued for another five years. Throughout the period of implementing the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB) plan, starting in fiscal year 1992 to fiscal year 1997, the government would not employ more civil servants or employees. These working groups also suggested that manpower reallocation and redeployment should be attempted as the first alternative to recruitment (OCSC 1991).

In order to implement their recommendations effectively, the working group demanded that every government department report expected vacancies from retirement to the CSC and related central personnel agencies one year in advance. These central agencies, in turn, would examine and decide if the vacancies were to be filled, or to be allocated to understaffed units. The CSC, its members argued, was to make decisions in relation to the task requirements of those government agencies.

As far as the diversification of administrative units was concerned, the OCSC's working group also proposed that no new administrative units would be set up during the five years between 1992-1997. However, the OCSC's desire to prevent the establishment of new administrative units at all levels was prevented by existing legislation related to state administration. As a result, the working group put forward the proposal that establishing any new division would not be allowed during fiscal years 1992-1997 (OCSC 1991).

Another issue that OCSC's working group discussed was whether any exemptions would be allowed regarding control of the number of civil service personnel and diversification of administrative units. Despite the frustration caused by policy loopholes that had contributed to the failure of implementing reform in the past, the working groups acknowledged that the cabinet was to decide if unavoidable needs for employing new staff requested by government agencies were to be approved. However, the OCSC insisted firmly that it was to be the only central personnel agency that advised the cabinet. Thus, other personnel agencies wishing to be exempt from this restriction needed to submit such requests to the OCSC (OCSC 1991).

### *Controlling Manpower Information*

Effective curbing of civil service growth depended largely on available manpower information. The working group raised the problem that this information was scattered among various government agencies. If manpower information and its reporting was to be used as a crucial tool for controlling the increase in government personnel and for effective manpower planning, a manpower information center had to be created (OCSC 1991).

While controlling manpower information and its reporting could have meant a symbolic victory over other agencies, the OCSC's working groups were well aware that other central coordinating agencies, namely the CGD, had equally significant information on the number of personnel and their costs. As much as the OCSC wanted to centralize the reporting system, it could not do so at will. As

a result, the working group suggested that the OCSC and the CGD were to be jointly the center for reviewing civil service manpower status, and analyzing manpower utilization and public personnel costs (OCSC 1991). They were also required to produce a yearly report for the cabinet.

Although the OCSC could not monopolize manpower information, the working groups agreed that the OCSC was to play a decisive role in determining and controlling the overall number of government personnel at the macro level. Its immediate task, as the working group suggested, was to work closely with the NESDB to forecast and formulate a civil service manpower plan for the period between fiscal years 1992-1996. It was for this task that the OCSC claimed that the manpower information center needed to be established under its umbrella, and that it was to provide ministries and departments with its standard and practice for manpower planning.

### *Early Retirement*

The OCSC's working groups also discussed the means of encouraging civil servants and government employees to leave the service voluntarily, so as to downsize the civil service. This solution, previously discussed in the cabinet meeting on 2 April 1991, was strongly advocated by both the OCSC and Ministry of Finance. However, since the idea was new and the Thai government had never attempted it before, it needed more careful thought. The working group therefore suggested that the OCSC and the CGD should work closely with related central personnel agencies to study and formulate an early retirement project, aiming to reduce the number of civil servants. It took more than five years before this project was to move off the drawing board.

In general, the plan for improving the civil service system and public personnel management consisted mainly of measures for controlling civil service growth. However, downsizing was not the only concern. Incorporated in this plan were issues other than manpower policy. The next section outlines these issues

### **Improving Administrative Processes**

As a former civil servant and executive in the private sector, Anand announced from the beginning that bureaucratic red tape was to be cut. Apart from advocating the notion of transparency that had become prominent previously but later faded from his agenda, Anand was well known for his efficient approach to management. The prime minister's reputation was translated into tangible actions by the OCSC's working group. They defined the concentration of decision-making power at the top of departments and ministries as a potential source of bureaucratic red tape that reduced administrative efficiency. They called for the delegation of decision making to lower levels. Another recommendation involved shortening the decision-making process. Any approval process needed to be redesigned in order that there were no more than two levels of review before issues reached decision makers (OCSC 1991). To achieve this, the working group agreed that the OCSC was to systematize and standardize the decision allocation system for the whole civil service (OCSC 1991).

As the prime objective of restructuring work processes was to improve public service delivery, the OCSC working group encouraged office automation be adopted by every government agency. Since this project contained both technical and managerial aspects, the working group suggested that the OCSC, BOB, and the Ministry of Finance jointly conduct the feasibility study.

### **Improving Public Personnel Management**

Among measures included in the plan for improving the civil service system and public personnel management, issues involving personnel management processes were broadly recommended. The reason for this was given by one OCSC official as “a move to delegate personnel power at the operational level to line agencies and other central personnel agencies.” The OCSC’s working group enumerated ways to improve recruitment, selection, and appointment processes. They did not suggest anything other than “calling for every central personnel agency to improve what they had already been doing” (from notes of a confidential interview conducted by the author, August 1999 at the OCSC, Bangkok, Thailand). But strategically incorporated within this section of the proposal was a clause that gave the OCSC the leading role in improving the employment termination system that aimed to enable the removal of underperforming civil servants and employees (OCSC 1991).

The last and also the most abstract part of the proposed reform plan involved training, developing, and maintaining the merit system. The working groups emphasized that training and development was to be considered as investment in human resources, and that the OCSC was to be the center for developing and improving training programs. They also called for stricter disciplinary actions, the promotion of public service ethics, and maintaining the honor of a civil service career.

In October 1991, no more than four months after the reform project started, the OCSC working group completed their draft proposal. During that period, the OCSC’s acting secretary general, Professor Wijit, showed strong leadership and commitment. As Theerayudth Lorlertrat of the OCSC commented in the interview previously mentioned, “he was well informed and regularly met with working groups many times each week, including on weekends and after office hours, to review progress.”

### **Deliberating the Plan for Improving the Civil Service System**

#### *Mobilizing Support from Politicians and Bureaucrats*

Since the draft proposal involved issues that could be controversial among the general public, and civil servants in particular, the OCSC needed support to ensure that the draft proposal was acceptable to all parties involved. To gain acceptance, the OCSC organized a two-day seminar at a hotel in the seaside resort at Pattaya on 19 and 20 October 1991. High-ranking bureaucrats from every ministry and central government agencies, as well as academics and experts on civil service and public personnel management, were invited. The aim of this seminar was to make a final review before submitting the draft proposal to

the cabinet. Deputy Prime Minister Meechai, who was the CSC's chairman, agreed to preside over this two-day forum.

During the seminar participants discussed many points, but eventually agreed in principle with the OCSC's draft proposal. Consequently, the OCSC did not make major changes to the draft and was therefore successful in securing its own reform direction, especially with regard to the section on the employment freeze.

Another form of political support came from the prime minister himself. Although Anand was not present at the seminar, he was closely informed about the reform project. But the critical moment was on 2 December 1991 when the prime minister paid a visit to the OCSC. Professor Wijit and his deputies took the opportunity during the luncheon meeting between the prime minister and OCSC's top officials to brief Anand on the progress of the draft proposal. According to Theerayudth Lorlertrat in the interview previously mentioned, Anand was said to be satisfied with what he had been told.

Having gained support from both civil servants and leading politicians, the OCSC was confident enough to submit the reform proposal to the cabinet for consideration. Without any hurdles, it gained approval from the cabinet when they convened on 7 January 1992. On 10 January 1992, the cabinet's Secretariat Office then circulated the formal cabinet resolution on the measures to improve the civil service system and public personnel management to ministries, central agencies, and public personnel agencies. As the resolution was an executive order, all government agencies were obliged to abide by this resolution.

### **Changing OCSC's Leadership After Approval of the Reform Plan**

The resolution on improving the civil service system not only represented the fruit of the OCSC's effort that past year, but also signalled the time to change the OCSC's leadership. At this point Professor Wijit, who had vowed to return to his former post after completing the reform project, kept his promise by requesting that Prime Minister Anand return him to his role as permanent secretary of the Ministry of University Affairs. He resumed his old post on 3 February 1992, and the cabinet then appointed Wilas Singahavisai, an OCSC deputy secretary general, as OCSC's general secretary.

Wilas' path to the top of the OCSC might well have been smooth, but the path of implementing the cabinet resolution on improving the civil service system (the pet project he helped shape when he was in the OCSC's working group) was not. Whether or not the resolution was a new dawn in civil service reform in Thailand remains to be seen in the next event, policy implementation.

## **IMPLEMENTING THE CABINET RESOLUTION OF 7 JANUARY 1992**

### **Dealing with the Reaction of Agencies and Ministries**

A few months after the Cabinet Secretariat circulated the cabinet resolution on improving the civil service system to all government agencies, it seemed that some agencies faced difficulties in implementing it. These difficulties stemmed mainly from the employment freeze and redeployment measures—the issue that the OCSC wished to have a firm grip on. The reaction came from both central

coordinating agencies with overlapping personnel jurisdictions and from some line ministries.

The problem first came from the BOB, which euphemistically claimed that the cabinet resolution undermined its authority over public personnel management. In its memo dated 4 June 1992, the BOB reiterated its jurisdiction over and its responsibility for hiring and firing government permanent employees. But in the cabinet resolution based on the OCSC's proposal, their responsibility was shifted and reassigned to the OCSC. The BOB, therefore, wanted the cabinet to reassure it that its authority over this employment was not encroached on, and that the Cabinet Secretariat should clarify its concern and inform government agencies accordingly.

A month after the BOB's reaction, the university affairs minister wrote to the cabinet secretary in his capacity as chairman of the University Personnel Commission. In a letter dated 27 July 1992, he opposed what other central personnel agencies had accepted—the OCSC's increasing role in filtering requests for employing more staff. He wrote: "The Ministry of University Affairs has been very prudent in increasing personnel. The University Personnel Commission (UPC) has only approved requests that have real need, in order that we have enough staff to deal with our responsibilities. The cabinet resolution on improving the civil service system, allotting to the CSC the authority to double-check our requests, complicates the process and causes repetition, since both UPC and the BOB have already approved the requests. This runs against the policy of cutting red tape and shortening work procedure that the government also wants to promote."

The above rationales led the university affairs minister to ask the cabinet to review the resolution, as well as reconsider if the double-check process conducted by the CSC could be lifted.

Another problem of implementation—also brought up by the Ministry of University Affairs—was that the nature of its ministry was different from other government agencies, and that the resolution on the employment freeze could not be realistically applied. The minister therefore requested that the resolution on the employment freeze not be imposed on universities.<sup>24</sup>

### **Revising the Resolution**

Upon receiving counterarguments from the BOB and the UPC, the cabinet secretary asked the OCSC to respond. The OCSC made clear its intention in the cabinet submission dated 6 August 1992 that the need for the CSC to double-check staff requests was a response to the failure to control manpower increases in the past. It argued that, within the short implementation period, the new practices proved effective, although stricter control was still needed. The cabinet had assigned the OCSC with the power to filter requests for real and unavoidable recruiting in order to control civil service growth effectively. In fiscal year 1991-1992, the OCSC received 5,241 of these requests, but only 3,217 of them, or 61.38 percent, were approved. The rest were scrapped.

The OCSC went on to argue for the double-checking by pointing out other central personnel agencies which were, in practice, not effective enough in controlling their personnel increase and filtering requests. As a result,

government agencies asked the cabinet for exemptions. However, the OCSC responded to the remarks of the BOB and the UPC positively.

The OCSC agreed that the BOB should resume the role of controlling requests for increasing permanent government employees. It also took the UPC's point regarding the cutting of administrative red tape further by suggesting that the cabinet should allot the power on this matter to central personnel agencies, a move which reduced the cabinet's power to approve requests for recruitment. To simplify the decision-making process as well as to relieve the cabinet's burden, government agencies did not need to submit requests to the cabinet that had already been approved by central personnel agencies. The OCSC also supported this, because by doing so, government agencies and central personnel agencies would feel and be motivated by their sense of self-responsibility.

There were two points, however, that the OCSC insisted upon. First, although it agreed that the policy on the employment freeze and redeployment was not to apply to medical personnel, as well as teaching and research staff in universities, administrative personnel working in universities were to comply with the resolution. Second, it insisted that at the end of every fiscal year, central personnel agencies must report numbers of requests for unavoidable recruitment requirements which had been approved, as well as any redeployment cases, to the OCSC. The purpose of this requirement was to monitor, analyze, and evaluate manpower management from a macro perspective. It was also the OCSC's responsibility to report the utilization of manpower in the civil service to the cabinet.

When the cabinet met on 8 September 1992, they approved the OCSC's submission. To emphasize this, a cabinet ruling generated at least two changes in manpower practices. First, central personnel agencies were successful in preventing the OCSC's attempt to encroach on their jurisdiction. This resulted from the fact that the cabinet and the OCSC assigned them power over the approval of requests for unavoidable need to increase personnel. Second, when such responsibility was handed back to other central personnel agencies, the special subcommission set up as part of the CSC to consider special requests from other central personnel agencies was disbanded.

Overall, the cabinet specifically, and politicians in general, lost their power to control increases in civil service staff. The resolution on improving the civil service system was the last of its kind before the general election was held in March 1992. But before Anand would hand over the administration to the newly elected government, which was expected to be inaugurated in May 1992, he managed to amend the Civil Service Act of 1975. This was one of the most important events in the history of reform in the Thai Civil Service, which we will examine in the next section.

### **AMENDING THE CIVIL SERVICE ACT (1975) AND RELATED ACTS**

Most of the issues incorporated in the plan for improving the civil service system, as we have seen, were carried out by cabinet resolutions and the prime minister's orders. Since most of those issues involved changes in the executive branch, the cabinet reserved the right to change or cancel those resolutions or orders as they wished. However, some issues which the OCSC's working group had suggested

required changes in legislation concerning the jurisdiction of government agencies. This kind of change ordinarily required parliamentary approval.

The idea of reforming civil service legislation was not new to OCSC officials.<sup>25</sup> When Professor Wijit was appointed as acting secretary general of the OCSC in April 1991, he had already heard from his senior bureaucrats that if the civil service reform project was to be carried out effectively and yield good results, the OCSC needed to be empowered. The reform-minded acting general secretary was convinced by OCSC senior officials that the reform project, which was Professor Wijit's most important mandate, would not achieve its intended aims unless the civil service legislation was reformed.

In persuading Professor Wijit of the need for legal reform, OCSC senior officials related the issue of the civil service employment freeze (that was high on the prime minister's agenda) to the need for legislative amendment. They claimed that failure to control the proliferation of administrative units resulted from the fact that central agencies had no clear, legal responsibility to carry out administrative restructuring. Despite that fact, the OCSC had to deal with the consequence of the civil service's overgrowth.

The two acts that OCSC officials wanted to see amended were the Organization of State Administration Act of 1932 and the Civil Service Act of 1975. These acts provided the legal basis for organizing and structuring government institutions, as well as managing public personnel. According to the OCSC, changing some articles of these acts to increase its jurisdiction would be essential for effective civil service reform.

Professor Wijit agreed with the OCSC on the need to amend civil service-related law on the grounds that it was consistent with government policy. One of Anand's strategies was to reduce bureaucratic red tape and inefficiency; as he declared to the National Legislative Council on 4 April 1991, there was a need to reform outdated legislation. Professor Wijit also believed that his immediate superior, Meechai, who was also involved in the government-wide legal reform, would lend full support.

Next, activities concerning the amendment of civil service-related acts will be described. These activities reveal how central government agencies, namely the OCSC and the BOB, used the amendments to the Organization of State Administration Act and the Civil Service Act as tools for strengthening the power of the civil service in general, and for expanding their domains over civil service policy as well as public personnel management.

### **Amending the State Administration Act of 1932**

In the past, neither the BOB nor the OCSC had direct responsibility over the establishment of new government agencies above the divisional level. If the government wanted to set up new departments or ministries, the Prime Minister's Secretariat Office would initiate the administrative procedure. This involved seeking OCSC and BOB opinions in relation to personnel and budgetary matters, respectively. In contrast to the earlier period when the Prime Minister's Administrative Reform Committee existed and played a crucial role in providing advice for the cabinet, there was no reform committee in 1991-1992.

The need to control the burgeoning of governmental organizations led OCSC senior bureaucrats who formed Professor Wijit's working group to assert that

increasing the OCSC's role by giving them more say on the issue of setting up new ministries or departments would increase their capacity to deal with the problem of civil service growth and to position them as the true guardians of the civil service and merit system.

To make the amendment acceptable to the cabinet, the OCSC working group formed alliances with the BOB, which shared the same interest in controlling bureaucratic diversification. OCSC officials raised the issue in one of its meetings held during April and May 1991. They encouraged representatives from the BOB, who were invited to discuss this particular issue, to join them in changing the Organization of State Administration Act of 1932.

As one might expect, they agreed that the Organization of State Administration Act needed to be amended in order that the OCSC and the BOB would have greater legal rights to advise the cabinet directly on the issue of restructuring governmental organization. OCSC officials saw this as a logical move, since both agencies were involved in controlling human and financial resources.

After agreeing on the proposed changes, the OCSC's working group started drafting the amended bill. After working closely with Deputy Prime Minister Meechai in the drafting process, their proposals for the new bill were fully endorsed and the cabinet agreed to proceed with the deliberation process in the National Legislative Assembly. On 6 March 1992, the Assembly passed the new Organization of State Administration Act (1991), in which Article 7 stipulated that the OCSC and the BOB had the duty of advising the cabinet with regard to the structural design of government departments. The new act not only reemphasized the role of the OCSC in providing necessary manpower and the BOB in allocating budgets, but ultimately it provided considerable administrative power for both agencies to inform cabinet decisions. After working closely with line departments, the OCSC and the BOB would submit their opinions to the cabinet for approval.

### **Amending the Civil Service Act of 1975**

The Civil Service Act of 1975 was a main source of the OCSC's jurisdiction. It provided the legal basis for all aspects of personnel management in the public sector. Amending the Civil Service Act, therefore, was another important goal that the OCSC working group aimed to achieve as part of their reform project.

The OCSC working group began reviewing the Civil Service Act of 1975 in April 1991, along with the amendment of the Organization of State Administration Act. As the single, central agency responsible for implementing this act, the OCSC working group could propose changes to their own advantage without involving other central agencies. The working group's aim in revising this act was to expand its authority over the management of the civil service, and reduce political influence over the appointment of senior bureaucrats. This would shift the OCSC's role from performing personnel administration at the operational level, as they had in the past, to performing an advisory role on wider civil service policy issues. The working group also proposed that the scope of the new act be expanded to include all kinds of government civilian personnel, regardless of their respective central personnel agencies.

During the drafting process, the OCSC working group was greatly concerned that important issues, such as human resources planning, as well as structural and procedural reforms across governmental organizations, be subject to OCSC jurisdiction. This placed the OCSC at the gateway to the cabinet. As a result, the OCSC was to be the single agency to advise the cabinet and the prime minister on all issues relating to the management of the civil service.

The OCSC not only intended to expand its jurisdiction, but also to increase its responsibility within the civil service as a whole, by reducing political power to appoint senior civil servants. It claimed that civil servants, especially those in the top ranks, had long suffered from unfair treatment by their political masters. According to Article 44 of the Civil Service Act of 1975, ministers could appoint or transfer permanent secretaries of ministries, directors general, and deputy directors general of departments. The OCSC echoed the opinion of the majority of civil servants that political interference in the neutrality of the bureaucracy was a serious problem.

Political interference over the appointment and transfer of senior bureaucrats, according to the OCSC working group, should be reduced by limiting ministers' powers of appointment to only permanent secretaries and secretaries general, the most senior posts in ministries. Permanent secretaries were to have their own managerial right to appoint or transfer their own staff. This would make permanent secretaries accountable to ministers, but would also increase their power. It was seen by the working group as a way to insulate civil servants from ill-intentioned politicians. These changes, therefore, appeared in Article 25 of the bill.

After months of drafting, the cabinet agreed to the draft legislation in July 1991. The bill was then sent to await the approval of the National Legislative Council, where hundreds of other bills were in a queue. Eventually, the Assembly passed the new Civil Service Act on 6 March 1992, and it became effective and enforceable on 1 April 1992 when Thai civil servants were celebrating the sixty-fourth Civil Service Day.

The formal jurisdiction newly acquired from these two amended acts prompted many senior OCSC officials to claim that all matters regarding administrative and structural reform (in establishing new departments) were the sole responsibility of the OCSC. This also resulted in what Bhidya Borwornwattana (1994) learned, that some OCSC senior officials showed strong resistance to the prime minister's order in appointing an administrative reform committee in charge of advising the prime minister on the issue of administrative reform.

Borwornwattana also recorded the first test case of civil service power that took place in the Ministry of Industry a year later, in January 1993. The case showed that the secretary general of the Industry Ministry exercised the power conferred on him by the new Civil Service Act by refusing to remove the director general of the Department of Mineral Resources, who was in conflict with the industry minister. The only way the minister could do so was to ask the cabinet to transfer the secretary general to an inactive post and replace him with the minister's candidate.

## CONCLUSION

The story of civil service reform in Thailand during 1991-1992 reveals many analytical points that provide important insights into civil service reform processes. The case tracks the process of bureaucratic reform, including how reform decisions were increasingly taken out of the hands of politicians. It also illustrates the development of an organizational strategy and associated capabilities, as well as effectively displaying the roles of policy entrepreneurs and strong leadership in the reform processes. The most important reform of this period, the employment freeze introduced in 1992, had a limited impact on the size of the civil service, which continued to grow at roughly pre-Anand levels. However, more important than civil service numbers, the longer-term significance of this period of reform was that mechanisms for controlling the size of the civil service had been developed.

As the title of this article suggests, civil service reform in Thailand was both constrained and facilitated by bureaucratic routines. These routines, on one hand, constrained the way in which civil service policy issues were framed and how reform alternatives were formulated and decided. On the other hand, changing or strengthening bureaucratic routines can be seen in itself as capacity building for civil service reform, since knowledge for reform was embedded in these routines. The tension between these constraining and facilitating forces shapes the reform outcome. From this perspective, which is more focused and coherent than pinpointing variety in the reform processes, at least four interrelated points concerning the making of reform choices deserve brief treatment here.

### **Bureaucratic Routines and Civil Service Reform Processes**

There is no doubt that the coup and the establishment of an interim government opened a window of opportunity for civil service reform issues in general (see Kingdon 1995). But the way in which this window was exploited was largely constrained by bureaucratic decision routines. As the case evidence suggests, Prime Minister Anand could not retain anticorruption issues on his government's agenda when he faced tight budget restrictions. The first part of the article exhibited the explanations of Anand's rhetoric turnaround in the light of the agenda-setting framework. But the prompt promotion of the issue of bureaucratic inefficiency to the prime minister's agenda was largely a result of routines that usually guided the prime minister's decisions. The prudent fiscal tradition of the Thai government, as well as the routine of cost control exercised by central coordinating agencies, diverted the prime minister's attention to cost cutting issues—a programmatic choice which had long been advocated by the OCSC and the BOB.

The effect of routines is also particularly evident in the process of formulating options for civil service reform. Anand's application of the usual action channels such as the CSC for making and implementing civil service policy is an example of how routines facilitated the prime minister's decisions on civil service issues. This, consequently, placed the OCSC as the lead organization for civil service policymaking. It was, therefore, almost inevitable that routines embedded in the OCSC were reflected in choices for reform proposals.

### **Routines and Capacity Building**

It would be imprecise to hypothesize that bureaucratic routines are to be blamed for impeding Anand's effort by constraining his reform choices. Embedded within bureaucratic routines, as we have seen in this narrative, are both substantive and procedural knowledge about human resource management and organization of the civil service. As the case evidence suggests, the OCSC was successful in creating routines in manpower planning and reporting practices which were instrumental in controlling the growth of the civil service and, hence, reduced personnel costs. The OCSC was also successful in amending civil service-related laws, which led to increases in its jurisdiction and capacity for implementing the reform program. In short, routines embedded in the OCSC's work organization motivated OCSC officials to commit themselves to the reform processes. The act of strengthening or improving routines contributed to OCSC's capacity building.

### **Entrepreneurship in the Civil Service Reform Process**

At least two types of entrepreneurs existed in the Thai case—political and administrative entrepreneurs. The distinction is analytically useful, because different types of entrepreneurs contributed to different processes of civil service reform.

The Thai case shows that bureaucratic entrepreneurs outperformed political entrepreneurs in the civil service reform processes, although it is clear from the case evidence that Anand tried to play an entrepreneurial role in the predecisional stage of civil service reform by promoting anticorruption issues. However, the fact remains that he did not effectively intervene in the processes of alternative formulation and program implementation. In this case, Anand could be a mere "issue entrepreneur" (Eyestone 1978) who facilitated the issue translation process.

It was bureaucratic entrepreneurs, not political entrepreneurs, who influenced the reform processes most. But identifying individual bureaucratic entrepreneurs in the reform narrative of the Thai case is problematic, as entrepreneurial functions were often filled cooperatively. They would, therefore, be best described as "institutional entrepreneurs."<sup>26</sup> The central coordinating agency, the OCSC (which exploited the ambiguity in defining the civil service's problems [Brintnall 1979], and advocated and was strongly committed to the downsizing program and improving related human resource management practices), should be named an entrepreneurial agency.

Bureaucratic policy entrepreneurs can be criticized for merely preserving their own interests; the OCSC successfully expanded its jurisdiction over public personnel policy. But at the same time, its motivation to fulfill its mandate as the most important central personnel agency and control the size of the civil service by strengthening its routines, also builds its own administrative capacity to do so.

### **Civil Service Policymaking and Implementation: Bureaucratic Polity Revisited**

The overall picture of any policymaking will be distorted if it is not viewed within a broader institutional context, namely, types of polity. I described Anand's administration as a bureaucratic polity. Within this polity, both military and civilian bureaucrats dominated the policymaking processes, and other societal or extrabureaucratic forces were effectively excluded. However, civil service policy change was a result of intense interactions within the polity itself.<sup>27</sup> Two modes of interaction, which affect the direction, scope, content, and pace of civil service reform, can be identified.

First, civil service reform and changes under Anand's administration reflect the interplay between the military-backed government and civilian bureaucrats. As revealed, the two groups fought to control the reform processes. It seems that civilian bureaucrats won the reform warfare by shifting decisions for reform away from politicians. As a result, civilian bureaucrats in the central coordinating agencies influenced the whole process of civil service reform, ranging from framing civil service problems to formulating reform resolutions and implementation. They consequently influenced the direction, scope, and content of the reform program.

Second, another front of the reform warfare involved the conflict and competition among central coordinating agencies and between line ministries and central coordinating agencies.<sup>28</sup> The strategies that the OCSC used to control the reform process—jurisdiction encroachments and boundary spanning—affected the degree to which reform capacity was built. The case evidence suggests that the content, scope, and pace of civil service reform during Anand's regime was partly an outcome of compromise between central coordinating agencies. In turn, this compromise constrained the effort of the OCSC in building capacity for civil service reform.

## NOTES

1. Following Barzelay (2001), I define public management policy as government-wide institutional rules and organizational routines which aim to guide, motivate, and control public service organizations.

2. This article is part of my Ph.D. thesis, entitled "Managing Civil Service Reform in Thailand 1980-1999: Analytic Narratives."

3. Painter (2001) conceptualizes a capacity-building triangle consisting of administrative capacity, policy capacity, and state capacity. In this article, capacity building refers to the first two capacities.

4. See Barzelay (2001) for detailed analysis of New Public Management benchmark countries including the United Kingdom, New Zealand, and Australia.

5. Identifying reform processes in linear fashion is analytically useful for constructing reform events. But narrating these events could be done interactively, and not necessarily linearly. The emphasis is on process dynamics.

6. The term was used by Fred Riggs to describe a configuration where bureaucrats (both military and civil servants) dominate the country's governance and extrabureaucratic forces were weak and consequently excluded from the policymaking process.

7. The term is intentionally used to refer to a situation where participants in the reform warfare (e.g., politicians and bureaucrats) engage themselves in fighting for control of the bureaucratic reform processes.

8. Anand pursued a diplomatic career and was appointed permanent secretary of foreign affairs. He was forced (by the military) to resign because of his pro-communist China policy. He then joined the Saha Union Group, a textile conglomerate.

9. It was revealed that guilty verdicts were returned only in insignificant corruption cases; only small fish got hooked.

10. The Thai government fiscal year starts on 1 October and ends on 30 September of the subsequent year.
11. The exchange rate during this time was 25 baht per dollar.
12. Circular letter from the Cabinet Secretariat dated 15 April 1991.
13. Ibid.
14. My dissertation deals with this issue as part of the activities leading to downsizing the civil service.
15. The National Legislative Assembly acted as the Parliament.
16. From the prime minister's address to the National Legislative Council, 4 April 1991.
17. Although the issue of transparency reform is important and contemporary to the Thai political and administrative context, it is not the focal event of this article and deserves its own detailed study.
18. The program aimed to scrutinize the progress Anand had made since he assumed office.
19. Minutes of meeting of the Special Subcommittee, 8 October 1991 (5/2534).
20. Minutes of meeting, 31 May 1991.
21. Minutes of the meeting between ministries' head of personnel section and OCSC officials on 31 May 1991.
22. Ibid.
23. The OCSC always argued against the diversification of central personnel agencies but failed to stop it in the past, resulting in eleven central personnel agencies so far. Some public administration academics in Thailand also called for the unification of these personnel agencies.
24. In the cabinet resolution, requests for increasing teaching and research staff for areas in which recruitment was competitive could be allowed.
25. The Civil Service Act had evolved through a series of minor amendments.
26. See Tabb (1995) for the concept of institutional entrepreneur. Like Tabb, Campbell (1989), who also studied policy entrepreneurs in Japanese civil service, pointed out that issue sponsorship in most cases is taken on by agency, and most policy entrepreneurs are bureaucrats.
27. Allison and Zelikow's Model III of governmental politics offers a similar interpretation of public policy changes.
28. Scholars on Thai public administration have also observed the same point. Seminal works in this area include Bowornwatthana's (1988, 1989).

