



South Korea: striving for good human resources management and training performance levels

Like both China and Japan, South Korea has a powerful bureaucracy that has had a major decision-making role in the country's management since it became independent in 1948.¹ From the rollout of national development planning in the 1960s to the sweeping public sector reforms in the wake of the 1998 Asian economic crisis, the government has played a predominant role in controlling the country's social and economic development. Concurrent with these changes, the civil service has expanded considerably, in particular in terms of training as witnessed by the 617 public administration programmes offered in 2010 by the Korean higher education system.² Human resources management and training in the public sector also stand out due to their performance levels. This is confirmed by the International Civil Service Effectiveness (InCiSE) Index,³ that is published by the Blavatnik School of Government at the University of Oxford, and which ranks South Korea ninth out of 31 countries.⁴

In 2017, the South Korean civil service had **996,080 employees** out of a population of 51.2 million in 2016.⁵ 62% work at state level and 38% at local level. There are three categories of civil servant: those in general service who are tasked with clerical, technical and research work; those in special service, such as judges, prosecutors, teachers, police officers and firefighters; and lastly, those who have political and elected responsibilities, and who are appointed by the National Assembly but are in non-career service. There are nine grades for civil servants in general service: the Senior Civil Service, which includes ministers, vice-ministers and director generals, covers grades 1 and 2, division directors grades 3 and 4, deputy directors grade 5 and general officers grades 6 to 9.⁶

A professional, appealing, progressive and innovative civil service

Historically, working for the government has been the most coveted profession. Although things have moved on, the civil service is still highly **appealing**: again, this year, over 440,000 applicants took state-run civil service exams.⁷ This appeal is bolstered by the fact that jobs are guaranteed for life.⁸

Recruitment is mainly by **competitive examination** so as to ensure equal access to the civil service.⁹ Nevertheless, experienced professionals may be subject to **profile-based recruitment** with an eye to hiring the most competent staff and opening up to the private sector.¹⁰

¹ http://www.reseau-etudes-coree.univ-paris-diderot.fr/sites/default/files/risa_782_0231.pdf

² <https://www.cairn.info/revue-internationale-des-sciences-administratives-2017-2-p-229.htm>

³ <https://www.bsg.ox.ac.uk/about/partnerships/international-civil-service-effectiveness-index>

⁴ <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/news/latest/new-index-ranks-best-performing-civil-services-world>

⁵ <https://www.lemoci.com/fiche-pays/coree-du-sud/>

⁶ <http://workspace.unpan.org/sites/Internet/Documents/UNPAN97882.pdf>

⁷ <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20180408000131>

⁸ <http://www.mpm.go.kr/english/news/Multimedia/ebook/hrm/chapter1/#book/3>

⁹ <http://www.mpm.go.kr/english/news/Multimedia/ebook/hrm/chapter2/#book/7>

¹⁰ http://www.mpm.go.kr/english/news/Multimedia/media/?boardId=bbs_0000000000000133&mode=view&cntId=2&category=

The Korean administration upholds **ethics and robust values**.¹¹ It has also **largely opened up** to the disabled, talented people in the countryside, those in the low-income bracket and to women.¹² At the end of 2017, the ratio of women in the civil service exceeded 50% for the first time.¹³

As recruitment by competitive examination and job security had put a drag on productivity,¹⁴ the government introduced a **performance management system** which contains two different evaluation systems:

- For grades 1 to 4, the evaluation covers the achievement of targets that are set on an annual basis with the evaluated official's agreement and that are based on the department's strategic objectives. It concerns pay and promotions, and an interim interview is held during the year.
- For grades 5 to 9, the evaluation is biannual and relates to work performance and job competency, as well as the achievement of individual targets. The results of performance evaluations are reflected in promotion screening and grading for performance bonuses, and job transfers and educational training.

Performance-based pay was introduced in 1999 with an eye to instilling competition between civil servants and it has gradually expanded throughout the civil service. Since 2017, it has included grade 5 officials. There are currently two types of compensation: a performance-based annual salary for grades 5 to 9 and a lump-sum performance-based bonus for grades 1 to 6¹⁵

In 2006, a **special management system was introduced for senior civil servants**.¹⁶ The 1,500 staff of director-general grade or above are in competition at inter-ministerial level and with the private sector. They are recruited following an assessment of six skillsets (Competency Assessment): problem recognition ability, strategic thinking skills, change management skills, performance-orientedness, client satisfaction, and coordination and integration skills.¹⁷ Selection is made through interviews, role play, group discussions and presentations.

Lastly, the Ministry of Personnel Management has an **electronic HRM system called e-Saram** which allows all agencies to manage careers from hiring to retirement, as well as evaluations and training. Since 2014, this software has been available as a smartphone app to make it more accessible.¹⁸

A fully-developed and operational training system that is open to new technologies

South Korea is one of the few countries that has **legislation on training public officials** (Training Act for Civil Servants which was promulgated in 1961). All civil servants have a **training obligation** before being appointed and promoted. Furthermore, all officials are strongly encouraged to extend their knowledge and skills. Grade 1 to 4 staff must take between 80 and 100 hours of training per year, 40% of which must be in professional fields and 60% as part of personal development.¹⁹

A number of organisations help train Korean civil servants: training institutes in central government agencies or which report to provincial-level governments.²⁰ These include the **National Human Resources Development Institute (NHI)** which has a central role. The NHI was founded in 1949 and, from the outset, it contributed to making the Korean civil service more professional. In 2016, it moved up a notch and became an **HRD hub**. In this respect, it is tasked with general and specialised training for central government employees, support for other public-sector training institutes, and the development of international cooperation and influence.²¹

In 2017, the NHI offered **446 training programmes for 160,000 civil servants**. The main goals of these programmes are to instil public service values, to bolster senior officials' leadership skills, to expand operational competencies and to share training know-how with other institutes.

The **training programme for senior executives**, which the NHI rolled out in 1993, is considered to be one of the best training programmes for civil servants. The training period lasts a total of **43 weeks** spread over four semesters and the programme aims to be both operational and effective. The first and third semesters are devoted to intensive training (28 weeks) through active learning based on case studies in the following fields: public service values, leadership, professional skills (economic, social and cultural knowledge), global mindset (ability to work abroad). The

¹¹ <http://www.mpm.go.kr/english/system/publicServants/>

¹² <http://www.mpm.go.kr/english/system/humanBalance/>

¹³ <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/news/2018/06/07/0200000000AEN20180607009000315.html>

¹⁴ <http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/apcity/unpan014202.pdf>

¹⁵ <http://www.mpm.go.kr/english/system/performance/>

¹⁶ <https://www.exam.gov.tw/public/Attachment/11319582574.pdf>

¹⁷ <http://www.mpm.go.kr/english/system/seniorCivilService/>

¹⁸ <http://www.mpm.go.kr/english/news/Multimedia/ebook/hrm/chapter11/#book/7>

¹⁹ <http://www.mpm.go.kr/english/system/humanResource/>

²⁰ <http://press-files.anu.edu.au/downloads/press/n2144/pdf/ch06.pdf>

²¹ <http://www.nhi.go.kr/eng/About/major.htm>

second and fourth semesters are given over to in-depth research into tasks assigned by the government departments which these executives work for. Every year, around 70 trainees take this programme.

The **remote training system** is especially well developed. In 2017, **150,000 civil servants took online courses**. The NHI provides 298 e-training modules and 72 MOOCs. This approach caters to those who are traditionally excluded from training. It is also part of the changing face of learning in the form of social learning²² or the flipped classroom. It also meets constantly-changing requirements through, for instance, DIY programmes where the trainees are masters of their own training or the development of modules available on smartphone (170) and training content in the form of five- to ten-minute videos which are aimed at younger staff. Lastly, the NHI has initiated the creation of a platform hosting the training programmes of all the institutes.²³

Virginie Ma-Dupont

²² Learning method involving sharing, building and working with others remotely using collaborative tools (wikis, chats, fora, blogs, etc.) or businesses' social media.

²³ <http://www.nhi.go.kr/eng/resources/publications/List.htm>