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## «SKILLS APPROACH» AS A STAGE OF PUBLIC SERVICE STAFF RECRUITMENT

**Abstract.** This article discusses the revision of civil service recruitment format. We propose to upgrade the existing procedure of competitive selection for an interview to determine competencies in order to find talents to implement strategic and current government tasks. Global practices of personnel selection is aimed at finding candidates who meet the requirements set by public bodies in relation to the competencies on a permanent basis, proving their effectiveness. The civil service of Kazakhstan, from the very first days of independence and up to this day, is in the process of change and improvement. The country's leadership emphasizes the importance of forming professional government apparatus.

**Key words:** *competencies, competence-based approach, interview to determine the competence, improving public administration, openness and transparency of competitive selection, selection methods, interview as a selection tool.*

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## ҚҰЗЫРЕТТІЛІГІ БОЙЫНША ІРІКТЕУ – МЕМЛЕКЕТТІК ҚЫЗМЕТ ПЕРСОНАЛЫН ҚАБЫЛДАУДЫҢ БІР КЕЗЕҢІ

**Аңдатпа.** Мақалада мемлекеттік қызметшілерді қызметке қабылдау форматын қайта қарау мәселесі талқыланады. Мемлекеттің стратегиялық және ағымдағы міндеттерін іске асыру

барысында, таланттарды іздеу мақсатында, құзыреттіліктерді анықтау үшін әңгімелесуге конкурстық іріктеудің қолданыстағы тәртібін жаңартуды ұсынамыз. Персоналды іріктеу тұрғысынан әлемдік тәжірибе мемлекеттік органның талаптарына қол жетімді құзыреттіліктер бойынша олардың тиімділігін дәлелдейтін тұрақты негізде кеңес беретін кадрларды табуға бағытталған. Қазақстанның мемлекеттік қызметі тәуелсіздіктің алғашқы күндерінен бастау алып, қазіргі уақытта жетілу кезеңінде. Мемлекет басшылығы кәсіби мемлекеттік аппаратты қалыптастыруға ерекше назар аударады.

***Түйін сөздер:** құзыреттілік, құзыреттілік тәсілі, құзыреттілікті анықтау сұхбаты, мемлекеттік басқаруды жетілдіру, конкурстық іріктеу әдіснамалары мен сұхбаттардың ашықтығы мен айқындығы, сұхбаттасу іріктеп алу құралы ретінде.*

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## **КОМПЕТЕНТНОСТНЫЙ ОТБОР КАК ЭТАП НАЙМА ПЕРСОНАЛА ГОСУДАРСТВЕННОЙ СЛУЖБЫ**

**Аннотация.** В данной статье рассмотрен вопрос о пересмотре формата найма служащих государственного аппарата. В целях поиска талантов для реализации стратегических и текущих задач государства нами предлагается модернизация действующей процедуры конкурсного отбора на собеседование по определению компетенций. Мировая практика в части отбора персонала нацелена на поиск кадров, соответствующих требованиям государственного органа по имеющимся компетенциям на постоянной основе, доказывая свою эффективность. Государственная служба Казахстана с первых дней независимости и на текущий момент находится в процессе изменения и совершенствования. Руководство страны особое внимание уделяет формированию профессионального государственного аппарата.

***Ключевые слова:** компетенции, компетентностный подход, собеседование на определение компетенции, совершенствование государственного управления, открытость и прозрачность конкурсного отбора, методы отбора, интервью как инструмент отбора.*

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## Introduction

The civil service of independent Kazakhstan is in the process of constant improvement. Particular attention is paid to the formation of a professional state apparatus. Qualified, competent personnel will be able to be competitive on the entire world stage. The topic of the development and modernization of the civil service is reflected in all of the country's priority documents. This underlines its importance and relevance. Over the years of independence, the civil service has experienced three key stages aimed at transforming the state:

1. Adoption and signing of the Presidential Decree “On the Civil Service” (*having the force of Law*). As a result, it established the principles of the civil service, approved the hierarchy of positions, defined the legal status and social guarantees of civil servants and introduced anti-corruption restrictions.

2. Approval of the *Kazakhstan 2030 Strategy*. The policy on the formation of a professional government was implemented with the adoption of the Law “On the Civil Service”.

3. Adoption and implementation of the first iteration of the National Plan *100 Concrete Steps*. The state adopted a completely new law on the civil service [1].

Foremost in the Plan is the improvement of the system of recruitment, training (*retraining*) and promotion of personnel. Modern personnel management tools have been introduced and, as noted in the National Report on the State of the Civil Service, this has improved the quality of civil servants [2].

The principles of all these reforms are based on meritocracy, public accountability and the effectiveness of the state apparatus.

On the world stage, the civil service of Kazakhstan is marked in accordance with international standards in the shape of the World Bank's Government effectiveness index. Kazakhstan's civil service is regularly measured by international organizations: the United Nations Development Programme; the OECD; the World Bank; and the Asian Development Bank.

Thus, the reforms carried out in Kazakhstan in relation to the civil service are positively evaluated by international experts. Expert opinion emphasizes that Kazakhstan was one of the first to introduce an authorized body in the field of the civil service, with selection

for positions through competition and the division of experts into a political and an administrative civil service.

Corresponding to the best international practices are reforms such as implementation of the principles of meritocracy; a new wage system; and a competence-based approach.

### **Research methodology**

The research method of the master's project used comparative analysis to review international experience in recruiting for government positions. We have examined and compared research data on a given topic regarding the professional development as a tool to enhance the professionalization and competitiveness of civil service. The review of international experience demonstrates that countries utilizing competency-based approach to recruit for government positions improve the standard of living for their citizens and facilitate the economic development.

### **Results**

World practice in terms of personnel selection is developing on an ongoing basis. Experts note and recommend further improvement of the state apparatus of the country in accordance with global trends *proving its effectiveness*.

The professionalization of the state apparatus in state policy is, in my opinion, the most important thing. Accordingly, the work of the Presidential Administration and the authorized body in the field of civil service in this area is carried out on an ongoing basis.

In order to study foreign experience in 2017, the Agency considered the international experience of selection for the civil service.

In 2018, at the initiative of the above agency, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development prepared for the first time a *Comparative Analysis of Civil Service Reform* in Kazakhstan and the OECD countries [3].

I would like to note that the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development uses a conceptual framework when assessing the development of the civil service.

This framework is based on 3 stages of development.

Professional civil service	Strategic civil service	Innovative civil service
meritocracy and the possibility to effectively use different talents	efficiency and attractiveness for high-class professionals	mobility, diversity and an open, collaborative culture
qualified and ethical servants and managers effective in everyday processes	proactive, result-oriented servants leaders who are transformational leaders and can manage changes	inquisitive servants adaptive and collaborative leaders

*Figure 1. The main features, characteristics and differences of the types of civil service.*

These stages do not exclude each other: the next stage is based on the achievements of the previous one.

At the moment, the civil service in Kazakhstan is assessed by the OECD experts as a professional one with strategic elements.

A significant influence on the choice of the selection system is the applied model of the civil service – career or positional.

For example, the United Kingdom, the United States, Belgium, Canada, Finland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway and Switzerland use a positional model that is open to external recruitment.

France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Korea, Mexico, Portugal and Spain are examples of a more closed career model.

The career model is characterized by centralized recruitment, promotion and training procedures; while in the positional model these functions are decentralized, i. e. transferred to the level of ministries and agencies.

There has also been a recent trend to mix these models by borrowing certain elements [4].

Based on a comparative analysis of the above-mentioned approaches to selection for civil service, the following conclusions can be drawn:

**First**, most countries have rather high requirements for candidates, both in terms of education, special knowledge and skills and personal qualities;

**Second**, the selection can be made by authorized government agencies, by ministries and agencies themselves, by specially created independent agencies, or even by private recruiting companies (Australia);

**Third**, selection processes are automated in almost all countries: vacancy announcements with detailed job descriptions and competitive procedures are posted on a single centralized resource, or on the websites of government agencies or special agencies, where candidates can apply and even follow all the stages of the selection procedure online (Belgium);

**Fourth**, in some countries, it is virtually impossible to pass the examinations for admission to the higher civil service without undergoing special training, which usually lasts at least a year (France);

**Fifth**, legal knowledge tests are used only in two of the studied OECD countries – Hong Kong and South Korea (knowledge of the Constitution);

**Sixth**, most countries use some form of competency-based selection (both computer-based tests and interviews).

A common trend in the civil service in developed countries is the use of competency-based selection and assessment.

In the United States, Canada and Great Britain, this approach was introduced in the late 1980s.

In the 1990s, it became more widespread.

Competency management tends to be introduced as part of broader reforms to increase the flexibility and efficiency of the state apparatus.

For example, the introduction of competence management in the Netherlands and Belgium was designed to change the bureaucratic culture to a more entrepreneurial one responsive to the challenges of our time and focused on the recipient of services.

Competency management systems are designed to encourage a gradual transition from traditional personnel management to strategic workforce planning for the modern civil service and to train leaders for future reforms.

According to the OECD, the process of increasing objectivity and transparency in selection based on a competency-based approach, focusing on attracting talented employees differing in origin, experience and views (diversity) is necessary for the civil service to respond more effectively to the changing needs of the civil service.

Since the implementation of the new Law and the civil service, there has been a threefold increase in people who started their careers from the initial stages from 2,569 people to 7,862 people, which in turn is

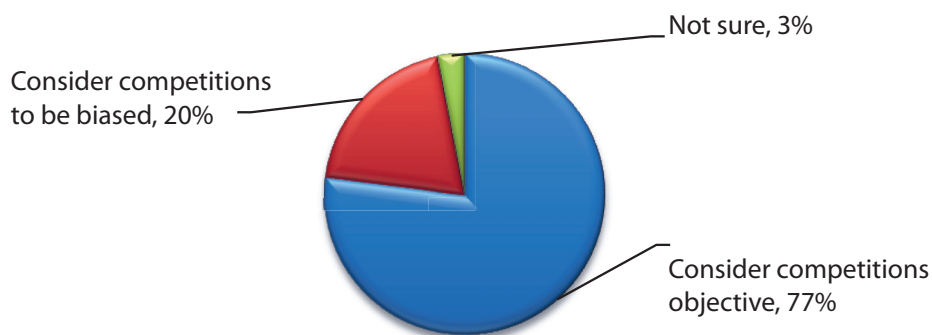
the basis for the implementation of meritocracy in the civil service.

The number of applicants for a single vacancy has doubled. Accordingly, the conditions for career advancement within state bodies have been created.

With the introduction of this approach, the number of civil servants promoted through the institution of internal competitions has almost quadrupled (from 1,348 to 5,186) implementing the principle of meritocracy.

These measures have strengthened the belief in the possibility of promotion solely on merit. According to the results of a social survey conducted in 2018 at the request of the Agency, more than 77% of the population indicated compliance with the principle of meritocracy when making personnel decisions.

According to the results of a sociological study conducted in 2019, 77 % of civil servants consider the selection procedure to be objective and transparent.



***Figure 2. The result of a sociological study regarding the promotion of personnel.***

In 2001, only 39% of respondents trusted the selection system considering protectionism to be a common phenomenon [5].

With the above in mind, taking into account the principles of world practice and the implemented state policy, the authorized body in the field of civil service is working on the revision of the selection system for civil service. New approaches have been proposed within the framework of the Concept of the New Model of Civil Service.

The new approaches provide for a shift from testing candidates' knowledge of the law to determining the level of their abilities.

As you know, at the moment, in order to enter the civil service (*for the first time or again after the termination of the civil service*) citizens have to go through three stages of selection, namely:

- testing for knowledge of the legislation;
- testing to assess the candidates' personal qualities;
- an interview with a state body (*the state body independently assesses the profile knowledge of candidates on a competitive basis*).

However, the current standardized testing aimed at identifying the candidate's level of knowledge of the legislation does not allow determination of the individual characteristics of the applicant and the productivity of the candidate's knowledge.

Often, candidates only learn the laws by heart, engaging their working memory, which in practice does not reflect on the ability to apply this legislation.

Besides, it should be taken into account that during the interview candidates are asked profile questions also formulated from the legislation and their knowledge. According to the authorized body, this does not fully reveal the potential of the applicants, their abilities, knowledge and skills.

We can see an alternative to this method in the selection of personnel based on competence selection.

It should be noted here that the competency-based selection in our country was introduced in the new Law on Civil Service in order to implement the second step of the Plan of the National Plan *100 Concrete Steps*, which states that the selection of candidates for grassroots positions and further career advancement should be based on the COMPETENCE APPROACH. It is implemented as part of testing to determine personal competencies (*the second stage in the selection system*) [6].

Candidates for the civil service are assessed for the skills required by employees to perform their duties effectively.

This test is not a knowledge test. It is aimed at determining the personal qualities of an applicant for civil service. The test questions do not have 'right' answers.

At the same time, all test tasks are related to each other and, in case



of giving false answers, the result may be distorted and incorrectly determine personal qualities.

For example, after successfully passing the legal knowledge test, a candidate for the corps B position will have to undergo another test – the Personal Assessment (*hereinafter referred to as “the PA”*).

The assessment of personal qualities is carried out in accordance with one program.

The test assesses 13 qualities of the candidate.

Legislative Testing Program	Position level	Competencies	PA testing time	Number of tasks
1	Senior management	1.Stress resistance; 2.Initiative; 3.Responsibility 4.Targeting and informing the service consumer; 5.Goodness; 6.Self-development; 7.Responsiveness; 8.Cooperation and collaboration; 9.Management of activities; 10.Decision-making; 11.Leadership; 12.Strategic thinking; 13.Change management.	100 minutes	130 tasks (10 tasks for each quality)
2	Middle level			
3	Grassroots positions			

**Figure 3. PA testing program.**

Since 2019, the PA testing rules have been amended to establish a pass threshold of at least 50%, meaning that 65 questions must be answered correctly to successfully complete the test.

In our opinion, this model represents some specific requirements that a candidate needs to meet. Here, they are not ranked by position and are identical for all levels of administrative civil service, i. e. this type of selection does not take into account the specifics of the activities of the state body, qualification requirements for the position of a particular expert, the level of decisions made, the level of responsibility, etc.

We believe that the competency-based approach implemented in the country is not identical to the OECD policy cited above.

In analyzing the system of state administration, we cannot overlook a number of negative trends that affect the development of civil service.

*First*, let’s take the statistics for the last 10 months of 2020. During this period, there were 85 cases of systemic corruption, 776 reported

crimes and 113 civil servants were convicted. Most crimes were committed in Almaty and Nur-Sultan, with the smallest number in Shymkent and Turkestan province. In social networks, one can often find negative comments on this topic. In some cases, criticism is appropriate. Despite the anti-corruption policy in the country, there are still corrupt officials in the system.

*Second*, one of the hallmarks of a professional state apparatus is an impeccable image – the ethical image of a civil servant.

In order to implement the tasks set by strategic documents to improve the image of the civil service, the Agency carries out extensive preventive work. Thus, according to the reporting data of state bodies, over the past 5 years, the number of ethical offenses and misdemeanors in the country has decreased by 2.3 times. While in 2015 there were 746 of them, by 2019, their number had dropped to 319 [7].

Despite the noticeable dynamics, there are facts of non-compliance with the acting law and violations of the Code of Ethics.

The above data indicates that there are some problems in the ranks of the state apparatus (*both corruption and ethical*).

A certain responsibility, in our opinion, also falls on the poor-quality personnel selection system. In turn, this affects both the development of the state apparatus and the quality of the functional responsibilities performed by experts.

In human-resource management, one of the most important processes is the selection and placement of personnel. These stages affect the overall quality and professionalism of the personnel. Mistakes in hiring personnel have a negative impact on the professional activities of the state body as a whole. This is not to mention the assessment, effectiveness of the employee, training, payment and promotion of experts who are not suitable for the state body.

We note that when hiring personnel (*announcing a competition*), the HR department should first analyze the job description, qualification requirements for the vacant position and, as a result, determine the key competencies necessary for the candidate to implement the assigned functions and responsibilities.

No such work is currently being done by human resources (*personnel management*) departments. Nevertheless, it is the placement of personnel according to the availability of abilities, which are the

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competencies of the applicants, that are the basis for the qualitative implementation of both strategic and current tasks for the state body.

By civil servant competence, we mean a set of behavioral responses that allow one person to better meet the demands of the job, as opposed to another.

It is possible to determine competence through an *interview*. The main purpose of such an interview is to determine the level of necessary competencies of the applicant for the performance of official duties. In order to be successful in everyday work, an employee must have both professional knowledge and personal competencies.

However, within the framework of the existing selection, determination of the competence of the candidate based on such characteristics as:

- skills;
- knowledge;
- social role of the candidate;
- motives;
- personality traits;
- the “I”-image of a person, within the framework of the current selection, is not possible.

As the basis of the method of interviewing by competences, we offer the methodological recommendations developed by the Astana Civil Service Hub and the HR Association for conducting interviews with candidates for civil service. [8]

In today’s world, selection of personnel is especially important, since the result (hiring an employee) determines the quality of experts in an organization.

The interview is a key step in the selection process. In the world experience, there are many different variations of competency-based interviews. We have studied the method developed by the Hub. In our opinion, this way of interviewing meets the needs of the modern world of personnel selection.

## **Conclusion**

The best characteristic of this selection is the reliability of the interview results. This is because the result is based on the exact compliance of the candidate with the qualification requirements by

means of a structured interview based on pre-developed assessment criteria.

Here, the structured method involves collecting information on the key competencies required for a particular position. The forecast of the candidate's success in the upcoming job will reduce the risks of mistakes in poor-quality personnel selection.

With this in mind, these recommendations regulate the conduct of interviews in accordance with the unified standards. That is, candidates are asked the same questions, which in turn will increase the objectivity and fairness of this stage of the competition.

Given that the country has taken a course to professionalize the state apparatus, we believe that the proposed personnel selection tool will allow for further modernization of the system.

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