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**The Speech of Samer Hankir, HR Program Manager/Senior Training Officer at the Office of the Minister of State for Administrative Reform (OMSAR)**

For years and years ago, we've been debating the concept of competency management and the chances of applying it in the Lebanese civil service. It is true that the concept was innovated and marketed by Western reformists. However, it carries within its philosophy universal features that cross borders and overcome the peculiarity of administrative and legal systems that prevail in different governments. It has become the cornerstone of a strategic human resource and talent management and development.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The title of the today's event is challenging, especially for the Office of the Minister of State for Administrative Reform (OMSAR) that is concerned with the development of the public sector.

Three years ago, it was not easy for us at all to embark on what I shall label as "a modest though ambitious development

endeavor” to spread the competency culture in the Lebanese administration.

We had to ask ourselves several questions of which some of them sounded to be “rhetoric”, of which many of them were probably demanding:

First, did we fully grasp the concept and do we seriously foresee all its consequences on the current regulations and practices in the fields of recruitment, performance evaluation, training and career development?

Secondly, Are we open to learn from the experiences of other countries who have made big leaps in the journey of modernization, or are we going to bury our heads in the sand like an ostrich on the pretext that “what applies there does not work here”. Frankly speaking, I haven’t found a better recipe for inertia, passiveness and laziness than repeating the same cliché “what applies there does not work here”! It is this argument, in particular, that is widely used defensively by some traditional bureaucrats who are experts in thwarting any reform attempt or even intimidating promoters of development.

Thirdly, who are the stakeholders concerned that should be involved in the process? What kind of partnership we need to

build, especially with those that have the legal power to help us enforce the required change in the Lebanese administration? Of course, the Civil Service Board had to be our partner and had to receive our special attention. That's why for us at OMSAR, the CSB had a dual identity: a beneficiary and a counterpart. One of the dilemmas in HR management is finding the right balance between the role of the Civil Service Board, on the one hand, and the role of the ministries on the other hand.

Fourthly, to what extent would the ministries open up to the modern approach to HR management? If they have the will to change, do they have the capacity to walk the way?

Fifthly, to what extent our international donors, especially the EU who have been thankfully supporting us, are ready to see reform practitioners, not only as project managers in charge of initiating, tracking and closing reform projects and spending the allocated funds in time in compliance with the EU standards, but also to see them as administrative development catalysts that require flexibility, adaptability and agility that bureaucratic procedures cannot afford to tolerate?

Despite the doubts that we had and the expected hurdles, we had the courage to start our HR project that was based on competence management. We were able to come up, in partnership with the Civil Service Board with a new

performance appraisal system that has competence management as its backbone. We don't have, yet, a full-fledged competency framework the way it was developed in the UK, USA and France, but at least the foundations have been laid down after intensive brainstorming, workshops and difficult (yes very difficult) discussions with the stakeholders concerned and the engaged experts and civil servants.

Ten competences have been identified, of which five of them would be selected on an annual basis for evaluation. Three of the five competencies would be binding, while the other two would be jointly identified and agreed upon by the appraiser and the appraised. This was exactly the main contribution of our approach to the administration, perhaps more than the suggested systems themselves. This approach opens the channels of communication and dialogue between the superior and the subordinate to make them think jointly and strategically. This definitely necessitates the development of a new Job Description format that is much deeper in terms of elaboration. This document, in turn, is supposed to be competency-based.

The mandatory competencies were tied to the categories of the civil service. For instance, competencies that are linked to categories 2 and 3 are more managerial in essence (leadership,

change management, people development and promoting teamwork....).

The driving force that has been giving impetus to our HR initiative was the culture of continuous learning and collaborative work. Just like in France, they've been working hard to shake the classic bureaucratic models by establishing the competency framework. In the United States, there was a need to build harmony between the individual staff member and the entire organization. Competency management was the linking bridge. In the UK, the competency framework has been a tool for cultural and organizational change. Yes, CHANGE is the keyword, perhaps painful, but unescapable. Competences are not an end by themselves. They are meant to be there to change the way we work, the way we manage, and above all, **the way we behave.** (the way we behave). We were really glad to see people from the same administration working together for the first time to discuss the competency management approach and to draft the system with our support.

Back to the main question: "Can the competency management approach change the future of the civil service in Lebanon?" To answer this question, we have to raise some more questions for reflection: do we have the courage to take the decision to

change; to take the risk to fail and try, then retry; to test modern approaches, to rethink our leadership style; To be brave enough to select a new caliber of leaders who are ready to develop their administrations instead of being just an additional layer of bureaucrats on the top of a traditional hierarchy?

Ladies and gentlemen,

The seeds of cultural change have been sowed. It is true that the testing of the new approach did not go beyond certain limits in the civil service. However, the ice of resistance to experiencing modern practices and a new line of thought has been broken. I'm not pretending that the barriers have fully fallen. The potential change agents who have been identified, and trained through the OMSAR's HR initiative in the Civil Service Board and in some pilot ministries are expected to keep up the momentum. It is like a snowball that will turn bigger and faster as it rolls down the slopes.