

24th session of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration

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Agenda item 8: Strategies for changing mindsets in the public sector, retaining talent and attracting younger workers

We would like to share with the Committee a subnational strategy that the State of Minas Gerais in Brazil has successfully been implementing for decades with the purpose of changing mindsets, retaining talent and attracting younger workers.

The general idea, as conceived in the late 80's, was to create a specific career path in public administration that would be accessible only to individuals who completed a 4-years bachelor degree in public administration.

This career should be intersectional, meaning that the student should be prepared to work in many different branches of government, from public finance to healthcare or infrastructure programs, according to their talents and interests. It should also be relevant, opening up public leadership opportunities to its members.

The education provided should be excellent, based on state-of-the-art principles of public administration. An entrance examination must be the opening gate for the interest applicants. A scholarship to cover some living costs could be allowed to students. After joining the public workforce, a compatible salary and job stability would be granted.

In 1987 the pilot was launched. It would be provided by Fundacao Joao Pinheiro, a governmental autarchy dedicated to research in the public area. It was named CSAP – Superior Course in Public Administration.

After a few political backlashes, the course became annually available, with regular entrances from 1994 to today. Circa 35 graduates join the public career every year, contributing to the refreshment of the workforce.

From the beginning of the programme up to 2015 the State had difficulty in retaining these talents, because the salary was not up to careers offered by other governmental branches of the federal government. It was common back then that students, after a few years from graduation, left the career in search for better opportunities. After 2015, thanks to a reform that led to better salaries the withdrawals dramatically reduced.

Nowadays there are more than 1200 of these experts in public policy and governmental management, currently working in the state of Minas Gerais. They function as a network across secretaries in many different areas. Their interactions facilitate governmental processes and contributes to more efficient and integrated actions.

In addition, as years passed by, they also became a strong workforce in leadership positions.

Elected officials have this workforce pool at their disposal to form a government, so they do not have to rely only in political appointed leaders, who can have a longer learning curve or face difficulties to address public administration roundabouts when recruited from the private sector.

The current government was very enthusiast of the professionals from theses careers to high-ranking positions; appoint a relevant number of them to Secretariat, undersecretaries and authorities from independent agencies.

But there are also some aspects of this strategy that requires attention: it is not a low-cost strategy; the first results are not reaped in the short term, so it is not an easy political choice; the course must encompass all views and allow discussions to prevent bias; the number of spots should be calculated in order to allow balance between entrances and withdrawals, like retirements; the career should be competitive; the selection should be fair and open.

In conclusion, the CSAP model has proven to be an effective strategy for attracting, retaining, and developing talent in the public sector in Minas Gerais. It has contributed to a more professionalized public service workforce, offering numerous leadership opportunities and ensuring that public administration is in the hands of well-trained and committed professionals.

While there are challenges, the long-term benefits of this strategy for both the state and its citizens are clear. It provides a valuable model for other regions and countries seeking to reform their public sector workforce and cultivate a new generation of effective public leaders.