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Author(s): Haroon A. Khan

PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT UNDER PRESIDENT FORD

Haroon A. Khan, *Henderson State University*

Abstract

Based on the archival data collected from the Gerald Ford Library at Ann Arbor, Michigan, this study analyzes the personnel management under President Ford. Assuming the office of the Presidency following the resignation of President Nixon, Gerald Ford had to establish trust in the institution of the Presidency. This paper analyzes the steps Ford took to reshape personnel management to restore trust in the Presidency.

Under the modern Presidency, each person occupying the White House faces the difficult task of personnel management, which is a crucial element in the success or failure of the president. President Ford came to the White House in a turbulent period of American politics as a result of Watergate and Vietnam. "The new president's paramount goal was to lead the country out of its long national nightmare and restore public trust" (Bonafede 1987, 42). He promised to cooperate with the Congress and return the cabinet to a policy-making forum of government. One of his major tasks was to implement a management policy to prevent the abuse that plagued the Nixon administration. At the outset, the Ford administration emphasized five major areas for better management: (1) evaluation of programs he inherited, (2) reduction of federal regulations and reporting, (3) contracting out and reducing overhead costs, (4) personnel management, and (5) decision-making and departmental organization (Walker 1974). This paper will examine President Ford's personnel management by reviewing the different steps taken to restore trust in the institution of the Presidency.

One of the earliest tasks of President Ford was to come up with a transition team. Ford appointed Donald Rumsfeld, a former Congressman who was respected for his pragmatism, as the head of his transition team. One way to demonstrate President Ford's sincerity in removing politics from federal appointments, as Rumsfeld suggested, "might be to adopt a policy of minimizing or eliminating partisan considerations in top level appointments and stating the intention to search out and appoint the men and women best qualified to serve the nation regardless of party" (Lynn 1976).

The Ford administration gave top priority to the following five areas in personnel management: (1) executive selection and development, (2) improving the quality of the work force, (3) controlling grade escalation and improving position management, (4) refining and extending productivity measures, and (5) constraining the level of federal employment (Lynn 1976). In the section below, this paper will attempt to analyze the five areas in personnel management.

Executive Selection and Development:

The Ford administration advised cabinet officials and top career executives to improve the managerial capabilities of their organizations, and to establish comprehensive selection and development systems (Lynn 1976). This was a significant departure from his predecessor who emphasized ideological loyalty as an important criterion for selection. The Ford Administration instructed the agencies to fill the vacancies with the best qualified individuals, to identify mid-career employees with the greatest potential, and to formulate development plans for promoting managerial responsibilities and qualifications (Lynn 1976).

Improving the Quality of the Work Force:

Another element of President Ford's personnel management policy was the emphasis on continuously evaluating employee programs to improve the quality of the work force The evaluation process included the quality of recruitment, employee performance, career advancement, managerial incentives and training programs (Lynn 1976).

Controlling Grade Escalation and Position Management:

The Ford administration was concerned about the grade escalations that had occurred in past years. The administration believed that many of the grade escalations occurred because of a lack of position management and classification (Lynn 1976). Grade escalation without position management through performance evaluation would not serve the purpose of motivating employees. The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the Civil Service Commission (CSC) were instructed to review selectively agencies with alleged problems of overgrading, duplication of work, or underutilization of personnel resources.

Productivity Measurement:

The Ford administration was concerned about the failure of many agencies to develop and utilize meaningful productivity measures of organizational and managerial performance (Lynn 1976). To deal with this problem, agencies were instructed to institute a program to refine the prevailing productivity measurements (Lynn 1976). The agencies were required to include a progress report on the productivity measurement program as a part of their FY 78 budget submission (Lynn 1976). General guidance and assistance were to be provided by the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the National Center for Productivity and Quality of Working Life. The administration also instructed to increase the use of productivity measures in supporting staff and budget requirements and for purposes of management evaluation and control. A government-wide goal of 2 percent improvement in productivity was set for the FY 77, and each agency was instructed to include projected improvement for the FY 78 budget request (Lynn 1976).

Employment Levels:

Another aspect of President Ford's personnel management was to emphasize reduction of the number of federal employees. With that purpose in mind, President Ford focused on increasing productivity and efficiency, through continuous personnel evaluation. "It is the article of faith and basic philosophy of this administration that the number of people on the federal payroll must be constrained." (Gergen 1976). Ceiling construction was to be achieved through improving the evaluation process, reducing the burden of federal regulations and reporting, contracting out, and increasing efficiency and productivity. In his memo on May 27, 1975, to the agency heads, President Ford wrote,

"There was concern that in the last 15 to 20 years, there has been gradual rise in the average grade of GS employees. Much of this was a result of technological and other changes in the composition of the federal work force which are reflected in increase in the proportion of technical, professional and managerial employees but some of them are due to grade escalation. Heads of agencies will take a personal interest in

ensuring the ceilings for both full time and part time employment" (Lynn 1976).

Agencies were instructed to evaluate their current internal system for implementing the personnel ceilings.

Political Appointees:

Political appointees are the crucial element of any administration because they set the tone and direction of the executive agencies and regulatory commissions (Michaels 1995). During the Ford administration, the White House Personnel Office was responsible for a total of 5,682 non-career positions that included 540 executive level presidential appointments, 1,175 positions as judges, ambassadors, US Marshals and U.S. Attorneys, 2,240 part-time positions, and 1,727 non-presidential appointments to positions excepted from the civil service regulations (Walker 1974).

President Ford believed that the type of management introduced by Richard Nixon was responsible for Watergate and was determined to change that system of management. Nixon's White House relied on clear lines of vertical authority (Edwards and Wayne 1994).

As a result, he was isolated from the cabinet, Congress, and to a great extent, from the people. White House aides became very powerful because they were the only people with whom Nixon had interactions on a daily basis. From the very beginning, Nixon suspected that he had inherited a bureaucracy hostile to his administration (Ingraham et. al. 1995). Nixon feared that agencies and departments were dominated by liberal democrats hostile to his agenda (Burke 1988). Being influenced by that belief, Nixon emphasized White House control of policy apparatus and de-emphasized the involvement of the cabinet (Burke 1988). He also established a White House counter-bureaucracy for domestic affairs headed by Frederick Malek (Aberbach and Rockman 1976). With regard to political appointees, Nixon went beyond partisanship by using ideology as a litmus test (Aberbach and Rockman 1990).

Ford wrote that "Nixon's counter-bureaucracy and management policy created an environment that encouraged the Watergate scandal" (Ford 1979). Ford was highly respected for his integrity and character (Hess 1988). One way he tried to demonstrate his new style of management and integrity to the nation was through the appointment process. Under his management, Ford wanted to increase the amount of information and the variety of viewpoints he received (Wayne 1978). He wanted to be more accessible not only to the White House staffs but to the Congress as well. In one year, President Ford met seventeen times with the House and Senate leadership and conducted 131 congressional hours in which he met with members of Congress (White 1975).

In addition to giving department heads a greater voice in administrative policy making, Ford also revived the cabinet meeting. He was the first president since Eisenhower to appoint a cabinet secretary and regularly presided over cabinet sessions. Meetings were held monthly and served largely as an information exchange among the president, his department secretaries, White House aides, and Executive Office officials (Wayne 1978, 54).

The institution of political appointees had grown significantly during the past years (Michaels 1995). Ford tried to recruit his long time friends in Congress to his inner circle of advisers. According to American Conservative Union (1976),

> it is not unusual for a president to surround himself with close
> friends with whom he can have confidence and support. He also

tried to be less ideological but pragmatic in his choices. Out of
the seven close advisers, only one (Jack Mash) can be described
unequivocally as a conservative.

Party affiliation is an important factor in presidential appointment. Fisher, from
her study, concluded that the least partisan presidents in terms of appointments were
Eisenhower and Ford. In addition, Ford appointed more Democrats than Reagan or
Nixon (Fisher 1987). Table 1 shows the percentage of Democrats appointed by Presi-
dent Ford (see Appendix). Ford wanted to establish an image of non-partisanship and
nonideological politics in his appointment process.

Of Ford's sixteen highest level advisers, the American Conservative Union rated
three as moderate conservatives, three are moderates and ten as liberals (American
Conservative Union 1976). Of the 29 appointments at the middle level (major agency
and commission chairmen and important departmental and White House aides), the
American Conservative Union (1976) rated 14 as liberals, three as moderates, ten as
conservatives, and two without any known political ideology. According to American
Conservative Union (1976);

among 117 lower level appointees, the liberals outnumber con-
servatives by 49 to 31. The exact breakdown is 49 liberals, nine
moderates, 31 conservatives and 28 who are either bureaucrats,
apolitical or have unknown political persuasion. Barely one-fourth
of the 117 then are conservatives. Among high level appointees,
moderate to liberal types dominate overwhelmingly. President
Ford's major appointments reflect the mentality expressed in the
motto he has coined for his administration: compromise, concili-
ation, consensus and cooperation.

Career Systems:

One of the difficult tasks presidents face is establishing smooth working rela-
tionships between political appointees and the career bureaucrats. Political appointees
are regarded as the government by strangers (Heclo 1977) because they are in their
jobs for a temporary period. President Ford lauded the work of career civil servants
for maintaining continuity in the political system. He wrote in his memo for Heads of
Departments and Agencies,

These men and women act in the best traditions of the career
civil service which has demanded from them for more than 90
years the highest degree of professionalism and competence. In
return, it has assured them of a competitive system free from
political considerations either in their appointments or in their
promotion. I intend to keep it that way and I call upon you to see
to it that the merit principles contained in the Civil Service Act
and the personnel laws and regulations are fully and effectively
carried out in your department or agency (Buchen 1976).

President Ford emphasized that appointments to the federal civil service must
not be made on the basis of politics, race, creed or sex (Buchen 1976). He instructed
the Chairman of the Civil Service Commission to fully implement merit principles
based on knowledge, skill and ability (Buchen 1976). More than 90 percent of all
federal jobs were required by law to be filled through open competition and solely on
the basis of merit and fairness (Buchen 1976). In his letter to the president, Robert

Hampton, Chair of the Civil Service Commission wrote that during the Nixon Administration, there were attacks in Congress, academia, the press and certain organizations, including National Civil Service League, that the career service was being politicized, and important career positions were designated as non-career and that one's political affiliation was considered prior to the appointment to such career position. Hampton also appreciated President Ford for his support for the career service (Buchen 1976).

Philip Buchen (1976), counsel to the President, in his reply to Mrs. McGowan on her query about a federal job, wrote on August 23, 1976, "It is the President's policy not to interfere with the procedures that have been established to handle the application of administrative decisions affecting a civil service employee's career." President Ford firmly believed in non-interference in the career system by putting emphasis on the neutral competence of the bureaucracy.

Heclo, Maranto and Lorentzen presented three models in political appointees-career relationships: Capture, Conquest and Comity (Michaels 1995). In the first model, political appointees are captured by the agency bureaucracy. In the second model, the White House tries to control the agency by filling the positions with politicians more in line with its interest rather than the agency interest. In the third model, political appointees and careerists try to work together in a cooperative spirit. President Ford's approaches to political appointees and the careerists would conform to the third level because he wanted to maintain cooperation between political appointees and career bureaucrats. Cooperation was achieved by Ford's emphasis on neutral competence in civil service and non-interference in career service.

Minorities and Women:

Democratic Presidents are more likely to appoint women than the Republican Presidents (Fisher 1987). From the very beginning, President Ford emphasized the need to hire minorities and women. President Ford's memo to Heads of Departments and Agencies on March 6, 1975, emphasized his strong committment for equal opportunity and affirmative action for employment and advancement in the federal government (Buchen 1976).

Ford emphasized the necessity of opening opportunities to all the people so that all can enjoy opportunities for advancement and compete on equal footing. Since Ford had been in office, he had emphasized the need to increase the number of women in high level positions. As a result of his efforts, fourteen percent of all new appointments were women (Buchen 1976). President Ford also encouraged hiring of Hispanics to provide for diversity in the federal service. President Ford's memo reads,

> There is reason to believe, for example, that the skills of the Spanish speaking as a group have not yet been fully tapped. Also, a much wider range of employment opportunities for women can be opened. I want equal opportunity to be reflected in every aspect of federal government. I have calledon Chairman Hampton of the Civil Service Commission to keep me fully informed on an annual basis of the progress each federal department and agency is making in this regard (Buchen 1976).

Excepted Positions:

President Ford took several steps to reverse Nixon's policy of excepted posi-

tions. Excepted appointments are not presidential appointments (Buchen 1976). They are nonpresidential appointments to positions excepted from civil service regulations and numbered about 1,727 during the Nixon and Ford administrations (Walker 1974). the Nixon administration introduced the policy of clearance by the White House Office for excepted positions in 1969 (Walker 1976). One purpose of the clearance process was to gain control over the bureaucracy. This process was known as "Project Responsiveness" under Frederick Malek (Walker 1974). Another purpose was to use it as a weapon against uncooperative bureaucrats in the agencies (Walker 1974). President Ford, however, worked to eliminate the White House Personnel Office responsibility for nonpresidential appointments to excepted positions below GS 16. He delegated the authority for Super-grade appointments on an agency-by-agency basis over time, based upon the confidence in the agency head and his or her performance in the personnel area (Walker 1974).

Based on Rumsfeld's memo, the decision was justified on several reasons: decentralization, reduction of White House Personnel Office workload, reduction of staff, and elimination of a continuous irritant to department and agency heads of having to clear routine excepted appointments with the White House Personnel Office (Walker 1974). Memo from Walker (1974) through Rumsfeld reads,

It would establish a presidential personnel policy which would certainly be looked favorably within the administration, on the Hill, and among the Press and the public. It would not eliminate legitimate partisan control over those positions but would rather place responsibility for those in the agencies and departments. Thus members of Congress and party officials would have to deal directly with the agencies and departments rather than with the White House.

To help free the civil service of corruption, stricter guidelines were enforced to screen the employees. "Each employee of the White House Office paid at a level equivalent to GS 13 ($21,816) and above and all special government employees regardless of grade, are required to file certain employment and financial information with the Office of the Counsel to the President not later than 30 days after their entrance on duty and thereafter on an annual basis each June 30," (Walker 1974).

The Civil Service Commission was instructed to make sure that they were complying with the executive order regarding the personnel policy (Casselman 1974).

Conclusion

From an analysis of the different steps, this paper draws the conclusion that President Ford tried to restore accountability and responsibility in federal government by reorganizing personnel policies. His emphasis on an open line of communication, involvement of the cabinet in decision making, pragmatism rather than ideological purity and neutral competence in the career service without political interference did much to restore the trust and confidence in the institution of the presidency that was damaged during the period of Watergate.

With an emphasis on improving the quality of the work force through productivity measures and position management, President Ford made a significant attempt to restore efficiency and responsiveness in the federal bureaucracy.

Haroon A. Khan

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APPENDIX

TABLE 1. SUMMARY OF PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATIONS AND APPOINTMENTS

FROM: August 9, 1974   TO: March 31, 1975

	NOMINATIONS FULL-TIME	NOMINATIONS PART-TIME	AMBASSADORS	JUDGES ATTORNEYS MARSHALS	APPOINTMENTS FULL-TIME	APPOINTMENTS PART-TIME	TOTAL	%
TOTALS	79	64	27	52	7	277	506	100
SEX								
MALE	75	47	26	52	7	235	442	87
FEMALE	4	17	1	0	0	42	64	13
PARTY								
Unknown	6	9		3		43	61	12
Democrat	14	9	1	8	2	56	90	18
Republican	50	36	6	40	4	158	294	58
Independent	5	10	1	1		20	37	7
Career	4	2	17	1	1	2	26	5
ETHNIC								
Great Britain	50	47	21	43	4	190	363	72
German/Austrian	4	1		1		6	12	2
Scandinavian	1		1		1	1	3	1
Irish	2	1	1	1	1	1	6	1
Italian		1				3	5	1
Polish	3					1	5	1
French			1	1	1	1	2	
Russian	1					1	2	
Jewish	4	2				5	11	2
Greek						1	1	
Other Eastern Europe		1				2	3	
Middle Eastern	1						1	
Spanish Speaking	1	4		2		11	18	
Black	3	5	2	2	1	15	28	
American Indian		1		1		4	5	
Asian						2	3	
Unknown	2	1	2			34	38	6