

The University of Hull

**Equal Employment Opportunity in Public Office in
Principle and Practice: an Empirical Study of the Omani
Civil Service**

**being a Thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in the University of Hull**

by

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Declaration

**I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own
has been identified and that no material is included for
which a degree has previously been conferred upon me**

Signed.....

15/09/2005

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to Fahad, Mohammed, Salah, Khamis, Noora and their fellow young Omanis. I hope that they will achieve their employment goals and that there will be no place in Oman for favouritism and nepotism.

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Table of Contents

	Page
List of Tables	v
List of Figures	vii
List of Abbreviations	viii
Abstract	ix
Chapter One: Research Overview	
1.1. The Conceptual Base of the Study	1
1.2. Statement of the Problem	5
1.3. Previous Studies	11
1.4. Significance of the Study	13
1.5. Research Objectives	16
1.6. Limitations	17
1.7. The Organisation of the Thesis	18
Chapter Two: Review of the Literature	
2.1. Introduction	21
2.2. The Context of Public Bureaucracy in Arab Countries	22
2.2.1. The Social Value System in Oman	30
2.3. Bureaucracy: the Concept and the Operation	36
2.4. Equal Employment Opportunity Approaches	41
2.4.1. The Representative Bureaucracy Approach	46
2.4.2. Management Diversity Approach	54
2.4.3. The Regulatory Merit-based Approach	58
2.5. A Working Model of Recruitment by Merit	63
2.5.1. Career Service and Position Classification	63
2.5.2. Good Practice Merit-based Recruitment Procedures	67
2.6. Summary and Conclusion	79
Chapter Three: Research Methodology	84
3.1. Introduction	84
3.2. Research Design	85
3.2.1. The Construction of a Positivist Model	87
3.2.2. Sources of Data	88
3.2.3. Category of the Field Study	90
3.3. The Research Question	90
3.4. Statement of the Hypotheses	93
3.5. Research Instruments	97
3.6. The Questionnaire	98
3.6.1. Rationale	98
3.6.2. Sampling	100
3.6.2.1 The Civil Servants	102
3.6.2.2 The Managers	104

3.6.2.3 The Experts	105
3.6.3. Scaling and Construction	107
3.6.4. Validity	112
3.6.5. Piloting	114
3.6.6. Reliability	115
3.6.7. The Statistical Analysis	116
3.6.8. Implementation	118
3.7. The Interviews	120
3.7.1. Rationale	120
3.7.2. Format	121
3.7.3. The Interview Schedule	122
3.7.4. Interview Respondents	122
3.7.5. Implementation	123
3.8. Summary and Conclusion	124
Chapter Four: The Context of Public Bureaucracy in Oman	
4.1. Introduction	126
4.2. Country Profile	127
4.2.1. Oman's History	130
4.2.2. Ibadhism; an Early Adherence of Merit Principals	131
4.3. The Public Bureaucracy before 1970	135
4.4. The Public Bureaucracy after 1970	136
4.4.1. Socioeconomic Development	138
4.4.2. Government Structure and Political Culture	142
4.4.3. Administrative Divisions	146
4.5. Challenges of Modernization	148
4.5.1. The Structure of the Omani Society	150
4.5.2. Differences and Social Equality	152
4.6. Summary and Conclusion	159
Chapter Five: Institutions and Laws Responsible For Public Personnel Management in Oman	
5.1. Introduction	162
5.2. The Civil Service Before 1970	163
5.3. The Civil Service After 1970	165
5.3.1. Personnel Institutions	166
5.3.1.1. The Civil Service Council (1975-present)	169
5.3.1.2. The Bureau of Employees' Affairs (1975-1988)	171
5.3.1.3. The Ministry of Civil Service (1988-Present)	173
5.3.2. The Personnel Laws	176
5.3.2.1. The Civil Service Law of 1975	178
5.3.2.2. The Civil Service Law of 1980	180
5.3.2.3. The 2004 Proposed Civil Service Law	182
5.4. Contemporary Employment issues	184
5.4.1. Employment Policy	184
5.4.2. Gender Employment Equality	190
5.5. Summary and Conclusion	193

Chapter Six: Recruitment and Selection in Oman: Policy and Practice	
6.1. Introduction	196
6.2. The Structure of Grades and Payment Scales	196
6.3. Position Classification	201
6.4. Recruitment and Selection	208
6.4.1. External Recruitment	211
6.4.1.1. Educational Posts	215
6.4.1.2. Non-Educational Posts	215
6.4.1.3. Special Skills Posts	216
6.4.1.4. Examination and Interviews	216
6.4.2. Internal Recruitment (Promotion)	219
6.4.2.1. Grade-to-grade Promotion	219
6.4.2.2. Post-to-post Promotion	225
6.5. The Legal Implications of the Current Recruitment Practice	232
6.6. Summary and Conclusion	234
Chapter Seven: Analysis and Discussion of the Results of the Empirical Study	
7.1. Introduction	237
Part One: The Questionnaire	238
7.2. General Information about the Sample	238
7.2.1. Distribution by Gender and Occupational Group	239
7.2.2. Distribution by Age	240
7.2.3. Distribution by Educational Qualification	241
7.3. Recruitment and Selection Procedures	242
7.3.1. External Recruitment (Entry level Posts)	242
7.3.2. Internal Recruitment (Promotion)	247
7.3.3. Extent of Representation of the Workforce	249
7.3.4. Satisfaction with Procedures to fill Managerial Posts	251
7.4. The Effect of Context	258
7.4.1. The Effects of Context on the Functions of the Bureaucracy	259
7.4.2. The Need for Formal Rules	264
7.5. Challenges and Methods to Implement Reform	267
7.5.1. Merit Recruitment as an Alternative	268
7.5.2. Methods to Secure Merit Recruitment	270
7.5.3. Obstacles to Implementing Merit Recruitment	273
Part Two: The Interviews	275
7.6. The Analysis of Interviews and Survey's Open-ended Questions	275
7.6.1. Factors that Influence Promotion	276
7.6.2. Effects of Social Norms on Recruitment Policy	280
7.6.3. Proposed Merit Recruitment Procedures	283
7.7. Summary and Conclusion	287
Chapter Eight: Conclusions and Research Implications	
8.1. Introduction	293
8.2. Summary and Findings	293

8.2.1. The Findings of the Field Study	295
8.2.2. Limitations of the Field Study	297
8.2.3. Suggested Ideas for Future Research	298
8.3. Recommendations	299
8.3.1. Internal Recruitment	300
8.3.2. External Recruitment	301
8.3.3. General Issues	302
8.4 Study Contribution	305
8.4.1. The Implications of the Field Study	305
8.4.2. The Theoretical Implications of the Thesis	307
Bibliography	310
Appendices	327
Appendix 1: Types of Representation and Extent of Independence	327
Appendix 2: Example of Job Description and Person Specification	328
Appendix 3: Validity Assessment	329
Appendix 4: The Results of Internal Reliability Tests based on 7 Subscales	333
Appendix 5: The Results of the Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Tests	334
Appendix 6: The English Version of the Questionnaire	338
Appendix 7: The Arabic Version of the Questionnaire	346
Appendix 8: The Interview Schedule	354
Appendix 9: Chronology of the Omani Civil Service	356
Appendix 10: A Framework for Human Resource Planning and Organisation	357

List of Tables

No.	Content	Page
2.1	Percentages of civil servants in senior posts based on social class background in some developed and underdeveloped countries	49
2.2	Roger's and Fraser's plans for person specifications	75
3.1	The distribution of the questionnaire sample	106
3.2	The interview participants	123
4.1	Indicators of the development of education and health in Oman during the period from 1970 to 2001	139
4.2	Human development indicators of Oman and other countries in 2003	140
4.3	The distribution of area and population in Oman	147
5.1	The increase of the numbers of Omanis and expatriates in the Civil Service during the early years of development (1970 -1980)	168
5.2	The membership of the Civil Service Council	170
5.3	The population in Oman by Age Groups in 2001	186
5.4	Percentages of Omanis and Expatriates in the Civil Service (1970-2003)	187
5.5	Participation of Omani women in the Civil Service (1980-2003)	190
5.6	Bias towards men in senior grades and posts in the Civil Service (2004)	192
6.1	Structure of grades and payment scales of Civil Servants in Omani Rials	198
6.2	Educational qualifications and work experience required to occupy grades in the Omani Civil Service hierarchy	203
6.3	Summary of types of External Recruitment and selection methods	219
6.4	Comparison between types of Internal Recruitment	226
7.1	The rates of distributed, returned and accepted questionnaires	238
7.2	Distribution of participants by gender and occupational group	239
7.3	Distribution of participants by age group	240
7.4	Distribution of participants by educational attainment	241
7.5	Attitudes toward the use of job analysis	243
7.6	Attitudes toward the use of advertisement	244
7.7	Attitudes toward the selection procedures	246
7.8	The rates of participants who complied with merit recruitment procedures oppose to those who did not	246
7.9	Comparison between factors that influence grade-to- grade and post-to-post promotions (internal recruitments) based on experts' views	248
7.10	The results of Chi-square (χ^2) tests of factors that influence grade-to-grade and post-to-post promotions	249
7.11	Attitudes toward the extent of representation of the workforce (Descriptive Statistics)	250
7.12	Component mean and standard deviation scores of attitudes toward recruitment and selection procedures	252

List of Tables (continued)

No.	Content	Page
7.13	Component mean and standard deviation scores of attitudes toward the decision making process	254
7.14	Component mean and standard deviation scores of attitudes toward consistency of rules and practice	255
7.15	Mean total scores for the three components that seek to measure extent of satisfaction with current recruitment and selection procedures	256
7.16	Overall extent of satisfaction with current recruitment procedures	256
7.17	Frequencies of participant' attitudes toward whither merit-based recruitment are served or not in relation to some background characteristics	257
7.18	Component frequencies and mean scores of attitudes toward the effects of social norms on the daily work activities	260
7.19	Frequencies of attitudes toward conception of priorities in public office	263
7.20	The affect of social norms on the functions of the bureaucracy	263
7.21	Component frequencies and mean scores of attitudes toward formal rules and informal relations	265
7.22	Attitudes toward formal rules (Mean and t-test value) by managers and non-managers participants	267
7.23	Component frequencies and mean scores of attitudes toward the need to replace the current system with the merit-based personnel system	269
7.24	Summary of attitudes towards implementing merit recruitment procedures	269
7.25	Attitudes toward procedures that should be followed to fill managerial posts	271
7.26	Frequencies and mean scores of the degree of importance of obstacles that may arise if the merit system is to be adopted	273
7.27	Themes and number of responses obtained from the interviews and the survey's open-ended questions	276
8.1	Recommended procedures for internal and external recruitment	302

List of Figures

No.	Content	Page
1.1	The relationship between the chapters of the thesis	20
2.1	An illustration of selection outcome if recruitment procedures depend entirely on merit	45
2.2	The processes of job classification	66
2.3	Parry's (1994) seven-step model of recruitment and selection procedures	71
3.1	The interactions between the dependent and the independent variables	93
3.2	Hypothetico-deductive model of a positivist paradigm	94
3.3	The size of targeted grade group among the other grade groups of the Civil Service hierarchy	102
4.1	Oman's location	128
4.2	HDI trends; Oman compared to Arab countries and the world	140
4.3	Development of the numbers of Civil Servants in Oman	141
4.4	Oman's administrative regions and governorates	146
5.1	The Organisational Chart of the Ministry of Civil Service	175
5.2	The development of the numbers of students in government schools from 1980-2002	186
6.1	The development of the numbers of Omani Civil Servants who have University and Post-graduate education	204
6.2	Types of recruitment in the Omani Civil Service	211

List of Abbreviations

A	Agree
ANOVA	Analysis of variance
ASR	The Annual Statistical Report
BEA	Bureau of Employees' Affairs
CBO	Central Bank of Oman
CEA	The Centralized Employment Act
CM	Council of Ministers
CS	Civil Service
CSC	Civil Service Council
CSL	Civil Service Law
D	Disagree
DC	Development Council
DCS	Department of Civil Service
DF	Degree(s) of freedom
DG	Directorate General
EEO	Equal Employment Opportunity
EO	Equal Opportunity
ER	Executive Regulations
ETS	Education and Training System
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GS	General Schedule
H.E.	His Excellency
HD	Human Development
HRM	Human Resource Management
HRP	Human Resource Planning
IPA	Institute of Public Administration
MCS	Ministry of Civil Service
MD	Management Diversity
MI	Ministry of Information
MNE	Ministry of National Economy
ONVQ	Omani National Vocational Qualification
OR	Omani Rial (1 OR = 0.7 UK £ or 2.58 US\$)
RB	Representative Bureaucracy
RT	Researcher's Translation to English
SA	Strongly Agree
SD	Strongly Disagree
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Science
SQU	Sultan Qaboos University
TQM	Total Quality Management
U	Undecided
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WDR	World Development Report
WLO	World Labour Organisation

Abstract

The conceptual focus of this thesis is equal employment opportunity (EEO) when applied to a public personnel management system. In particular it fills a void in evaluating the concepts of Representative Bureaucracy and Management Diversity in both principle and practice, and in comprehending the extent to which their objectives can be translated into practical recruitment procedures. Moreover, the importance of organisational context is crucial. The study investigates how the merit principle can be sustained in a work environment where culture adversely affects organisational efficiency and EEO issues.

The Omani public bureaucracy was taken as a case study. The study evaluates whether merit recruitment is embedded into the HRM system as demanded by the country's 1996 Basic Law. Oman faces serious challenges that necessitate efficient recruitment policy that can lead to an effective workforce. On the economic front, while population is rising, oil reserves are decreasing. Thus, the hiring of qualified civil servants is now essential for the country's future development. Politically, the governing elite gather public institutions under their command and operate on informal, personalistic and tribally-oriented work values. The result is a personnel and administrative system where public posts are filled based on nepotism, favouritism and ascriptive criteria, rather than on the basis of achievement and merit. The study argues that the time for reform has arrived to deal with challenges efficiently.

After building a generic model of merit-based HRM, analysing the context of the public bureaucracy in Oman, examining the functions of personnel laws and institutions, and evaluating current recruitment activity in both policy and practice, a field study was undertaken to answer the study's questions and to test its hypotheses. The findings suggest that a Weberian type of rational-legal bureaucracy needs to be established. Despite the argument of the collapse of this approach in some western liberal democracies public personnel systems, the research shows that the basic concept of merit still survives in professional practice in other parts of the world where cultural values and social norms are preserved in the work-place. It particularly 'fits' the Omani context and provides an efficient EEO approach. The study confirms that blind imitation of western approaches may not be applicable or useful in developing states. Finally, the theoretical implications of the research are highlighted, with specific recommendations to ensure responsiveness to the merit-based recruitment model adopted by the study.

The thesis should be of interest to both students and practitioners of public administration in the Arab Gulf region in particular, and developing countries in general.

Chapter One

Research Overview

1.1. The Conceptual Base of the Study

From the turn of the twentieth century, the enormous change in the functions of the state and vast expansion of the services it provides have been reflected in the development of the public bureaucracy, and ultimately the expansion of the numbers of those who run its business. A large administrative apparatus is a characteristic of the modern state, particularly in developing nations where the state holds overwhelming power and operates economic activities that are regarded in industrialised nations as private sector activities (Smith 1996; Haque 1997; Hughes 2003). As states take on an increasing role of command to manage and distribute services, large administrative structures become a necessity. A level of administrative capacity needs to be attained to translate policies into actions. However, size brings complexity (Peters 2001; Cook 2004). More people doing more things have to be organised in hierarchic structures of command and control and through meaningful personnel policies and regulations that lead to attract and retain qualified employees. It quickly becomes clear that the ability to function effectively depends greatly on the quality of those people which is determined, in turn, by the personnel management system adopted (Parry 1994; Torrington *et al.* 2002).

Surely a public bureaucracy that employs poor staff will produce less, or achieve less, than one that recruits, keeps and promotes the right people.¹ This is not to say other HRM functions, such as training, appraisal, and labour relations, or factors which the bureaucracy cannot control, such as the social and cultural context, political interference and the state of the economy, do not affect productivity, but to stress the significance of the recruitment activity as *the* key factor for organisational success. Field specialists clearly emphasise that the proficiency with which recruitment and selection activity is conducted constitutes the most important aspect of the whole personnel function and directly affects all other personnel management activities (e.g. Plumbley 1985; Taylor 2002; Cook 2004). Plumbley (1985:8), for instance, notes:

¹ The term 'bureaucracy' in this study does not carry any negative connotations. It is used to refer to the government public administration or the civil service. A definition is provided in the following chapters.

Be that as it may, the costs of inefficient recruitment are formidable in financial expenditure alone; the indirect consequences are more difficult to quantify, but are probably even more costly in human as well as in financial terms... efficient recruitment and placement procedures are a prerequisite to the development of an effective workforce.

Certainly, no state can be presumed to be developed if it lacks the capacity to manage its public personnel effectively. Alastai (2002:55), an Omani HRM expert, argues that the ultimate success of a bureaucracy depends mainly on the quality of its personnel. It is they who ultimately realise plans, and they who make them realities:

The quality of the bureaucracy is largely determined by the devotion and ability of its public servants who conduct and manage it. Governments, on the other hand, are responsible to assure that the system allows the employment of highly competent people; those whom selection to public office is based on their work achievements regardless of any irrelevant factors.²

Further, the personnel system adopted should entail the selection of candidates on the basis of objective assessment of their ability to carry out duties. Key recruitment factors such as person specifications (education, experience and skills) and post description (duties and responsibilities), are issues that have to be considered before hiring public servants (Ingraham 1995; Jackson 2002). Efficient recruitment policies and procedures are, indeed, the key to reach the ultimate goal of having an effective workforce that can be capable of running the increasing duties to lead to modern state building.

Recruitment of employees in the public sector, in particular, requires more attention. This is mainly because government employees affect the state's capacity to act to manage national resources that belong to all citizens. Experts in public administration during the last few decades (e.g. Riggs 1964; Mosher 1982; Haque 1997; Noon and Ogbonna 2001; Peters 2001) emphasise the direct role of the state's bureaucracy in citizens' daily life and explain how this institution becomes the most rational means of exercising control. Field experts submit that changes in societies, whether economic or political, emerge in large measure as the result of state direct intervention. Haque (1997) sees this role as even more critical in developing societies, where there is limited political participation, and where the social elites hold great power in directing the state's policies and actions.

It rapidly becomes obvious that recruitment policy in public office is directly linked states' political culture. Public servants bring to their jobs a host of values and attitudes that greatly affect all operations of the bureaucracy. As a result, recruitment policies and

² Quotations that are based on Arabic texts were translated into English by the researcher and translations were checked by an expert to secure accuracy and clarity.

procedures hold a serious place in both the public personnel system followed, as well as the political and administrative values adopted to decide and implement policies. Peters (2001:86) sees this link when he states: “Recruitment is a question about democracy”.

Hiring an individual best qualified for a particular post in the contemporary public bureaucracy is challenging and complex. Organisational efficiency, equal employment opportunity (henceforth referred to as EEO), the context of the bureaucracy, and a host of other factors suggest that this activity is of crucial significance and requires special attention. Employing the most qualified is not always the determining factor within this context. There are other intervening factors that have to be considered when discussing EEO issues in public office. It has been established that the capabilities of state, in terms of efficiency, are also determined by adopting a personnel system that can practically reflect the representation of all components of the society in the government workforce. Field experts, throughout years of investigation (e.g. Riggs 1964; Eulau 1976; Mosher 1982; Peters 2001) emphasise that selecting the proper employment policy in public office requires active and meaningful policies that can secure organisational efficiency, as well as meeting social and political objectives.

Governments, around the globe, declare in their constitutions and personnel laws that they respect and protect the right of all citizens to have equal access to public posts. It is very common to see statements of EEO policies in states’ public personnel regulations. However, declaration is one thing and the practice is something else. Experience reveals that most of governments declare policies, rules and values but fail to lay down the practical procedures required to secure implementation (Kaler 2001; Kamali 2002). Hence, what matters is not so much the declared principles, but the actual practice.

Experts and practitioners are in a continuous search to decide the EEO concept and procedures that can translate principles into effective results. Various EEO concepts and approaches have already been generated in the literature that attempt to solve the issue of the lack of effective implementation. For instance, there are those who propose the concept of the Representative Bureaucracy and argue that the selection of public servants should not be based exclusively on merit (job-related criteria), but rather on selection outcome so all groups of society are involved in the public workforce (Kingsley 1944; Krislov 1967; Pitkin 1967; Mosher 1982; Kelly 1998; Peters 2001). The underlying assumption is that bureaucracy should mirror the characteristics of the

people it serves and all citizens have to be represented in the processes of making and implementing public programmes, and accordingly, all share equal responsibilities for the success or the failure of the system. Others (e.g. Kandola and Fullerton 1998; Redman and Wilkinson 2001; Lorbiecki 2001; Ospin and O'Sullivan 2003) propose the concept of Management Diversity and argue that formal EEO policies, through state intervention, have failed to secure objectives and the solution is seen in self-driven organisational policies. Supporters of this approach argue that groups' differences should be viewed as an advantage to effectiveness through "a business case argument", and, accordingly, EEO can be internally driven, not externally imposed. As will be observed, the notion of Management Diversity concentrates on individuals rather than groups, addresses the total organisational culture rather than a particular set of rules, and views implementation as the responsibility of all, not just personnel departments.

Each of these approaches has its advantages/disadvantages, rationale and particular recruitment procedures to achieve its aims. There has been considerable debate within the academic community about the effectiveness of these approaches when compared with the traditional merit-based personnel system. The reader can notice easily that much of the latest EEO literature in the public sector is written in a way that criticises the regulatory merit-based personnel system. Nevertheless, this study argues that the alternatives provided are mostly theories that lack a clear vision on how to translate EEO objectives into specific recruitment procedures.

Despite the argument of the collapse of the merit system, the basic concept of merit survives in professional practice in public office (Shafritz *et al.* 1992; Ingraham 1995). Merit in principle continues to hold a serious place in the value system of public personnel management and this is largely because employment in this sector is subject to conditions that may not apply to other sectors. In public office, merit employment is considered as a greater necessity than in a business application and dictates normative as well as instrumental roles (Rosenbloom and Carroll 1995; Woodward 2000).

Selection through neutral competence may be an important component of the agenda of EEO and may promise a solution if developed to meet modern work requirements. The assumption underlying the merit system is that it increases the probability of sound recruitment process to minimize the likelihood of errors that may result from bias or subjectivity (Parry 1994; Taylor 2002). Although selection outcome may, or may not,

secure group representation, standard and clear-cut procedures guarantee the selection of the most qualified. A closer look at the characteristics of the merit system reveals that this system is consistent with the ideal type of the rational-legal bureaucracy declared by Max Weber at the turn of the 20th century when he formulated his concept of bureaucracy and authority (see Lawton and Rose 1994:31-36).

The variety of concepts offered in the literature lead to different options of the course of action. Some writers argue that selecting the appropriate direction should depend on the context of the bureaucracy under investigation (Riggs 1964; Smith 1996; Haque 1997; Flynn 2002). When considering reform, special attention should be paid to the social, cultural, political and economic variables that surround the system. Smith (1996) and Haque (1997), for instance, clarify that what might be appropriate in Western systems may not be appropriate or acceptable in other parts of the world. Theories intuitively developed in Western countries' environment might be matters of great debate in the developing world. Blind imitation, without comprehending the context of the targeted system, may result in failure. Bureaucracy cannot be treated as a neutral institution, but rather, as a sub-system of its surrounding features (Peters 2001). This suggests that a broad framework of a host of different factors, internal and external, direct and indirect, must be realized before evaluating personnel policies and before proposing reform.

There is a need for critical study to evaluate EEO theories discussed in the literature when applied to the public bureaucracy of a country whose context is considerably different from its counterparts in industrialised Western nations, where these theories were developed. This study aims to fill this objective. It aims to discuss and evaluate current equal opportunity concepts when applied to personnel recruitment and selection policies and procedures in an organisational setting that has its specific administrative, social, cultural, and political context.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

The limitations of the existing literature become apparent when applied to developing countries like Oman. To begin with, the experience of modern public bureaucracy in Oman is relatively recent. Before the discovery of oil in commercial quantities in 1967, and the change of the political leadership in 1970, there were no developed political institutions in the Western liberal democracy sense. The country was embroiled in civil

war and most people were illiterate and living on the threshold of poverty. Until 1971, Oman was isolated from the rest of the world, to the extent that it was not recognised as a member in the UN, or even its regional Arab League. The country had little physical infrastructure and health, education, housing and communication were basic, at best. The public bureaucracy hardly went beyond the institution of law and order.

The period before 1970 was characterised by a simple and fragmented administrative system lacking financial and technical resources (Peterson 2004c). The administrative infrastructure, as will be shown later in detail, was so basic as to be almost non-existent (Allen 1987). There were neither personnel laws to regulate employees' affairs, nor civil service institutions to supervise personnel policies and regulations. Personnel activities, such as recruitment, training, and so forth, were based on traditional methods that took no account of organisational effectiveness. In fact, writers such as Allen (1987) and Muharami (1993) argue that all patterns of the bureaucracy were of medieval simplicity. This was due to the fact that no government in a modern sense existed, but only simple traditional aspects of administrative structure were in operation. During that period, an autocrat of the most traditional kind ruled Oman.³

In 1970, the current ruler of Oman, Sultan Qaboos, came to power after a bloodless coup d'état against his father. This marked a renaissance, in which the processes of establishing organised government began. Since then, the country has made tremendous steps toward modernisation in a remarkably short time (World Bank 1995; Miller 1997; Peterson 2004c). Sultan Qaboos assumed power with a certain urgency to bring Oman to life, and the country has undertaken great innovation in all aspects of modern state-building since then. The public bureaucracy was no exception. Typically of developing countries, public institutions started to play a key role in development programmes. An organised civil service was set up and gradually expanded.

The rapid changes have brought in administrative growth and greater responsibilities to public agencies. Writers (e.g. Looney 1990; Kechichian 1995) argue that the change of leadership and the increasing oil revenue during the 1970s and the 1980s encouraged the government to implement massive development plans to improve the public personnel system to be capable of coping with the new changes. This was demonstrated

³ During the period from 1930-1970, Oman was ruled by Sultan Said. The status of the public bureaucracy before 1970 will be discussed in Chapter Four.

during the last 35 years by the establishment of four central personnel agencies and the issue of three civil service laws. The responsibilities of the civil service expanded gradually and, as we indicated at the start of this chapter, size brings complexity. The most serious administrative constraint Oman met in the early period, and probably until now, is the lack of qualified employees to run the expanding public bureaucracy. The Civil Service Law of 1980 was the first personnel law to recognise the basic principles of EEO. In this Law merit was considered as the basis for recruiting and selecting public servants (see Oman 1980:9).

Nowadays, Oman has been transformed from a poor, underdeveloped country to a modern nation-state, based on such indicators of development, as per-capita gross national product, infant mortality, literacy rates, and availability of social service (Rippenburg 1998). A report issued by the World Bank describes Oman as having “graduated” from the rank of an underdeveloped nation needing loans to a developing country (World Bank 1995, cited in Curtiss 1995:49). Yet, observers (e.g. Lancaster 1995; Miller 1997; Katz 2004) express their worries that Oman faces serious political and economic challenges. The economic challenge it faces is that its population is rising while its oil reserves are declining, while the political challenge it faces is the extreme concentration of authority in government and the lack of meaningful political participation. Within this context, Katz (2004:1) writes:

Compared to the neighbouring Saudi Arabia, there is very little press coverage on Oman. And unlike the many stories about how bad things are in the kingdom, the little reporting done on the sultanate is generally positive. It would be a mistake, however, to conclude from Oman’s glowing press coverage that all is well there. Oman, in fact, is experiencing some very difficult problems that are likely to get worse in the coming years.

Apart from the political and the economic challenges, there are serious worries that the current public personnel system might lead to an incompetent workforce. The urgency of the need to have an effective workforce to run the public institutions is seen as even more pressing, given the fact that Oman now has limited resources. Skilled, talented, and qualified personnel are needed now more than ever (Peterson 2004c). In contrast to its neighbouring Gulf States, Oman possesses modest oil reserves. Oman’s oil reserve is expected to decline dramatically within the next 15-20 years (World Bank 2003; Katz 2004). The government is required to make the best use of its resources, whether these are financial or human resources, to adjust to life without oil. The civil service, in turn,

is expected to develop its personnel policies to be capable of hiring qualified and talented employees, particularly in a decision making capacity.

The Omani government has become aware of this challenge. In 1995, the government declared its strategy for the next 25 years, called “Oman 2020 Vision”. The Vision was designed by specialised international institutions, including the World Bank and UNDP. The strategy lists three main objectives; the second is: “To develop human resources so that elements of society will be able to contribute more effectively in development processes” (MD 1997:231). This objective raises the major issue of how the Ministry of Civil Service, as the central government personnel agency, should be able to recruit people who can cope with the new challenges and who can plan and execute development programmes efficiently.

Indeed, wealth alone cannot generate sustainable success. Al-Ansi (1994:9), an Omani expert in public administration, argues that the public sector in Oman lacks an effective workforce. According to him, converting monetary resources into productive human resources is the challenge the government faces:

Developing personnel policies might be more important in the coming years than the development programmes if government seeks to maintain achievements and develop new ones. Implementing merit and equal opportunity principles is the first step toward achieving an effective workforce (Al-Ansi 1994:37).

Government awareness of the need to create a central agency to supervise and monitor the public service has been reflected by the founding of the Ministry of Civil Service (henceforth referred to as MCS) in 1988 as an independent body to suggest rules, and develop personnel policies⁴. Of paramount importance, the MCS is also assigned with the duty of enhancing personnel policies and regulations to cope with new challenges.

The challenges that arose recently include the creation of the first Constitution in 1996 (referred to in Oman as the Basic Law). The creation of the Basic Law is considered the most important legislative development in recent Omani history (Kechichian 1995; Rippenburg 1998). The document clarifies all aspects of the state apparatus. With its 80 articles, it includes declarations on human rights, freedom of speech and press, the rights and responsibilities of citizens, and the duties of the government (MI 2002a). Further, the document declares several rules that are directly connected to personnel management in the public service. It contains a number of provisions that, taken as a

⁴ The development of the personnel laws and institutions will be discussed in Chapter Five.

whole, provide a basis for EEO policy in public employment. Article 12 on Social Principles (Oman 1996:7) is the most direct statement; the article states:

Justice, equality and equality of opportunity between Omanis are the pillars of society, guaranteed by the State...Citizens are considered equal in taking up public employment according to the provisions of the Law.

The contemporary Omani civil service is expected to cope with the contents of this supreme document and to make sure its provisions are reflected in the personnel policies and procedures of the civil service, particularly those relevant to recruiting and promoting public servants to various grades and posts levels (Al-Siabi 1998; Alastai 2002). However, the extent of consistency between the current practice and the demands of the recently declared Basic Law is highly questionable and requires close attention.

In Oman, typical of any developing state, the civil service is assigned a wide range of tasks. There has been a predictable shortfall in both the quantitative and qualitative development of the civil service during the early years of development, compared with the pressure for growth brought upon it. One important result of the pressure for development was that public servants were recruited and promoted without sufficient account of merit criteria (Hassan 1990; Al-Ansi 1994).

As argued by some Omani specialists (e.g. Al-Yahmadi *et al.* 2002; Al-Ameri and Al-Farsi 2004), personnel selected to fill public posts during the early years of development were not necessarily chosen based on their qualities (e.g. qualification, experience, and skills) but rather through irrelevant factors. Favouritism and nepotism were the direct result of the open-ended regulations that allow direct appointment without formalised selection procedures. As will be observed in a later stage of this study, the 1975 and 1980 Civil Service Laws in various articles allow exceptions from open competition, suspending the declared merit principles.

Nevertheless, employment opportunities in the past were widely available in the public sector. This sector was and still is the most attractive sector for employment to Omanis (Maawali 2000). However, with the latest economic recession, national income declined, and so did easy access to employment to public office (Recabi 2001). The civil service has come under increasing pressure to ensure that the system allows the employment of the best qualified. Issues of social equality and the need to implement systematic recruitment to secure justice have had increasing significance since then.

Further, employment was not a problem in the past when there was less competition and professionalism. Nowadays, however, these have become increasingly obligatory, with the new development challenges that require an effective workforce. The Basic Law was issued and it demands that merit and equality should be secure and should be the basis for all recruitment policies and procedures in public office. Hence, not only are the government and its civil service institutions obliged to rule according to the dictates of the Basic Law, but the administrative structures, policies, and regulations should be in conformity with this supreme document, as well.

After identifying from the literature the EEO approach that suits the Omani civil service, the study aims to investigate the extent to which current recruitment policies serve merit and equality principles. With the exception of some entry level posts, most posts, including managerial posts, are currently filled through administrative appointments. Major procedures considered essential for successful recruitment (e.g. job analysis) are excluded from current regulations and practices. The study argues that recruitment and promotion in Oman is determined by non-administrative criteria. As a result, selection decisions are based on subjective opinions that cannot secure merit or equality.

While principles of merit were settled in many advanced countries decades ago, these are still a matter of great debate in developing countries.⁵ The Omani system relies heavily on the discretion of ministers to secure merit and equal opportunities. Recabi, an Arab expert who served in the MCS for fifteen years, labelled the current practice as “the system of a one man show” (Recabi 2001:6). This expert was convinced that the authority given to ministers suspends citizens’ right to compete for public posts. He argues that in tribal and traditional societies, such as that of Oman, current procedures may lead, directly or indirectly, to selection being affected by bias and favouritism. Recabi’s argument indeed gives a good reason for investigating this issue.

The topic becomes even more critical, bearing in mind that some published studies mentioned that nepotism and favouritism are considered as acceptable social norms in Arab societies (e.g. Awaji 1971; Jreisat 2002; Roberson *et al.* 2002). These studies are to be evaluated. It might be useful in this chapter to quote what is written about Oman in the U.S Department of State Annual Report which monitors human rights and equality issues around the world (Department of State 1997); the report notes:

⁵ For instance, in the UK, the Northcote-Trevelyn Report in 1854 and the Fulton Committee Report in 1968, and in the USA the Pendleton Act in 1883 and the Hoover Committee Report in 1955.

The announced Basic Law in Oman prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, ethnic origin, race, religion, language, sect, place of residence, and social class. However, decrees to implement its provisions have not been promulgated. Institutional and cultural discrimination based on gender, race, religion, and social status exists.

This study seeks to take into account the effect of context (e.g. the political environment and cultural norms) when personnel activities are carried out in the public service. This includes officials' attitudes and behaviour when involved in the recruitment and selection procedures. It argues that the material progress achieved in Oman over the last 35 years have not been accompanied by much change in people's attitudes to overcome negative social and cultural norms (e.g. bias and favouritism when filling public posts). It also argues that merit-based personnel procedures may promise a solution; otherwise nepotism and social networking will continue to be the primary mechanism to control personnel procedures. Without reform that secures competence principles, social status, exchange of benefits and other non-job related criteria will be difficult to control in Oman. Disadvantaged groups of the society will continue to have little access to key posts, even if eligible, when compared to the advantaged elites. This is mostly because the system concentrates authority in the hands of the latter. As will be observed, current methods reflect the way the prevailing culture shaped the composition of the system.

1.3. Previous Studies

Unlike the plethora of literature on Western countries' personnel systems, the availability of such literature on Oman is extremely limited. Locally, there is only one periodical in Oman that publishes scholarly work in the field of Public Administration and HRM, called *Aledary* (the Administration). This periodical is published quarterly in Muscat by the Institute of Public Administration, which is supervised by the Ministry of Civil Service. Until early 2005, only two articles were found relevant to this study's topic. With regard to academic research, no material was found that directly discusses EEO theories (e.g. the concepts of representation or diversity). The somewhat relevant and useful materials found were unpublished doctoral theses written by Omani researchers and submitted to Western universities.⁶ These studies have addressed themselves to various issues in field of HRM, yet they are similar in the fact that most paid little attention to recruitment policies and practice in the public sector.

⁶ These are: 1) Muharami, S. (1993), 2) Maawali, A. (2000), and 3) Hosni, T. (2001).

The most relevant is that of Muharami (1993). In this study, Muharami reviews administrative reforms in the Gulf States before and after the discovery of oil. He provides a detailed review of administrative development in these countries in relation to their economic progress. With regard to Oman, Muharami's contention is that after 1970 the Omani bureaucracy became quite organised as the country has embraced order and progress. He concludes his study by asserting the great need for further research in the field of public personnel management in Oman (Muharami 1993:256).

Within the regional context, some useful studies were located and reviewed. Most of these were related to public administration in neighbouring Saudi Arabia.⁷ One of the earliest is Awaji's (1971). In this study, Awaji examined the characteristics of the Saudi bureaucracy in relation to its cultural and social context. He employed a self-administered questionnaire in his study and took a sample of 271 government officials. His findings include that Saudi bureaucrats are influenced by their traditional values (family ties, etc) and such influence leads bureaucrats to behave dualistically, to satisfy their social values, on the one hand, and to fulfil their official duties, on the other. Awaji criticized the Saudi personnel system, pointing out that it has been manipulated by those who are in charge (Awaji 1971:65). His conclusion indicates that the Saudi bureaucracy, as a classic Arab public bureaucracy, is characterized by an "active representation" where bureaucrats are pushing for their constituencies (region and tribes) without any question being addressed regarding loyalty to the country or its general public.

Shiha (1984) evaluated the extent of representation of the Saudi public bureaucracy. He compared the bureaucratic representativeness of the United States with that of Saudi Arabia by using three indicators: accountability, responsiveness, and predictability. Shiha's contention was that the Saudi bureaucracy is representative. He rests his interpretation on several factors. Among them the bureaucracy is: 1) accountable (since citizens are loyal to the King), 2) responsive (since there is successful development), 3) predictable (since it has administrative discretion), and 4) has social homogeneity (since all Saudis are Arabs and Muslims), in contrast to the social heterogeneity of the US.

Although Shiha's analysis provides guidance to evaluate bureaucratic behaviour in developing Arab states, the validity of conducting a comparison between two nations

⁷ Saudi Arabia and Oman are both members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), along with Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, and UAE. These six states are almost completely homogeneous sharing the language, religion, and homogeneous cultures, most are financially and commercially integrated in the world's capitalist system, and have similar economic resources (oil), and similar political systems (monarchies).

that are culturally different is questionable. Haque (1997) argues that cross-cultural differences between the Western model of bureaucracy and developing nations should not be ignored. The two countries have different settings and orientations.

Rawaf's (1989) research seem to support Awaji's (1971) conclusion. She argues that personal friendship and family connections play an important role in the selection and the advancement processes of employees, which, ultimately, allows subjectivity and favouritism (*ibid*: 202). Her argument makes clear that bias against minority groups means that fewer are offered jobs in the first place and, subsequently, these groups face more inequality when competing to fill key posts. She concludes that disadvantaged groups are filtered out from the selection process at the earliest stage and stresses that without systematic recruitment, equality and merit cannot be served in Arab countries.

Finally, there is the study of Hassan (1994:140). This study explores problems of the personnel system in Arab World, which he attributes to "cultural alienation". In this detailed and critical study of the Sudanese public sector, Hassan (1994:91) argues that a comprehensive reform that takes into account all the interactive social Arab and Islamic values is required before aiming to achieve effective personnel policies in the Arab countries. Indeed, Hassan's findings and the findings of the other studies mentioned above are valuable and were useful sources in this study. Yet, as will be demonstrated below, this study has its originality and significance.

1.4. Significance of the Study

The study intends to fill an existing gap in the literature about the Omani civil service and its personnel policy. Before 1970, Oman was, to a great extent, neglected as a subject of scholarly inquiry. Now, the reader can easily find articles and books about Oman, but the main obstacle is the fact that most of these sources provide general information (country profile). In other words, it is very difficult to find scholarly publications that discuss the specific area of interest. This is clearly reflected in the shortage of materials in relation to the civil service. Data about the civil service is widely spread between government publications and very little is available in English. In recent years a number of studies have taken an interest in public administration, yet, as mentioned before, none discusses the civil service or its personnel management policies in specific.

This study has particular objectives. It attempts to investigate deficiencies in securing EEO policies and merit-based personnel procedure when public servants in Oman are recruited and selected to public office. This necessarily requires a comprehensive understanding of the roots of the country's administrative development. With this in view, personnel laws and institutions are to be evaluated. This is particularly important to Omani administrators as the study argues that the world of personnel management is shifting under the feet of the Omani civil service. The study draws particular attention to the fact that an effective public personnel system is a prerequisite for the development and advancement of the entire state functions. The study reassesses fundamental issues in order to establish, if possible, new points of reference, and shed light on how to restore successful ones. This process was conducted in the spirit of dialogue and understanding with personnel systems of some developed countries.

Oman is still in the early stage of development. Improving the public personnel system might be easier and less expensive at this stage. The research seeks to provide some useful recommendations to improve the capabilities of the system to cope with the challenges of modernization. As mentioned above, the civil service is required to cope with two particular issues: 1) to fulfil the objectives of the vision of the future, "Oman 2020", which demands effective development of human resources, and 2) to adjust personnel policies to cope with the requirements of the Basic Law (the constitution).

To the best of the researcher's knowledge, this study is the first to employ qualitative and quantitative methods to evaluate recruitment policies in the Omani civil service. The study benefits from the fact that the researcher is from the Ministry of Civil Service and has intimate experience of its operations. As will be observed, this connection was beneficial not only to enrich the study's arguments, but also to get access to primary data. Using personal connections in field studies indeed represented a great advantage (Schwab 1999; De Vaus 2001). This was also reflected in the valuable data collected from the interviews conducted with experts and senior officials inside and outside the Ministry of Civil Service. Interviews not only expanded the researcher's knowledge of the system, but also provided valuable assessments of current practice based on real world experience. Further, the researcher hopes that the gathered data about the civil service in a single resource and in English will be beneficial for future researchers.

Apart from the local perspective, the research is a significant contribution to knowledge at a wider level. Many studies have attempted to explain the link between recruitment procedures and equal opportunity approaches. This has become an area of increasing significance linked to the understanding of HRM in the global context (Torrington *et al.* 2002). However, most of these studies focus on private sector employment and have been conducted within European or U.S settings. As we indicated before, employment implications between the two sectors are different and the Western public personnel context is also different from that of the developing Arab countries (Haque 1997). Attempts to replicate, validate, or expand these studies within the Arab countries have been very limited, although Arab countries have the potential to be a “formidable international player” (Robertson *et al.* 2002:583).

Further, this study pays considerable attention to the role of context when evaluating public personnel policies and when considering reform. Unlike developed countries, culture is one of the major sources of work-related beliefs in Arab countries and has a strong effect on the function of the public bureaucracy (Ammaj 1993; Jreisat 2002). Kechichian (1995) and Ali (1999), for instance, argue that Arab culture tends to be more collectively oriented than the cultures of the West. In these countries, religious and cultural values are pervasive in the work-place, and the commitment to these values tends to influence almost all organisational attitudes. The issue of the effect of context in such organisational settings needs further explanation and is still not fully explored in the contemporary literature. There is a great need to extend knowledge on this field.

Theoretically, the study focuses on the implications of implementing particular EEO concept that can be translated into effective recruitment procedures within the context of a particular country’s public bureaucracy. In the light of the lack of agreement in the contemporary literature over the ideal EEO approach, in spite of the numerous attempts, it is often repeated that more research is needed. The study intends to contribute in filling this gap in HRM literature by evaluating the Representative Bureaucracy and Management Diversity EEO approaches as opposed to the traditional regulatory Merit-based approach. The aim is to identify the approach that may suit the context of the selected administrative setting.

The significance of such an attempt emerges from the fact that this study aims rationally to link theory to practice. Since the US Pendleton Act of 1883, through to the present

day, countries have adopted different strategies to make reforms in order to secure EEO principles, on the one hand, and to enhance efficiency, on the other. The remedial measures took different forms and were based on different concepts. Unlike previous studies where the focus is either on recruitment procedures or on EEO approaches, this study seeks to join these two elements together by demonstrating how EEO concepts can be translated into specific personnel policies and procedures in public office.

1.5. Research Objectives

Claiming that the existing recruitment methods in Oman are not systematic to reflect the equality and merit principles demanded by the Basic Law requires in-depth analysis of the system based on empirical evidence. Although the basic objectives of the study have been stated in the foregoing discussion, these can be summarised as follows:

1. To identify recruitment procedures that can be followed in Oman and can lead to secure principles of merit and equality. As a tool of analysis, a practical model of best practice is to be identified and reflected in the Omani personnel system.
2. To comprehend the context of the Omani system by understanding the country's political, economic, cultural and social characteristics and by explaining how such features affect the functions of the public bureaucracy.
3. To comprehend EEO approaches discussed in the literature and to see the possibilities of adopting these approaches in Oman and in its special context. Attention will be drawn to personnel procedures that can be followed to translate the objectives of these approaches into practical recruitment working model.
4. To examine personnel laws and institutions responsible for legislating, executing, and supervising the recruitment activity in Oman, and to evaluate the extent to which EEO rules can be reflected in the actual recruitment practices.
5. To answer the research questions and to test its hypotheses, which will be stated later in this study, through a triangulation of research methods. This necessitates the employment of three research tools: 1) the evaluation of secondary data (the literature), 2) the analysis of qualitative data (interviews), and 3) the analysis of quantitative data (a questionnaire).
6. To conclude with recommendations for development of the public personnel system in Oman to be more responsive to merit and EEO principles.

1.6. Limitations

As indicated previously, Oman was virtually unknown to the outside world as recently as 1970. There is a limited list of scholarly publications. As will be observed, the study depends to a great extent on primary sources. The lack of sufficient literature is, indeed, a major limitation. However, efforts have been made to cover all emergent research issues.

Another limitation the researcher faced is the lack of access to government publications. In Oman, as in many Arab countries, personnel policies are treated with confidentiality. Although personal contacts were beneficial to certain degree to overcome this limitation, the researcher faced difficulties in obtaining important statistics and data. Interviews were a useful source, yet they remain a reflection of the views of the people who provided them. Omani researchers usually deal with issues of social justice with a degree of caution to avoid being accused of criticizing the system. Criticism perceived as groundless could meet with a negative reaction. Although there is no alternative to the label “unjust” except “unjust”, attempts were made to base criticism on facts.

There are also some limitations related to the field study, which are as follows:

1. The study focuses on the main functions of recruitment and selection in the civil service. Thus, no attempt is made to cover all aspects of the operations of public personnel functions (e.g. training, payroll, HRD, or retirement).
2. The scope of the study is limited to public personnel under the jurisdiction of the 1980 Civil Service Law. This does not include, therefore, personnel in the private sector, independent public corporations or the Military and Police. Those are governed by their own professional and service codes of regulation.
3. Two groups of civil servants are further excluded from the scope of study, these are: 1) political appointees (e.g. Ministers, and Under-secretaries), and 2) non-Omanis. These two groups have their own service codes of regulation, which differ in the recruitment procedures from those applicable to the massive majority of civil servants who occupy the grades of the General and the Special Schedules (to be discussed in Chapter Five). For instance, the first group fills posts through royal decrees, while the second are subject to the rules of the Executive Regulation (see Oman 1980:8-10, and Oman 1984:6-12).

1.7. The Organisation of the Thesis

Including this introductory chapter, the materials in this thesis are organised into eight chapters to provide systematic coverage. The content is outlined in the following:

Chapter Two contains a survey of the literature and is organised into three sections. The first section starts by discussing public administration in developing countries and how political, economic, and social factors affect the functions of public bureaucracies in these countries when compared to their counterparts in industrialised nations. Then the focus is narrowed to the Oman. The context of the public bureaucracy in Oman is discussed with particular attention drawn to the social value system. The second section discusses EO concepts. Three EEO approaches are discussed, namely, the concept of Representative Bureaucracy, the Management Diversity approach, and the traditional regulatory merit-based personnel system. The third section discusses implementation. After locating the approach that suits Oman, an attempt is made to identify recruitment and selection procedures that can be followed to translate EEO objectives into working model. As a tool of analysis, a seven steps merit-based model is identified as a basis for evaluating, at a later stage, factors that retard progress in Oman. The section discusses also some key personnel functions related to the recruitment activity (e.g. the concept of career service, and processes of the job classification system).

Chapter Three is devoted to the research methodology. A comprehensive coverage is provided of how the theoretical base of the study was reflected in the empirical work. Next, the research questions are presented. An explanation is provided of how these questions emerged and what strategy was used to answer them. The questions lead to the formulation of several hypotheses which are to be tested through the adopted research methods. The third section discusses the methods used. A triangulation of methods was adopted to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings. Apart from the analysis of the literature, an explanation is provided on how the self-administered questionnaire and the semi-structured interviews were employed. With regard to the questionnaire, the section explains the procedures followed. This covers sampling, construction, scaling, contents, validity, reliability, piloting, administration and implementation. Similar details are provided about the interviews (e.g. format; sample; schedule; administration).

Chapter four is devoted to discuss the environment of public bureaucracy in Oman. The chapter affords a wide understanding of the country and its people. It reviews Oman's

geo-historical setting and its political and economic structure. An attempt is made to link these variables to the overall bureaucratic norms applied when administrative tasks are performed and policies are made. The chapter discusses the structure of the current government, the achievements in socio-economic programmes, and the challenges that face the country in coping with modernisation. Then, attention is drawn to the structure of the Omani society. The final section addresses the characteristics of the population in terms of religious sect, origin, and class status.

Chapter Five deals with the institutions and laws responsible for the recruitment in Oman. The chapter is organised into three sections and aims to set the stage for the next chapter, which evaluates recruitment policy and practice. The first section explores the achievements in the public personnel field before and after 1970. An attempt is made to separate the development of personnel laws from those related to agencies responsible for their implementation. The last section of Chapter Five discusses contemporary issues in the Omani civil service, which are of direct relevance to employment and EEO issues; these are: 1) the components of the workforce, 2) the employment policy, and 3) gender and equality opportunity issues. Data provided in this chapter is supplemented by interviews conducted with Omani officials and experts.

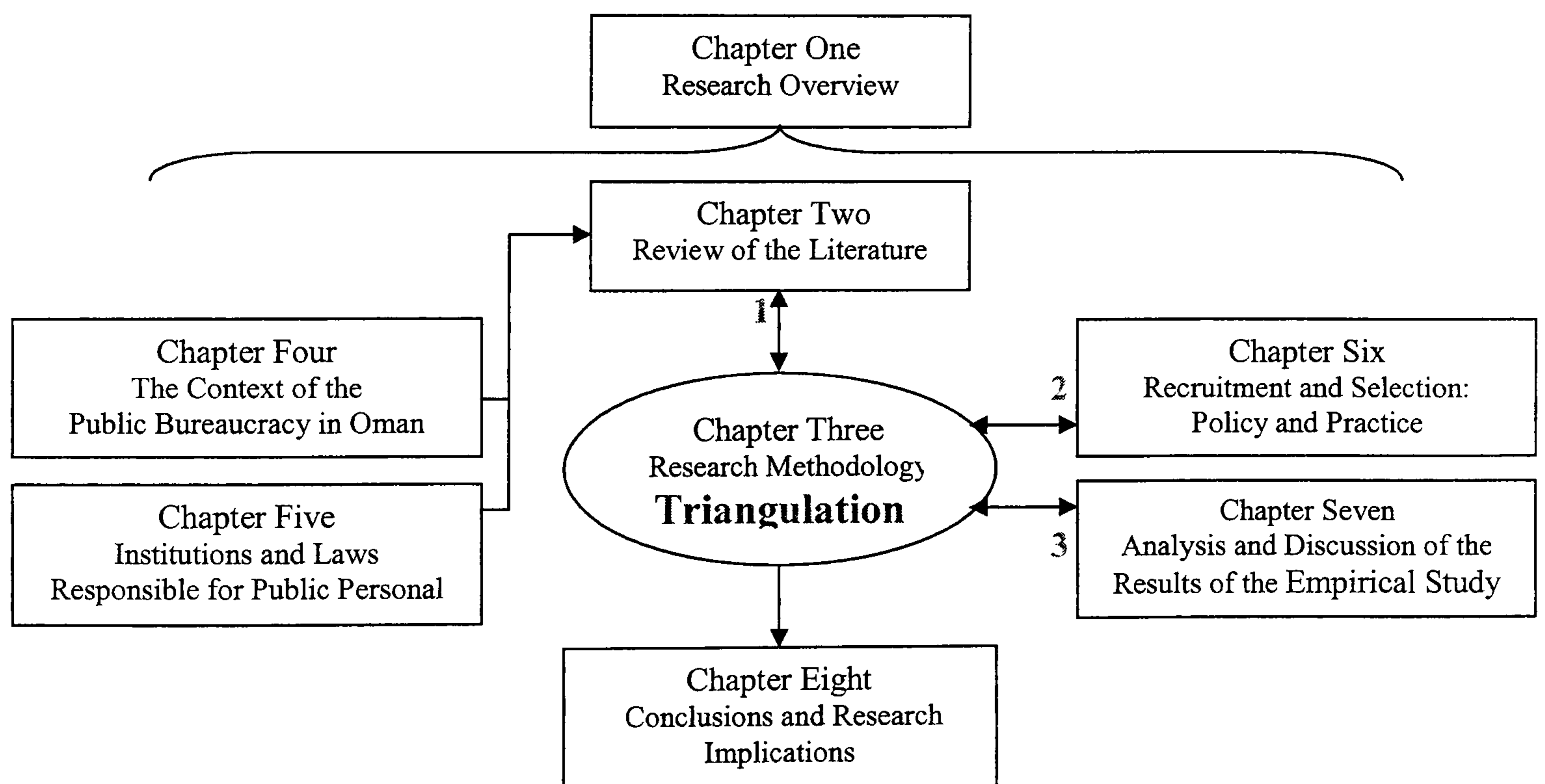
Chapter Six analyses recruitment and selection policy and practice. This chapter also benefits from data obtained through the interviews with officials. It begins with an explanation of the structure of grades and posts in the civil service hierarchy. Emphasis is placed on the payment and job classification systems in operation. Then, the chapter discusses the recruitment and selection methods followed. Recruitment methods are divided into two types: internal (post-to-post and grade-to-grade promotions) and external (entry level posts). The discussion covers procedures, regulations and practice. The views of practitioners are also analysed concerning the effectiveness of the current system and its implication on merit principles and objectives. The chapter concludes by reviewing the legal implications of the current recruitment and selection policy and practice (the extent of compliance with the Basic Law).

Chapter Seven is devoted to discussion of the same issues discussed in Chapter Six but based on the field study (the questionnaire and structured interviews). The primary aim is to evaluate the findings and to analyse the factors influencing recruitment and

selection policies from the perspective of three respondent groups (Civil Servants, Managers, and Experts). The research hypotheses are tested within this context.

Chapter Eight is the concluding chapter. It contains a summary of the main research findings and the study's theoretical and field study implications. It also contains the concluding remarks, followed by a series of recommendations on how to improve the current recruitment policy in Oman to be responsive to the merit and EEO principles.

Figure 1.1: Diagram of relationship between the chapters of the thesis



Chapter Two

Review of the Literature

2.1. Introduction

As indicated in Chapter One, this research attempts to fill a void in the discussion of how to sustain a merit foundation in public organisations, particularly in developing countries where environmental variables or national contexts have strong impact on human resource policies. Although the study focuses on a certain organisational setting, the context is the broader issue of merit in principle and in practice in modern employment and on how HRM responds to changing demands. It was noticed how the gap between public and private personnel management is narrowing as the broad field of HRM and its policies have grown to apply to both the sectors. Hence, the larger goal is to offer an alternative perspective for embedding the values merit represents in response to modern public bureaucracies.

A review of the literature on personnel management in public sector setting provides information on how academia addresses recruitment policies and procedures. Typically, equal employment opportunity (EEO) concepts or approaches are discussed at one end of the continuum and laws, policies and procedures required to implement these concepts or approaches are discussed at the other. The environment within which the bureaucracy functions is always at the heart of the discussion and given considerable attention. Field experts (e.g. Riggs 1964, Mosher 1982, Haque 1997, Peters 2001 and Flynn 2002) agree national conditions differ between countries and different contexts generate different discourses on the way reform or changes can be made. They stress that bureaucracy cannot be treated as a neutral institution, but rather as a sub-system of its surroundings. This study adopts this approach and accepts that the choice of the EEO approach that may suit Oman and the recruitment procedures associated by the selected approach should be informed by analysis of the contexts of the bureaucracy.

Based on the above description, it can be said that three interrelated issues need to be addressed to cover the study's subject: 1) the context of the public bureaucracy in Oman, 2) the EEO approach that suit that context, and 3) the recruitment and selection policies and procedures that should be followed to implement the selected EEO approach.

The above three fields of the literature, together, constitute a framework which will inform the analysis of this study. To concentrate efforts into a specific direction, the literature, in that respect, is categorised into three sets, and accordingly the organisation of this chapter. The first can be labelled explanatory or “means-related”, the second is “theoretical” or “conceptual”, while the third is “procedural” or “ends-related”. As can be seen, the third is intended to reflect the findings from the first two.

The first section aims to explore the effects of culture, religion, and social norms on the general function of the Omani bureaucracy. The aim here is to show how the unique features of the public administration in the Arab countries, in general, and in Oman, in particular, necessitate the adoption of particular policies. After a short introduction to the role of the modern civil service and the importance of selecting an efficient recruitment policy, the second section discusses EEO approaches. The attention is directed to organisational policies and procedures governments may adopt to secure EEO values. Two approaches are discussed in this context as opposed to the traditional merit system: the Representative Bureaucracy approach and the Management Diversity approach. The discussion covers the development of each approach, their advantages and disadvantages, and the extent to which each may or may not be suitable to Oman.

The last section is devoted to the procedures required to secure the implementation of the selected approach. The section begins by outlining key personnel functions related to recruitment policy (e.g. career service and position classification). The experiences of some developed countries are discussed within this context. Finally, for the purpose of clarity, a merit-based model of recruitment is outlined. The objective is to use this model as a guide when evaluating the procedures in Oman in a later stage of this study.

2.2. The Context of Public Bureaucracy in Arab Countries

The context of public bureaucracy is extremely important in determining organisational policies that fit the specific administrative setting (Flynn 2002; Hughes 2003). Hughes (2003), for instance, argues that differences of national culture have a bearing on the practice of HRM, and are particularly worth considering when evaluating personnel policies, as culture, political and economic systems, and social norms have a strong effect on the general function of the public bureaucracy. Dominant political ideologies and the management climate in the public sector influence almost all operations of

personnel activities and act as a “simplifying mechanism” to justify administrative strategies and reform goals (Haas 1980). Lachman *et al.* (1994:40) note:

Culture can be used as an explanatory variable in management studies as it can cause differences and affect the transferability of management and organisational practices

Indeed, organisational culture cannot be ignored if we are to discuss personnel policies, particularly in bureaucratic setting such as that of Oman’s. Mullins (2005) indicates that although the concept of organisational culture is widely acknowledged because of its pervasive influence over employees behaviour and action, the term, in itself, is difficult to define precisely because there is no consensus on its meaning or its applications. According to him, a simple way of defining culture is: “How things are done around here”, while the term organisational culture can be defined as: “The collection of traditions, values, policies, beliefs, and attitudes that constitute a pervasive context for everything we do and think in an organisation” (Mullins: 2005:891).

Observers, such as Haque (1997) and Lachman *et al.* (1994), who made particular emphasis on developing countries, regard organisational culture in these countries as the major determinant of work attitudes, as the concept is deep-seated in their political, religious, and social norms.

Smith (1996) indicates that the term “Developing Countries” is usually associated with the term “Third World”. He points out that controversially the term “Third World” is used to identify developing, underdeveloped and poor countries and only a small minority of countries would be regarded as part of the Third World by other criteria. Hence, a country may find itself labelled within this terminology even though it differs in social, economic, and political conditions from many other countries in that same category. According to Smith, the definition of the term “Third World”, however, acknowledges the process of change and the diversity between countries. He notes:

A group of countries which have colonial histories and which are in the process of developing economically and socially from a status characterised by low incomes, dependence on agriculture, weakness in trading relations, social deprivation for large segments of society, and restricted political and civil liberties (Smith 1996:3).

According to the World Bank, Third World countries are mainly developing countries. These countries are poor by international standard and the majority are found in the low-income or lower-middle-income categories defined in terms of gross national product, GNP per capita. They are typically characterised by high levels of dependence

on the export of a very small number of commodities, compared with the diversified exports of most developed countries (World Bank 1997). With regard to the Arab countries, the Bank indicates that although some are still considered under-developed (e.g. Somalia, and Mauritania), the majority are labelled developing, including Oman.

Hughes (2003:218) discusses some characteristics of the developing countries. He draws particular attention to the relationship between political ideology and economy in these countries. According to him, most developing countries adopt the principle of a strong state sector in the economy and in many cases, this has been “allied with the then-prevailing ideas of socialism”. He explains that these countries believed that the fastest way of achieving economic growth is through government ownership of enterprise, intervention in the private sector, and the dominance by a “bureaucratic technocracy.” However, Hughes (2003) argues, this strategy failed. The World Bank (1997:2) supports this argument. The Bank’s report notes:

Things never worked as the technocrats expected in developing countries. Governments embarked on fanciful schemes. Private investors, lacking confidence in public policies or in the steadfastness of leaders, held back. Powerful rulers acted arbitrarily. Corruption became endemic. Development faltered, and poverty endured.

Exploring differences between developed and developing states may help to understand the environment of public bureaucracy in Oman, as a typical developing country. Haque (1997) provides a comprehensive comparison. He discusses the issue using three dimensions of comparison: politics, economy, and culture. In terms of politics, the administrative system in advanced capitalist nations emerged within a socio-historical context based on scientific and industrial revolution, a stable political system, a degree of political neutrality, an effective mechanism of bureaucratic accountability, and an ideological atmosphere of liberal democracy that separates state from religion. In contrast, bureaucracy in developing nations is characterized by increasingly powerful civilian or military bureaucracy, centralized elitist behaviour, absence of competitive political parties, monarchical powers, and patron-client relationships (Haque 1997:436). Such features, Haque argues, lead to limited political participation and the emergence of authoritarian and one-party rule. Hence, a weak or underdeveloped political system encourages the bureaucracy in developing countries to intervene in all aspects of life.

In terms of the economic dimension, Haque (1997) indicates that the economic context of public bureaucracy in advanced nations is predominantly characterized by strong

market forces, free economic competition, and the tradition of limited state intervention, or what he called “a complementary relationship between the state and private capital”. On the other hand, market forces in developing countries are weak, economic competition is limited, state intervention is apparent, and the relationship between the state and private sector is conflictual (*ibid* 438).

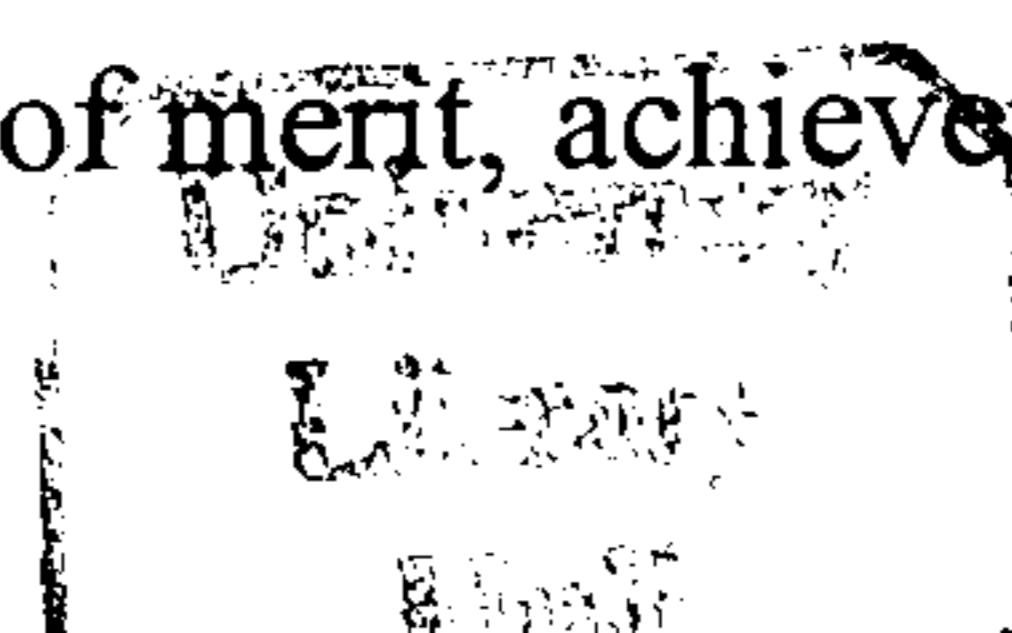
Haque (1997), further, sheds light on another economic factor. He argues that although some developing countries have adopted the Western capitalist economic model, their economic context remains notably different and the disparity between bureaucracy and economy causes “incongruity and inconsistency” (*ibid* 440). He is persuaded by Crone’s (1988) argument that the advanced economic model and bureaucratic backwardness cannot go hand in hand. She argues that an advanced economy requires maintenance of law and order and advanced bureaucratic apparatus, while in developing countries the state holds overwhelming power by mediating the interests of particular classes. In such systems, Crone (1988:78) explains, the state elites play a crucial role in transforming “the weak petty bourgeoisies into a proper ruling class.”

It almost goes without saying that the public sector in developing nations controls the economy and, hence, it has overwhelming power. Oman is no exception. In Oman, the state directly operates almost all activities, including some that are regarded as belonging to the private sector. Hughes (2003:224) discussed the characteristics of state-owned enterprises in one typical developing country, Zambia. He writes:

Public enterprises in developing countries were characterized by low profitability, poor return on investment and lack of strategy. There were a number of problems: managers were poorly trained and lacked direction; there was an inefficient organisational structure with overstaffing common; inadequate financial control systems; weak oversight by the government; political interference; and the ‘opportunistic misuse’ of state-owned enterprises by private individuals, bureaucrats or joint-venture partners.

Therefore, unlike the relatively balancing role of state bureaucracy in developed nations, governments in developing nations becomes the dominant power and, accordingly, their role and authority is unlimited. This demonstrates the importance of the quality of those who run these type bureaucracies and the way they are recruited to public posts.

Finally, Haque (1997) discusses the cultural dimension and asserts that the Western model of bureaucracy emerged and expanded within a cultural context that embodied certain values such as secularism, individualism, and rationality. In developed systems, the cultural atmosphere is distinguished by its features of merit, achievement orientation,



specialization, and impersonality. In contrast, the culture in developing societies is characterised by ritualism, ascriptive norms, patron-client relations, informal interaction, seniority-based authority, extended family, and collective responsibility. Hughes (2003) adds to the above that developing countries are characterised by strict hierarchy where the elite are recruited to lifetime careers with high salaries even in the poorest states. As will be observed, all of the above descriptions are directly relevant to the Omani case.

The literature on the effect of culture on the function of public bureaucracy cannot be properly covered without shedding light on the work of Fred Riggs, who made a particular effort to understand the nature of bureaucracy in developing societies decades ago. Riggs' (1964) approach, based on "ecological factors" and their relationship to the administrative system, takes understanding beyond the immediate structural and functional features of the system. This approach identifies societies in terms of their predominant economic features. Three broad societal types were identified: agraria, industria and transitional. Within this spectrum of societal types, Riggs argued, all systems throughout the world can be located.

According to Riggs (1961:4-12), countries identified as "agraria" are those in which the economy is predominantly agricultural, with associated traditional social features. At the opposite end of the spectrum are the "industria" or advanced countries, with associated social features of urbanism, and technological culture. The third type, which is the intermediate, is the "transitional". The third type is "not just in-between by some economic and social mix, but transforming from the first type to the second". Riggs argues that all developing societies are located within the transitional type.

Riggs (1964), then, identifies a series of three deductive models related to the above social types bureaucracies: the fused, the diffracted, and the prismatic. He characterised organisations on the basis of analysing their activities rather than their purposes and coins the phrase "Prismatic Society". According to him, administrative activities are identified as "those of any organisation having to do with its allocation of goods and services", while public administration is defined as "the structures for locating goods and services in a government". In his full-scale study, *Administration in Developing Countries: the Theory of Prismatic Society*, Riggs (1964:22) argues:

Clearly our fused and diffracted models cannot be found in the real world. But these ideal or constructed types can serve a heuristic purpose by helping us to describe real world situation.

The three models (Fused, Diffracted and Prismatic) are taken from physics and analysis of light. Just as light may be fused as white light or broken into numerous colours, so functions in society may be fused or spread. A diffracted society, therefore, is one in which functions in society are highly specified, in the same way light may be diffracted into a wide spectrum of colours. The third possibility is “the Prismatic Society”. This type represents the middle ground between the fused and the diffracted and reflects the situation of transitional societies.

Riggs identifies several features of the prismatic society, including heterogeneity, formalism and overlapping. Heterogeneity refers to the simultaneous presence, side by side, of quite different kinds of systems, practice and viewpoints. Formalism refers to the impression given by constitution, law, regulations, and organisation charts. Overlapping refers to the extent to which what is described as “administrative” behaviour is actually determined by non-administrative criteria, such as social and economic status and considerations of influence and power.

Moreover, Riggs (1964) explains that several administrative practices are found in typical prismatic societies. Among these is nepotism, as appointment is widely based on tribal and family influence. He argues that nepotistic recruitment to public office predominates and officials are not recruited based on merit competence, but with a view to elite status. Riggs (1964: 273) further emphasises that the social hierarchy in prismatic societies directs not only appointments and promotions in public office, but all services and benefits gained from government and concludes: “prismatic systems are basically wasteful and prodigal.”

Oman is typical of a prismatic society. Its economy is transitional (midway between the agraria and the industria) and its administration is prismatic (midway between the fused and the diffracted). Riggs’ argument leads to the assertion that considerations of influence and elite status, or capability to use position to help others from similar background, are characteristic of the Omani bureaucracy. In Oman, tribal or traditional background is considered when officials are to be selected to important positions. This phenomenon is discussed by Rippenburg (1998:70), who argues that the Sultan’s appointments to key posts (e.g. Ministers, Ambassadors, and so forth) are clearly influenced by the tribal background, and accordingly, most political appointees are drawn from the social elite.

Foster (1993) discusses another important aspect related to bureaucracy in developing societies. He sheds light on what he refers to as the “reconciliation period” required before genuine change may emerge in developing societies. Foster (1993:4) develops two concepts of society by distinguishing between “technical and material change” and “non- material cultural change”. According to him, for every technical and material change, there is a corresponding change in the attitudes, thoughts, values, and behaviour of the people who are affected by material change. He contrasts material change with non- material change by pointing out that the effect of material culture is determined by the extent to which the other aspects of culture are affected by it. Barriers are found in the nature of the social structure of the society; “the prevailing type of family and the relationships among its members, caste and class factors, the locus of authority in familial and political units, the nature of faction and the like” (Foster 1993:77). He explains that once the society is convinced that the old ways are less useful, then change will take place and the strength of the conservative forces will be weakened while the change force will be strengthened. Foster (1993:79) calls this period the “reconciliation period”, and emphasises in developing societies this period is not an easy period to go through, as change is unusually difficult and slow.

Ogburn (1983: 477-78) discusses cultural change in transitional societies, as well, and argues that cultural change requires readjustments in cultural attitudes. He coins the term “maladjustment” and indicates that the speed of change varies considerably from one system to the other systems. He introduces his argument as follows:

Various parts of modern culture are not changing at the same rate, some parts are changing much more rapidly than others; and that since there is a correlation and interdependence of parts, a rapid change in one part of culture requires readjustments through other changes in the various correlated parts of culture. ...the extent of this lag will vary according to the nature of the culture material, but may exist for a considerable number of years, during which there may be said to be maladjustment.”

The literature on Arab countries’ public administration confirms the importance of the environmental variables and the extent these variables play in shaping all functions. Ammaj (1993) studied the function of public sectors in some Arab countries and argued that these systems share common deficiencies. He indicated that bureaucracy provides services in almost every aspect of life on the behalf of the state and their functions have proliferated. In his research findings, Ammaj (1993:179) lists a number of deficiencies Arab bureaucracies share; these are summarised as follows:

1. *Shortages of adequately qualified and trained personnel.*
2. *Education and training facilities do not match public service requirements.*
3. *Low levels of motivation and commitment in the service.*
4. *Low job satisfaction.*
5. *Concentration of authority in the higher reaches of the hierarchy.*
6. *Lack of public trust of the civil servant and a weakness of respect.*

Within this context, Heady (1984:195) discusses the nature of the political system in Arab countries like Saudi Arabia and Yemen (which are similar to Oman to a large extent) and describes these systems as “static” in nature, with a long history of traditional elite systems where challenge to traditional attitudes is not permitted or encouraged. He describes these systems as “ortho-traditional regimes” and explains that the ruling elite has been able to sustain the society with internal solidarity resting on the traditional bases of custom, heredity and religion as they rely for their strength on the traditional class structure and work hard to keep it that way. He concludes that the administrative machinery or the civil bureaucracy, which is the vehicle to permit or encourage change, is used to delay “unwanted change”, since its ability to operate efficiently is disrupted by its own traditional characteristics. Heady (1984:294) writes:

Although such regimes will probably be committed to modernising goals, these are likely to be limited in scope and designed not to jeopardize the political status quo. The emphases will instead be on rapid industrialisation and provision of public services, particularly if the country is fortunate enough to have extensive oil reserves which can be exploited as in the Arabian Peninsula states.

Understanding the social value system in Oman and how this system affects the state’s and citizens’ attitudes is essential. Omani commentators, such as Agwani (1987) and Al-Ansi (1994), stress that the public bureaucracy in Oman operates within a specific setting and it is influenced in its operation by that setting. According to them, it is influenced mainly by its cultural factors. Al-Ansi (1994), for instance, refers to these factors as “cultural environmental variables influencing the administrative system”, and emphasises that these factors should not be disregarded, particularly if discussing or evaluating personnel management. Peters (2000:77) highlights this issue, as well, but from a wider perspective. He emphasises the importance of context when conducting organisational studies and argues that national culture has a direct effect on the public bureaucracy and on the people it manages; he writes:

Culture has a significant impact on the behaviour of public administration. We are the products of our own culture and see the world from our own perspective. It is difficult, if not impossible, to escape the imperatives of a culture taught to us from birth... any

significant progress must come a more complete empirical delimitation of culture and an examination of its dimensions' variables.

The next section will shed light on the social value system in Oman.¹ In the section an attempt is made to help readers observe how the material development in Oman over the last 35 years has not changed citizens cultural and social norms. The aim is to show, at a later stage in this chapter, why particular equal opportunity policies and regulations should be adopted in Oman to correspond with its social environment.

2.2.1. The Social Value System in Oman

To narrow the scope of the social value system in Oman to a manageable range, an attempt was made to identify the cultural norms that directly influence public servants' attitudes when carrying out duties. As will be observed, culture in Oman exerts a profound impact upon the state and its public bureaucracy.

Prior to the advent of oil, life in Oman was simple and a tribal system of government served the limited needs of the people. There were no developed political institutions and the tribe formed the basis for political and social organisation. Government, as we know it now, was represented by ruling tribes; within the tribes, it was represented by tribes' leaders, named Sheikhs who acted as the supreme political and legislative authority. A consultative council within the tribe called *Al-sablah* could assist Sheikhs if required. *Al-sablah* consists of the powerful men in the tribe who are consulted by the tribe's leader before decisions are made (Hourani 1991, Rippenburg 1998).

Sheikhs are usually selected on the basis of their personal qualities, such as wisdom, maturity, bravery, generosity and justice. Al-Haj (1996), however, argues that personal characteristics are not the only criteria for leadership. Sheikhs are chosen from a noble branch of the tribe and should be wealthy. Once the Sheikh is chosen, members of the tribe are expected to give support, obedience and loyalty.

Kinship and tribal orientation play a critical role in citizens' attitudes. Norton (1995) provides an in-depth investigation of the characteristics of the Arab tribal system. He indicates that the cultural dynamics of Arab society are affected by the collectivity of

¹ The term 'Value System' is used in this study based on the definition provided by Awaji (1971:53) who defines it as 'the aggregate of values, norms, and patterns of relationships prevailing in the contemporary Arab society which, with respect to the public bureaucracy, defines the social conception of bureaucrats' roles and responsibilities towards their own particular social groups'.

family and tribe over individual, and explains that kinship and tribal relations, rather than the individual, form the primary unit of community. With all Arabs, whether urban, peasant, or bedouin, intimate groups have five interconnected levels; these are: A'ilah (the close family), A'l bait (three generations up and down), A'ahl (kin), A'lfakhitha (sub-tribe), and A'lqabilah (the tribe). Mutual aid and cooperation within these five ranks is essential in the Arab culture. This social norm, as will be observed shortly, not only affects officials' attitudes when performing their formal duties, but also directly affects the general function of the public bureaucracy and its efficiency.

Hassan (1990) indicates that the entire social structure in Oman is based on kinship and, hence, it is not surprising to find a certain amount of influence being exercised in favour of relatives. Hassan confirms that tribal identity has never lost importance in Oman and kinship links are maintained in what is a carry-over of tribal traditions. Despite the significant changes that have occurred in Oman, notably since 1970, Sheikhism has maintained its identity and changes in the social structure of the society might be more apparent than real. Eickelman (1989) confirms this, as well, when he indicates that Oman is built on the traditional structure in which power vested in Sheikhs is a respected part of the political system.

No less important than the tribal system is the role of the family. In Oman, as in all Arab and Muslim states, family loyalty permeates all aspects of life. According to McElwee and Al-Riyami (2003) Omani society is "a family oriented society", and this dominates all social relations. They explain that for Arabs, the family lies at the core of society playing a major role in political, economic, social and religious spheres and that all social relations are directly tied to family and tribe considerations which are fundamental for every individual's personal identity, whether in cities or villages. In Oman, people are conscious of each other's family membership, identity and status. Consequently, family links facilitate access to public jobs and government services.

Family groupings form the basis of interaction and the lineage patterns operate as the invisible framework of the community. Peterson (2004a) indicates that the extended family in Oman is the core societal unit and the relationships within it have had, for centuries, a major determining influence on political attitudes. Peterson (2004a) also mentions that intermarriage is controlled in Oman to sustain family integrity and the tribe's reputation, in general.

With regard to the issue of intermarriage, the society in Oman has a long tradition of consanguineous marriage and this custom is deeply rooted in people's view of their tribal and family integrity. Cousin marriages have prevailed over time for social and economic reasons, to strengthen family ties and enable property to be kept within the paternal family group. Evidence of the continuity of intermarriage is confirmed through a recent empirical study conducted by Rajab and Patton (2000). The aim of this study was to determine the prevalence of consanguineous marriage and the mean coefficient of inbreeding in Oman. Consanguinity rates among 60,635 couples they investigated (20.8% of the national population of childbearing age) were determined on the basis of a questionnaire in major delivery units.² In this large survey, 24.1% of marriages were reported between first cousins, 11.8% between second cousins and 20.4% were within specific tribal groupings. In their analysis Rajab and Patton (2000) indicate that because of the strictly endogamous nature of the tribal groups, most marriages would be expected to be consanguineous to some degree, although at a level beyond that of second cousins. Rajab and Patton (2000: 324) conclude by noting:

The study confirms that, in common with other Middle Eastern states, in Oman there has been a high proportion of consanguineous marriages in past generations and this practice continues to present day.

Agwani (1987:9) goes further to relate family values to the national level (citizens'/monarch relations). He argues that the society in Oman is a "parental society", where loyalty is found in the relationship between father and son as it is found at the national level between citizens and the ruler. Rippenburg (1998:70) also discusses this unique relation in Oman (the family/state relationship) and argues that a basic feature of the family system in Oman is "authority", from the father's authority within the household to the authority of the ruler at the level of the state. She explains that this factor is essential to understand the structure of the role of Sultan Qaboos, who is regarded very much as the father of his people; she notes, "His popularity seems authentic". Rippenburg (1998:71), further, comments:

In a system which enhances the role of the ruler as paterfamilias, the impetus for change tends to come from the top rather than the bottom.

Tradition, customs, and norms have stemmed from these relationships and adopted as society's rules of communications. Eickelman (1989) shows how lineages operate in

² The number of couples investigated in Rajab's and Patton (2000) study may seem huge (60,635). The researcher checked this number in more than one electronic source and it was stated as shown above.

this system when he explains that mutual obligation and interdependence mainly stem from the fact that members of a lineage rely for their protection on their lineage kin group, or the tribe at large. He explains that members of the lineage share common economic interests; thus, all are obliged to participate in enhancing the interests of their tribe. Within this context, Agwani (1987:11) argues that in Oman tribesmen are not encouraged to be independent from the interest of their tribe:

The identity of the individual is identical with that of the lineage. The individual is primarily responsible for its welfare and prosperity. That is, individualism- meaning independence- doesn't exist in tribal society apart from the demands, the needs and the form of the particular group. Consequently, individual's initiative is only encouraged when it serves and enhances the interests of the group.

Hence, backing and support are articulated through the extended family and tribal linkages; in fact, some observers (e.g. Norton 1995; Peterson 2004c) argue that national solidity in Oman is not a matter that can be taken for granted, as opposed to regional and tribal attitudes which remain strong. Peterson (2004c), for instance, emphasises that the geographical pattern of the former family-tribal system in Oman has been difficult to destroy, even with the modern system of government.

Consistent with the above argument, a study conducted by the Directorate General of Job Organisation and Classification in the Ministry of Civil Service (MCS 2001) found that Omani civil servants have a common reluctance to move away from their extended families, even if offered a higher salary and better posts. The study considered this phenomenon as a major obstacle to training and advancement for many civil servants.

Even when servants move from their traditional areas, tribal identity and its associated set of values are maintained. Muharami (1993) explores this topic and argues that although transfer and training requirements drew employees from their regions to urban areas, such as Muscat, regional and tribal identity are preserved and secured. He explains that instead of adjusting to the new environment, attitudes and values of these employees transferred from an essentially tribal system based within traditional territories to one located in the new place. Muharami (1993:87), in fact, argues the sense of belonging and the desire to support tribe members increase when employees find themselves living in a new environment.

The Omani culture is also based on the fundamental principles of Islam. Religion in Islamic societies influences the attitudes and behaviour of people in almost all aspects

of life. Assessing the overall impact of religion on Muslims' values, Al-Haj (1996: 556) writes: "Islam is the base of determining the relationships among people and it is the determinant of almost all social and cultural values". He explains that, unlike Europe and North America, where identity and loyalty are described in terms of nationality, faith is the political force that measures identity and loyalty in the Muslim world. Descent, language and residence have been of secondary importance and loyalty, in terms of nationality, has not been a major consideration in Muslim countries until relatively recent. Lewis (1994:72) argues that it was only during the nineteenth century, under European influence, that the idea of political nation, or nationalism defined in terms of connection to a piece of land, advanced in the Islamic world. For Muslims, the basic division, the criterion by which persons are separated from one another, is religion. Consistent with this view, Riphenburg (1998:58) mentioned that it is only in the last few years that Oman has negotiated boundary treaties with its neighbouring states.

Furthermore, the separation of religion and politics has no traditional place in Muslim society. Along with other Muslims, Omanis do not consider religion as a private or personal activity. Instead, Muslim societies in all their social structure and cultural variety are organic societies with organic religious systems (Riphenburg 1998). Hassan (1990) argues that *Shariah* (Islamic Law) provides a guiding framework, whether of the government or of individuals. He indicates that the Omani state is committed to abide by the principles of Islam: "Shariah and Qur'an have been the bases of all government's policies and laws" (*ibid*: 10). The Basic Law confirms this orientation. In its provisions, it attaches religion to the monarch and to the state's authority (see Oman 1996: articles 1 and 2). Such an orientation was observed by Riphenburg (1998:154) who indicates that Oman is a "neopatriarchal state, a monarchy attaching religion to power". Therefore, religion remains a vital force in all aspects, including those relevant to the general function of public bureaucracy.

Excluding expatriates or non-Omanis, the entire population in Oman is Muslim.³ Under Islam, work is seen as a form of worship, as Islam encourages followers to be honest and loyal to their jobs and faithful to their employers (Abdullah 1998). It regards the process of selecting the right person in a post, that is the best qualified, as a function of serving the community. The Qur'an praises the hired man who is strong and honest:

³ According to Peterson (2004b), only a handful of Omani non-Muslim Hindu families exist on the coast near Muscat, who obtained their Omani nationality only after 1970.

“...truly the best of men for thee to employ is the (man) who is strong and trusty” (the Holy Qur’an 28:26 cited in Abdullah 1998). Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) urged Muslims to be skilled in performing their work and work is considered a trust and responsibility which should be performed without bias (Hazzaa 1992). Generally, the teaching of Islam does not conflict with modern methods of personnel management and its teaching encourages the principles of merit when people are selected to various posts.⁴ In fact, Islam stresses the importance of developing human resources and setting the required rules to secure equality to all, including non-Muslims.

The preceding discussion showed how the social value system in Oman is maintained and secured, and perhaps, will remain the driving force in the future. It can be seen that changes achieved in the material field have not succeeded in weakening the hold of the traditional conservative views and the practice of tribal norms. Curtiss (1995) discusses Sultan Qaboos’ efforts to integrate Omanis to the new modern state system and indicates that since his accession in 1970, Qaboos has been remarkably successful in consolidating tribes and provinces under one sovereign and independent state. Curtiss (1995), however, argues that although Qaboos’ knowledge of Islam and tribal networks enabled him to establish his authority more effectively than had any Sheik or Amir in the Arabian Peninsula, his government has not succeeded in breaking down the patron-client relationships. He notes: “The old patterns of the tribal cultural value system have been difficult to destroy” (*ibid* 54).

This reinstates Foster’s (1993:79) argument of “material and non-material change” and the “reconciliation period” required in transitional societies before genuine change can be achieved. Oman has witnessed significant material development; yet, the change did not equally touch people’s norms and attitudes. The country has not yet passed the “maladjustment” period; the period required for transformation from traditional to a modern society described by Ogburn (1983), and its characteristics are identical to those described by Riggs (1964) in his model of the “prismatic society”. It could be said that the general concept of cultural lag still could be applied to Oman, as the country’s value system still persists beyond the scope of physical change and is able to adjust to

⁴ The argument that Islam’s teachings do not contradict with merit principles and modern HRM methods was emphasized by many Islamic scholars and non-Muslim observers. For details, the reader can refer to the following major references: Qutb (1966) *Social Justice in Islam*, translated to English in 2000 by John, H. (pp.26-48), Khaduri (1984) *The Islamic Conception of Justice* (pp. 170-182), Esposito (2000) *Islamic Values are Compatible with Western Values* (p. 56), Kamali (2002) *Freedom, Equality, and Justice in Islam* (pp.38-40) and Parks, G. (1997) *Freedom, Justice and Equality: the Teachings of Islam* (pp. 14-78).

economic change, as argued by Haque 1997). Tribal and familial interdependence and other traditional norms still persist, to a degree hardly different from the pre-oil era. In fact, the country's value system has not only resisted change associated with development, but has succeeded in conditioning all changes according to its principles.

In the section we have reviewed the national context of the public bureaucracy in Oman and attempted to shed some light on the unique characteristic of the Omani society. The importance of understanding the context of the system before proposing reform was emphasised by many experts in the field. For instance, Flynn (2002) who examines the way management changes can take place in the light of the proposition that different contexts generate different discourses, stresses that explanation of reform and its implementation requires the identification of relevant national context, or what was referred to as "the institutional context". Flynn (2002:74-75) notes:

The context is not only important for the likely success of implementation but also for the sort of solutions that are proposed...if we want to understand the processes involved in changing management in the public sector we need to take account of all the contexts."

Indeed, the national context cannot be ignored when discussing reform. This can be seen more clearly if the above description of the Omani contexts is compared, for instance, to western settings such as that of the UK. Further, and parallel to the national context, is to comprehend the concept of the civil service and the function of the modern public bureaucracy. It was thought constructive also before discussing EEO approaches and the personnel policies associated with these approaches to understand the principles which underpin the idea of bureaucracy and the significance of adopting efficient personnel management policies. The next section is devoted to this objective.

2.3. Bureaucracy: the Concept and the Operation

From the turn of the twentieth century, the enormous change in the functions and responsibilities of the state and vast expansion of the services it provides to the public have been reflected in the development of states' public bureaucracies, and ultimately the expansion of public servants being recruited to carry out its functions. Peters (2001), indicates that governments have become a pervasive fact of everyday life and the civil service, as the tool of the public bureaucracy, has become an especially pervasive aspect of government. Peters (2001:14) observes:

By whatever measure we would want to apply, governments spend more money, employ more people, and constitute a more pervasive influence on the lives of their citizens now than for most of human history.

The twentieth century, indeed, has witnessed an expansion of government functions all over the world, in both developed and developing countries. Smith (1996) elaborates that this has arisen very largely from radical shifts in conceptions as to the nature of government itself. He explains that the apparatus of government and administration has grown considerably in response to the assumption of greater responsibilities by the state and, as a consequence, the quality of their personnel becomes an essential factor. Not only do public officials play a major role in determining programmes, but more essential aims cannot be achieved unless these officials are capable of performing the tasks. Smith (1996), hence, stresses that managing public servants and the authority given to them, become a complex issue in the contemporary civil services, all over the world.

In the past, the role of the state was simple and was mainly confined to the provision of security, the administration of justice among citizens, and the defence of its territories against external attacks. The structures of administration and rules of service have evolved over the course of the history of the human race; a UNDP publication states:

Government and administration are not new inventions. They are as old as the history of human being working together in large groups. For thousands of years, since long before the dawn of recorded history, the arts of government and administration have been essential features of human society. Ever since man emerged from the most primitive forms of association he has had to devise administrative systems, even in societies displaying few of the attributes of the modern state (UNDP 2002:4).

In today's world, however, the state has come to assume extensive and growing welfare functions; the UNDP publication adds:

As soon as government extends its activity from the traditional tasks of defence, diplomacy, and the maintenance of law and order, and enters the field of economic and social services, its administration inevitably acquires a multiplicity of ministries, departments, divisions and independent commissions and boards (UNDP 2002:17).

In response to different forms of pressure, bureaucracies have to develop and to take upon themselves responsibilities for utilising, administering, and directing manpower in pursuit of widely accepted objects of public policy (Mullins 2002). Civil services have had to develop, as well. The UNDP publication (2002:19) indicates that an effective bureaucratic machinery has to be established and rules governing the operations of

services have to be formulated, to increase effectiveness in the pursuit of growing state functions; the publication notes:

Every government programme must be translated into action and appropriate administrative machinery be created for carrying out the particular activity.

Bureaucracy has been defined in many ways. Lawton and Rose (1994) identified three major concepts of bureaucracy. First, it can be conceptualised as a form of government which could be distinguished from other forms (e.g. monarchy or democracy). Under such a system, bureaucrats are employees of the state. Second, bureaucracy can be seen as a system of administrative efficiency. This approach sees bureaucracies as complex organisations that can be found in both the public and the private sectors. Finally, the word is commonly used as a negative term to refer to an inefficient system of public administration (e.g. the misuse of public money).

Although there is no agreed definition of the term, Lawton and Rose (1994:27) provide a somewhat pragmatic description of the function of the bureaucracy. They indicate that the term can refer to “a particular method of determining how organisations are structured and the methods by which the tasks of the organisation are achieved”. A comprehensive definition of the role of bureaucracy is provided by Mosher (1982:17). Mosher identifies this role as “the business of carrying out the affairs of state in accordance with law and due process”. Accordingly, Mosher adds, the public service requires skilful decision makers, if it is to be effective and efficient.

Mosher (1982) emphasises the role of the civil service by explaining the interconnection between government policy and the professional competence of civil servants. He lists a number of points that explain this relationship, among these:

- *Governmental decisions and behaviour have tremendous influence upon the nature and development of our society, our economy, and our policy.*
- *The great bulk of decisions and actions taken by government are determined or heavily influenced by administrative officials, most of whom are appointed, not elected.*
- *The kind of decisions and actions these officials take depend upon their capabilities, their orientation, and their values.*
- *These attributes depend heavily upon their backgrounds, their training and education, and their current associations (Mosher 1982:3).*

However, the evaluation of the role bureaucracy and people who run it inevitably starts with the work of the German sociologist Max Weber (1864-1920). Weber attached great importance to the idea of bureaucracy, arguing that bureaucracy has the potential to be

superior to all alternative forms of organisation (Weber 1971, cited in Smith 1988:4). Weber saw the success of the bureaucratic form in the existence of formal rules, without which corruption, patronage, and inefficiency would be the obvious results. Smith (1988:4) cites Weber's views that bureaucracy is technically:

Capable of attaining the highest degree of efficiency and is in this sense formally the most rational known means of carrying out imperative control over human beings. It is superior to any other form in precision, in stability, in the stringency of its discipline and its reliability. It thus makes possible a particular high degree of calculability of results.

Beetham (1987:13) discusses the above view and points out that administration based on the Weberian model can be understood as "the coordination and execution of policy" and system of administration as "an arrangement of offices concerned with translating policy into directives to be executed by the organisation." Beetham (1987:11-12) summarises Weber's basic features of a bureaucratic system as:

***Hierarchy:** each official has a clearly defined competence within a hierarchical division of labour, and is answerable for its performance to a superior;*

***Continuity:** the office constitutes a full-time salaried occupation, with a career structure which offers the prospect of regular advancement;*

***Impersonality:** the work is conducted according to prescribed rules, without arbitrariness of favouritism, and a written record is kept of each transaction;*

***Expertise:** officials are selected according to merit, are trained for their function, and control access to knowledge stored in the files.*

Therefore, under a system of rational/legal authority, obedience is owed to the legally established system where orders are issued and obeyed because of the authority of the office. The Weberian concept is based on the belief that public servants' loyalty, at least in theory, should be to legal authority, regardless of the political power. In other words, the public bureaucracy can deal with successive governments with different political beliefs since it has an autonomous orientation. Lawton and Rose (1994) discuss another important aspect of the Weberian concept of bureaucracy. They mention the criteria against which public servants are appointed. In the following, we summarise the principles that are the most relevant to this study's context:

1. Public servants are only subject to the authority of official obligation.
2. Public servants are appointed, not elected. Therefore candidates are selected on the basis of merit (qualification and examinations).
3. Public servants are organised in a clearly defined hierarchy of offices.
4. Public servants are remunerated by fixed salaries with a right to pension. The salary scale is primarily graded according to rank in the hierarchy.

5. The office has a clearly defined sphere of competence in the legal sense.
6. The office is treated as the sole or the primary occupation of the incumbent.
7. The office constitutes a career and the promotion system is according to seniority or to achievement or both. Promotion is dependent on the judgement of superiors (From Weber 1971, pp.21-22, cited in Lawton and Rose 1994:31).

Thus, Weber's idea of bureaucrats is mainly organised based on clear-cut rules. These rules and their purpose must be known by all (bureaucrats and the public). They must be consistent with each other and should be based on a valid cause. Essential to the Weberian model is the fact that the scope for subjective interpretation of rules should be limited. Therefore, rules should be robust and unambiguous (Hood 1986). Indeed, securing merit principles when recruiting or promoting public servants came at the top of Weber's priorities. Implementing merit was particularly important because public servants are selected not elected; hence, selection should be based on qualification and examinations.

Peters (1995) contributes to the concept of bureaucracy from another angle. He observes that civil servants including those at relatively low levels of the organisational hierarchy are indeed public decision-makers. He explains that these employees bring to their jobs a host of values and attitudes that greatly affect the quality of the bureaucratic setting. Accordingly, extra weight and attention must be given to the way public servants are recruited, selected or promoted.

The civil service and its role are at the heart of government bureaucracy. Whilst the civil service is widely accepted as the most appropriate machinery to carry out government activities, the concept of Civil Service, however, is open to various interpretations. Bozeman (1979:166), for instance, provides a pragmatic account of who and what the government employee is:

an engineer, accountant, janitor, lawyer, physician, economist, secretary, investigator, manager, biologist, librarian, psychologist, architect, linguist, truck driver, personnel administrator, and, say, clerk. It is difficult to think of occupations that are common in the private sector that are not also represented in the government.

The definition of who is a civil servant is also a matter of the terms of the relevant laws and regulations in various countries. In the US, Dimock and Dimock (1999:179) explain that civil servants are "employees at all levels of government even where no formal civil service laws exist". To them, this includes the federal, local, and state government. A

definition, only slightly less pragmatic, of the civil service is provided by them as “a body of permanent, full-time public officials in a professional, non-political status and who are not members either of the judiciary or the armed forces”. In Britain, Robert (1995) explains that the term “civil servant” was first used in the U.K in the late 19th century to distinguish the civilian employees of the East Indian Company from military personnel. According to him, “civil servants” from the British point of view are:

Those servants of the Crown, other than the holders of political or judicial offices, who are employed in a civil capacity, and whose remuneration is paid wholly and directly out of monies voted by parliament (Robert 1995:11).

Hence, the system excludes from this definition political and judicial servants and members of the armed forces. It also excludes public servants in local government and the public corporations. Therefore, it comprises only the civilian employees of the central government who are governed in their employment by laws and regulations specific to the service in which they are engaged.

In sum, any progress toward administering bureaucracy must enlist qualified personnel who can run its expanding role efficiently. This points to the weight of the recruitment and selection policies adapted to attract, select and retain qualified employees. However, not everybody agrees that selecting the most qualified based on formal merit rules (the Weberian approach) is the key for success. Competing equal opportunity approaches have been generated in the literature, suggesting that governments should carefully decide their EEO policies in order to secure both efficiency and equality.

After defining the concept of equal opportunity, two EEO approaches are discussed in the coming section as opposed to the formal merit approach. These are the Representative Bureaucracy approach and the Management Diversity approach. Comprehending these approaches is important to the overall question of what constitutes merit in public sector HRM. The larger goal is that of offering an alternative perspective for embedding equality and efficiency values in public office.

2.4. Equal Employment Opportunity Approaches

To understand the principle of equal employment opportunity, it may be useful to start with a definition. Adams *et al.* (1995:190) (cited in Wardy 1996:42) define equal opportunity as: “An administration with an eye to treating all individuals fairly

according to their merits and to seeing that they receive what they deserve". Klingner and Nalbandian (1998:89) define the term in relation to the system in the public sector organisations. According to them, the term historically refers to:

Those personnel rules, regulations, and processes that promote employee competence, protect employees from patronage abuse and other discrimination, and operate to support the work of government.

Klingner and Nalbandian (1998) argue that such rules tend to be seen as the opposite of "entrepreneurial" in the private sector sense values. They explain that in the public sector, employee competence is usually connected to pay for performance, rather than an institutionalized set of HRM policies and practices, as in the private sector.

A definition that applies to both sectors is provided by Torrington *et al.* (2002:367):

[EO is] an approach that seeks to influence behaviour through legislation so that discrimination is prevented, and seeks to formalise procedures so that relevant job-based criteria are used rather than irrelevant assumptions.

Torrington *et al.* (2002) explain that the "irrelevant criteria" mentioned above arise from assumptions that are based on stereotypical characteristics, such as to say that women will not be prepared to work away from home due to family commitments, or that a person with a disability will have more time off sick. Therefore, equal employment opportunity aims, mainly, to provide a foundation for formalisation of procedures to attain justice by disregarding any irrelevant job-based criteria.

Undoubtedly, the political and the legal context of each country's public administration set the limits of government intervention to secure equal employment opportunities among citizens. Although principles of justice and efficiency when filling public posts are stated in most constitutions and personnel laws, implementation is subject to different circumstances. Decades ago, Friedrich (1950) discussed difference between declared rules and practice and asserted that constitutionalism can emerge only after a substantial development of the bureaucracy. He stressed that without a governmental apparatus, the challenge would not be present to bring into being a system designed to impose limitation and roles upon those who exercise authority.

Since the US Pendleton Act of 1883, through to the present struggle to deregulate and decentralize personnel policies in public organisations, countries have adopted different strategies to make reforms in order to secure EEO principles, on the one hand, and to

enhance efficiency, on the other. The remedial measures in the UK and in the US, for instance, were under different headings. In the UK, the government's intervention was in the form of adopting "positive action" policies, while in the US it was under the heading of "affirmative action" (Parry 1994). Peters (1995) and Torrington *et al.* (2002) discuss the differences between the two systems. In general, the UK's positive action recruitment policies are basically based on formal post-based criteria (experience, skill and degrees). Here, candidates from the underrepresented minorities are encouraged in advertisement to apply for the post and told that their applications are welcomed, yet they have no particular advantage in the selection procedures, as selection decisions are made based on merit, regardless of the social stratum of the candidate. In the US, affirmative action policies pay attention to the social stratum, as the system views differences as just as important as other job-based criteria. The system accepts merit, but draws more attention to ethnic balancing by assuming that the ability to carry out a job can depend upon ethnic characteristics, just as it can depend upon education and skills. Hence, while both systems encourage the underrepresented to apply for public posts, the American system puts weight on ethnic characteristics in recruitment policy.

In practice, even if the EEO principles are the sole criterion for selection, governments face difficulties to secure fairness to minorities and disadvantaged groups. A reliable assessment comes from Lady Howe, Chair of the UK Opportunity 2000 Target Team. She stresses that successful equal opportunity policies demand, after all, a high level of commitment by both organisations and managers who supervise recruitment procedures. She indicates that many organisations have a policy statement relating to EO and claim they are an "Equal Opportunities employer", but in reality do little more than publishing this statement. Lady Howe stresses that promoting change demands commitment from those at the top, together with a clear action plan that specifies what the organisation hopes to achieve, how it intends to achieve that, and how it will evaluate achievements (Opportunity 2000, 1993a:12).

Newell (1995:124) also argues that there are limited benefits gained from EEO policies, "despite legislation". She points to the complexity of rules and regulations and indicates that legislations do not really serve objectives, simply because they are highly complex. Within this context, she refers to Lord Denning in a House of Lords debate when he described EEO laws as "beyond compare...no ordinary lawyer would be able to understand them". She notes:

For organisations to take issues of equal opportunities seriously and overcome the long history of white male dominance a suitable human resources environment has to be provided and organisations need to develop greater flexibility to accommodate all groups of society.

Kaler (2001) provides insightful analysis of EEO policies governments adopt as the core of recruitment by distinguishing between efficiency issues (selecting the most qualified) and equality issues (securing representation). He argues that EEO policies do not specify any particular outcome in terms of group representation as they may result in unequal opportunities between groups of the society. He explains that even with all unfair discrimination removed, selection on merit may result in an unrepresentative workforce, as the level of distribution will depend entirely on merit between groups and that may lead to fair discrimination. He writes:

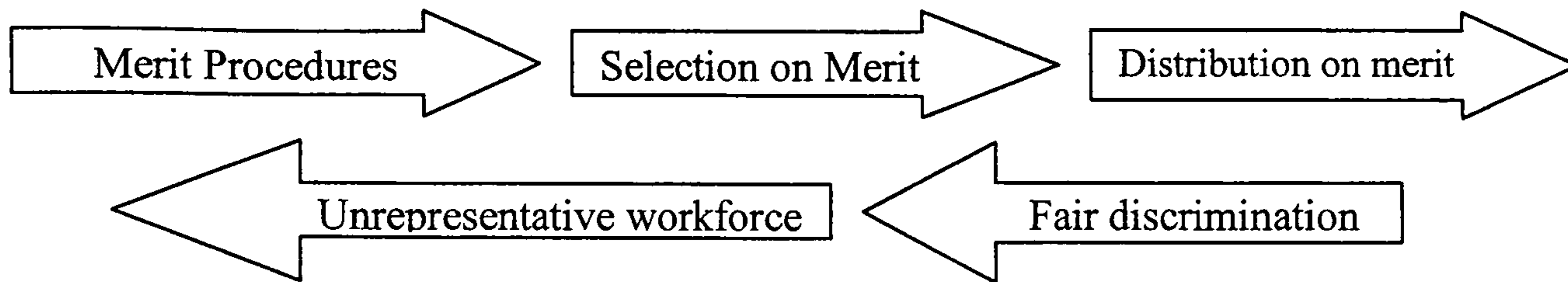
Perhaps it is more honest of people to accept egalitarian grounds, they are opposing rather than simply offering a particularly strong version of it...by implication, therefore, there ought to be unequal outcomes when, as all too possible, merit is unequal'

Kaler (2001:53-62) differentiates between three approaches governments adopt:

Approach one: calls for “reverse discrimination”. Advocates of this approach argue that not guaranteeing a representative workforce is so much the worse for selection on merit. The overriding consideration is securing representation and, therefore, merit should not be the sole criterion for selection. Kaler rejects this approach as it suggests discrimination on “egalitarian grounds”. In fact, he argues that this approach does not belong under an EO heading and labels it “super strong equal opportunity” or “equal group selection”.

Approach two: calls for selection based on merit and insists on merit as necessary and sufficient. Advocates of this approach exclude from consideration everything except the possession of meritorious characteristics and argue that merit is essential for both employment efficiency and justice. Kaler argues that this approach is another version of the UK’s positive action. He argues although organisations under positive action policies encourage underrepresented groups to apply and proclaim that they seek balanced workforce, their recruitment policies have a very narrow view of what equality of opportunity requires, since selection on merit does not guarantee the employment of the less represented. He argues that if positive action policies succeed, they may increase under-representation among those they are designed to assist. Kaler labels this approach “weak equal opportunity”, as it ignores group differences (Figure 2.1. illustrates Kaler’s views of the result of this second approach).

Figure 2.1: An illustration of selection outcome if recruitment procedures depend entirely on merit



Source: Based on Kaler (2001:53-62).

Approach three: is somewhere between the above two. Here, advocates argue that selection on merit is necessary but not sufficient. They accept the need for competition, but would wish to see the resulting inequalities of outcome kept to some necessary minimum in favour of disadvantaged groups in order to achieve the moral objectives. This may require some limits to selection on merit. This approach in the U.S goes under the heading affirmative action. Kaler labels this approach “strong equal opportunity”, as it is neither of explicit rejection nor explicit acceptance of merit. Yet, he argues that affirmative action is impractical in reality, simply because employers cannot secure equality through unjust means.

Kaler’s analysis rests fundamentally on the selection outcome. His proposition is that unless merit is “evenly” distributed throughout all groups, selection on merit will not guarantee fairness to disadvantaged groups. It can be argued that his analysis does not offer a solution, taking into consideration that personnel policies in the public sector are based on legal means. What Kaler argues for might be something in between the US “affirmative action” and the UK “positive action.” If accepted, state intervention will be necessary to supervise procedures. Hence, governments would have to select between two options: 1) securing merit principles without interference in the selection outcome, or 2) interference to secure representation, but only through unjust means.

Therefore, although governments adopt different EEO employment policy and follow different implementation strategies, there is still strong argument on the effectiveness of the chosen methods. A review of the major HRM texts written by scholars in public personnel management revealed the disagreement on the ideal method that can be adopted when citizens are recruited or promoted to public posts. As indicated in the introduction of this chapter, the following three sub-sections are designated to discuss two EEO approaches as opposed to the regulatory merit system.

2.4.1. The Representative Bureaucracy Approach

The primary emphasis in discussing the concept of the Representative Bureaucracy will be on its relationship to recruitment policies in public office. We will start by trying to comprehend the background and the dimensions of the concept “Representation”, followed by an attempt to learn how the concept was developed to seek the inclusion of the “Bureaucracy”. Within this framework, the focus will be on defining the concept, understanding types of representation, and discussing the implications of the concept for recruitment and selection policies in the public service.

The concept of representation, though it might be one of the oldest concepts discussed in political philosophy, is an ambiguous one. The change of meaning is not the only ambiguity this word has; its interpretation by different theorists adds to that ambiguity. Eulau (1976:8) outlines the development of the term “representation”. He indicates that the term was first used by the Greeks. When they first used the term, their intention was to limit the participation of “all” to the participation of the “few”. Therefore, the concept was basically designed to limit representation, rather than to extend it. As the absolute monarchy of the 16th century took over, the meaning changed from no representation to selective representation. At that time, the notion was limited to those whose voices “counted”. Eulau (1976) concludes that it was the French and the American revolutions that declared formally citizens are equal and thereby expanded the base of representation.

Kelly (1998) also discusses the early use of the concept of representation and points out that the American Founding Father, James Madison, presented the “Federalist” notion in terms of having factions in government that would represent the interests of their members. Kelly (1998:203), however, notes that “most of the Founding Fathers (and probably most of the Founding Mothers) thought it was acceptable to exclude slaves, women, and non-propertied people as citizens with full civil, economic, and political rights”. She explains that although principles of equality were declared in the American constitution, the inclusion of all citizens into an equality framework has taken close to 200 years to complete and passed through a long and difficult process. She adds that the notion of which groups should be represented has expanded later to include racial groups, women, and, most recently, the disabled and the elderly. Yet, Kelly (1998:204) argues, at the approach of the 21st century, there are still serious problems encountering minority groups in the US to have equal access to top positions.

Peters (2001:14) elaborates on how the concept of representation was developed to include the public bureaucracy. He indicates that the massive expansion of bureaucracy in the 20th century led to the emergence of different views of how to deal with such a body that interferes in citizens' everyday lives. Among those was the notion of the "Representative Bureaucracy". The aim was to expand the concept of representation to include the government bureaucracy. Since then, Peters explains, theorists have become concerned about the extent to which the bureaucracy does, or should, represent the characteristics of the population in whose name it administers policy.

Mosher (1982) discusses how the concept was first used in a systematic fashion. He states that the expression was first used in the work of J. Donald Kingsley during the Second World War, when he introduced the concept as the title of a book in 1944 addressed to the British administrative class. Among the arguments of this book was that the British Civil Service reforms of the 19th century were intended to transfer control of government from the aristocracy to the new business bourgeoisie, but the administrative class continued to represent the values of the former. Field experts (e.g. Krislov 1967 and Kelly 1998) mention that Kingsley criticised the British bureaucracy for not representing the diverse interests of various social classes and declared that this situation was the source of many deficiencies in the British public sector. Kingsley's analysis was based on the belief that the bureaucracy has been useful instrument of the ruling class, and its power has been rooted in that fact. Mosher (1982:101) elaborates on Kingsley's views by linking the concept to personnel policy:

Since then [Kingsley's analysis], representative bureaucracy, in theory at least, introduces a quite new dimension to personnel administration.

In terms of the definition of the concept, there is no consensus in the literature, as there are different interpretations. Kelly (1998:203) confirms the ambiguity of the term when she notes: "Representation does not have a self-evident meaning". She refers to Van Riper (1958) who viewed a representative bureaucracy as one that is "in general tune with the ethos and attitudes of the society of which it is part". Political scientists (e.g. Krislov 1967; Eisinger 1980; Mosher 1982) provide a detailed analysis about the dimensions of the concept, yet none has provided a particular definition. In general, these scholars agree that the government, at its best, ought to include a representative bureaucracy that mirrors its general public demographically. Their stand is based on the assumption that if governments do not secure representation, the concerns of the under-

represented will be ignored and, as a result, public programmes and policies will be ineffective or difficult to implement.

A comprehensive definition of the term is provided by Spence (1997). He indicates that the notion of “representative bureaucracy” refers to the degree to which the staffing of the bureaucracy represents the social structure of the society of which it is composed. Within this context, they view employment policies as a tool available to governments in their social and economic policies and as a way to reflect society’s concerns. Spence (1997) explains that hiring minority community members can serve not only to attack any prejudices within society, but also to provide a means of economic advancement for the entire society.

The theme here is that if the workforce is heterogeneous and mirrors its population, the bureaucracy is more likely to be responsive to its clients. This suggests that representativeness, or the lack of it, skew the outputs of public policies, which may compromise equality. In contrast, narrow recruitment from a particular social stratum will lead to biased programmes and, accordingly, there will be a danger that dominant group values may be imposed on minorities.

Yet before we go far with the advantages of representative bureaucracy and the idea of enforcing the concept when recruiting public servants, there are facts related to the nature of employment in public office that should be advanced. Peters (2001:90) draws attention to two important issues within this context, which he refers to as “caveats” that need to be considered before implementing the principles of representative bureaucracy. First, Peters (2001) argues that there tends to be better ethnic representation further down the hierarchy, as research has consistently found that minorities and middle-class backgrounds are likely to be equitably represented in civil services because civil service is, in itself, a minority and middle-class occupation. Although the definition of class of origin is somewhat “fuzzy” (especially between upper and middle class), governments in both developed and developing countries appear representative in low and middle-class occupations. Peters (2001:91) explains:

This offspring in the civil service is not a particularly damning finding for the nature of the bureaucracy but, rather, reflects general patterns of social stratification and mobility in society.

This pattern may persist in societies that have sought to eliminate class barriers in public life and may be due also in part to the nature of the motivations of particular social groups. Peters supports his argument by presenting a table that shows how senior posts in most civil services are quite representative in most countries (see Table 2.1 below). A closer look to this table, in fact, shows that proportions of Middle and the Working classes in senior post tend to be slightly higher in some developing countries if compared to some developed countries (e.g. 76% in Pakistan and 70% R. Korea as apposed to 16% in Switzerland and 30% in France).

Table 2.1: Percentages of civil servants in senior posts based on social class background in some developed and underdeveloped countries

Social class origin	U.K (1995)	U.S.A (1995)	France (1995)	Germany (1987)	Denmark (1972)	Sweden (1972)	Switzerland (1980)	Italy (1965)
Upper	28	19	40	1	47	42	61	17
Middle	58	44	30	69	43	44	16	65
Working	14	21	14	11	10	14	23	5
Other	-	16	16	19	9	-	-	13
Total	100	100	100	100	99	100	100	100
Social class origin	Canada (1977-88)	India (1947-63)	Turkey (1962)	R. Korea (1962)	Spain (1967)	Pakistan (n.d.)	Zambia (1969)	Brazil (1972)
Upper	44	17	29	13	-	22	5	26
Middle	19	66	62	70	96	76	43	53
Working	36	-	1	7	4	2	23	11
Other	-	17	8	10	-	-	27	-
Total	99	100	100	100	100	100	98	100

Source: Peters (2001:112)

The second caveat Peters (2001:90-91) discusses, is the fact that empirical research attempting to link background with behaviour shows that administrators, especially in senior posts, tend to adopt and support the values of the dominant community, rather than their class of origin. Peters explains the advocacy of representative bureaucracy assumes that social class should determine behaviour. However, this assumption is “ambiguous and unsubstantiated”. He notes:

Socialisation is a lifelong process, and as administrators from working-class backgrounds attain middle-class status, they tend to adopt the values of that class rather than their class of origin and there will tend to be relatively great homogeneity of social and political values.

The argument of the extent of independence of public servants and the extent to which they should or should not push for the values of their class of origin and the interest of their constituents, leads to investigation of types of representation. Mosher (1982:15-16) distinguishes between two types of representation: active and passive. According to him, active representation is where bureaucrats advocate their constituents’ interests,

regardless of the interests of other groups, while passive representation reflects the degree to which individuals in the bureaucracy mirror the total society by contributing positively to the democratic process. Mosher clarifies that passive representation would help to strengthen democracy and to contribute to its principles by providing the bureaucracy with diversification and independent values, while active representation represents a threat to democracy, as bureaucrats may push for their constituents' interests regardless of the interests of the entry society. Mosher (1982:16) explains the consequences of passive representation:

The strengths of different private interest groups within an administration are vastly unequal and the establishment of anything approaching equality among them would be nearly impossible.

Pitkin (1967) (cited in Kelly 1998:204) enriched the discussion of representation independence in public office by distinguishing between four types of representations, these are: formal, descriptive, symbolic, and substantive. The four types differ in terms of whether or not civil servants should “stand for” or “act for” those they are representing. Within the categorisation, in the case of “acting for”, the representative is viewed as an actor or agent, acting as if his clients were acting, while “standing for” was viewed as a type of descriptive or symbolic representation, where the actor reasonably stands for his clients (further detail about differences between types of representation is provided in Appendix 1).

Wardy (1996:33) discusses Pitkin's (1967) views and interprets that Pitkin does not believe that representatives should mirror the social characteristics of the general public; rather, they ought to act in the interests of the general public in a manner responsive to them all. Wardy (1996:38) explains that even if bureaucrats fulfil their legal obligations, they may fail to be responsive. He explains: “to be responsive, bureaucrats must have contact with the public while formulating and implementing policies. However, this is not an easy task in the real world”.

Even if one accepts the assumption that having a representative bureaucracy is ideal to enhance employment equality, deciding the proper personnel policies that can be implemented to secure this approach is highly complex and a matter of continuous debate. For instance, some argue that equitable representation can be secured through responsive merit recruitment (e.g. Wardy 1996; Spence 1997), while others disagree and

argue that merit will serve advantaged groups and, instead, call for alternatives such as governments' interference in the recruitment policy (e.g. Kaler 1998; Lin 2001).

For instance, Lin (2001:67) in his empirical study of recruitment procedures in Korea's public service found that the disadvantaged groups of society tend to be in the lower echelons, in health and education occupations and are underrepresented in senior posts. He argues that this situation is the result of adopting merit recruitment. He explains that merit-based recruitment relies on personnel specifications, such as education and training, and usually the advantaged groups of the society can fulfil these requirements better since they have better access to education and training, if compared to the disadvantaged groups. Lin (2001:67) also discusses administrative appointments or "bureaucratic appointments", as another recruitment alternative, and argues that this type also serve the elites because elites tend to serve each other's values and interests. Lin (2001) calls for something in between these two options, yet provides no particular suggestions to overcome deficiencies.

Peters (2001:86-90) discusses the concept of merit and the extent to which this concept can serve the objectives of representation in public office. He starts by confirming that the subject is "complex", as the theoretical concept of representative bureaucracy goes beyond the traditional principles of formal merit policies to the wider democracy issues. He explains that the concept of representation asserts that all levels of government have a moral obligation to seek out individuals with certain attributes and qualities, and therefore it is the responsibility of the state to be a "model employer" by designing a system that secures balanced group representation within the framework of employment equality. Peters (2001) proposes that civil servants can be selected on the basis of achievement criteria only if that is necessary, while ordinary public posts should not be necessarily filled by the best, but, rather, by who is "adequate" to do the job. He clarifies that recruitment policies should pay attention to what he refers to as "ascriptive criteria" (e.g. social status, gender, and ethnicity) similar to that paid to formal merit principles. Peters (1984:74) writes:

A committed bureaucracy requires that the tasks of government are accomplished well. This may necessitate that its servants not are selected based on neutral competence, rather on some combination of political disposition and administrative talent.

According to Peters (1984:135), formal rules cannot secure a representative workforce and, therefore, cannot safeguard social programmes and policies from bias:

There is a higher probability that these personnel [selected based on merit] will not be from minority communities while they will be working with members of minority communities and may tend to impose their dominant group values. Studies of teachers, social workers, the police, and other types of public employees indicate a tendency to reward those clients who correspond to accepted dominant values and punish those who do not.

In terms of implementation, a distinction has been made between two recruitment methods: 1) recruitment based on “neutral competence”, and 2) recruitment based on “responsive competence”. On the first, procedures are solely based on merit, while on the latter it is based on merit, but also responsive to the ascriptive criteria. Peters indicates that by adopting neutral competence, employers assume sufficient legal and technical criteria will be adequate to guide the choice, and accordingly, officials will be “value-free administrators” and socio-economic background will have little influence on their decisions. This assumption, Peters (2001:87) argues, “simply does not confirm to the realities”. He favours responsive competence and argues that the bureaucracy will have to have the ability to hire personnel who are used as a positive means to enhance the welfare of all members of the society. Peters concludes that responsive competence can help to secure employment equality and work efficiency, as well. He writes:

...thus, “responsive competence” may be more important than “neutral competence” in assuring that the tasks of government is accomplished well.

In sum, the significance of the representative bureaucracy equal opportunity approach lies mainly on the outputs of public policies. Supporters (e.g. Pitkin 1967; Spence 1997; Kelly 1998) suggest that having a representative workforce could bring all members of society together on matters that concern the entire society, break down barriers, reduce tensions, and most important, provide justice to all components of the society when public programmes are formulated. At the government level, equitable representation gives a greater chance to influence policies, enhances capacity to diagnose problems and facilitates implementation.

Wardy (1996:72) studied the feasibility of implementing this concept in the Saudi system and indicates that scholars trying to define the concept are faced with two controversies: 1) The concept: is it a means or an end? 2) The public servant: is s/he a delegate or independent? In addition to Wardy’s concerns, we add: 3) Implementation: is it possible to regulate this approach in the formal public personnel laws? 4)

Procedures: what recruitment procedures can governments, as “model employers”, follow to secure implementation? and, 5) Rationale: if the merit procedures are abandoned, is it acceptable or practical to secure justice through unjust means?

Although the objectives of representative bureaucracy are made clear, supporters do not suggest pragmatic procedures to achieve these objectives. The argument of “responsive competence” might be the only alternative that can be considered, yet essential questions arise if this type of recruitment is to be adopted:

1. The selection authority: to whom should it be given, and what assurances can be provided to secure improper use?
2. Basis and representation: on what basis can we decide which social group is represented or not? and, how will the system deal with active representation?
3. Justice and efficiency: if merit procedures are abandoned, what justification can be given to those who are best qualified but not from the targeted group, and if the best are not selected, how can the system secure efficiency?

Implementing “responsive recruitment” in a bureaucratic setting such as that of Oman is complex and unsystematic, if compared to the formal merit-based equal opportunity system. Given the context of the Omani administrative system, this type of recruitment will end up by becoming just another version of direct appointment. The concept of representative bureaucracy is challenged in three aspects. 1) The usefulness of enforcing this concept in the public service, since the civil service (as argued by Peters 2001) is mainly a middle-class occupation. In Oman, as in many countries, key or political posts are usually filled through administrative appointments and are not subject to formal civil service rules. As we showed in Table 2.1, Middle and the Working classes are represented in most civil services, in both developed and developing countries, without enforcement. 2) The literature suggests that bureaucrats’ background has little effect on behaviour. This is because socialisation is an ongoing process and bureaucrats tend to adopt the values of the dominant class, instead of their own. 3) If bureaucrats adopt their constituents’ values and advocate their interests, this may result in active representation where the interests of the entry society might be ignored (Mosher 1982; Kelly 1998).

In Oman, in particular, enforcing this concept might be a *double-edged sword*. First, the country has no formal group classification through which the government (as a model employer) can diagnose groups that are less represented. Although differences exist, the

system disregards these differences based on the assumption that all Omanis are Arabs and Muslims and any official groups' classification will not serve the national unity. Opponents may argue that enforcing representation in the public bureaucracy might lead to active representation, which would pose a threat to national unity. Second, in Oman, there is a serious worry that if officials were allowed to interfere in the selection results, the dominant group (tribesmen and elites) might end up twisting recruitment policies in their favour, rather than helping the unrepresented.

Given the contexts of the Omani bureaucracy and role of the social value system, the objectives of the concept can be normally enforced through secured regulatory step-by-step recruitment and selection procedures. As we have explained previously, all social classes in Oman have equal access to education, including post-graduate education, and the same applies to training, since the government provides free training for all citizens. This qualifies all citizens from all social groups to compete fairly for public posts.

2.4.2 The Management Diversity Approach

Apart from the representative bureaucracy, most of the contemporary literature on equal opportunity suggests two other competing alternatives: the legally based merit approach as opposed to the somewhat new approach, Management Diversity (Lorbiecki 2001; Torrington *et al* 2002). Over the past twenty years there has been considerable debate within the academic community about the effectiveness of the Management Diversity approach. Although many texts and articles have been written on this subject, it was noticed that no clear views are offered on methods of implementation, particularly in the public sector where practical procedures are required. In the following we will explore the concept of Management Diversity and examine the usefulness of adopting this concept in public personnel management.

Much of the latest HRM literature in equal opportunity is written in a way that suggests that the Management Diversity approach is superior to traditional government policies. According to Noon and Ogbonna (2001) Management Diversity has been a gradual trend, starting from writers and organisations in the US, travelling across to UK and seeping into mainland Europe. Ospin and O'Sullivan (2003) explain the main features of the Management Diversity approach by indicating that unlike established approaches to the management of equality, the Diversity approach concentrates on individuals

rather than groups, is internally driven, not externally imposed; addresses the total organisational culture rather than the system, and implementation is the responsibility of all, not just personnel departments.

Kandola and Fullerton (1994) are generally regarded as the main UK supporters of the Management Diversity concept. To them, Management Diversity, in theory and practice, offers a new challenge to tackle employment equality and organisational effectiveness issues. They argue that by adopting this concept, organisational self-interest may guarantee equality to disadvantaged groups through cultural change. The assumption basically relies on the notion that “it would not be in the economic interest of the business to ignore the benefits encompassing a valuable source of labour” (*ibid*: 14).

Noon and Ogbonna (2001) explore the concept of diversity from another angle. They explain that organisations in the UK, for instance, have proved to be highly resistant to changing their personnel employment policies, despite years of EEO legislation and minority groups face immense problems in penetrating the upper echelon of all types of agencies, public and private. They argue that the Management Diversity approach provided new alternatives by bringing change through self-interest or through the “business case”. They state that agencies which are able to manage a diverse workforce find an important competitive advantage in doing so, and this may encourage others to follow. Noon and Ogbonna (2001:382) write:

Nothing prevents equal opportunity being argued exclusively on the grounds of organisational self-interest, and nothing prevents diversity being argued as a way of serving the very same moral ends as equal opportunity.

Newell (1995:63) adds to the above a number of sound commercial reasons why the Management Diversity approach should be considered;

- *Linked to organisational competitiveness.*
- *Cost saving associated with Equal Opportunities policies.*
- *Improved creativity and flexibility, and accordingly the return on investment.*

Newell (1995:65) explains that the theme behind Management Diversity is “good ethics is good business,” and explains that organisations need to acknowledge that there will always be much to lose from being ethical and much to gain from being unethical. For instance, organisations may realize that they might need to select based on merit skilled posts, but for posts of a routine nature, where no special talent is needed, there is

nothing to be gained from attempting to select the very best. In return, Newell (1995) argues, organisations will be winning the approval of the wider society, as customers want to see themselves reflected in the workforce. Further, the diversity of the workforce may help to dictate customers' preference. Newell (1995:67) notes:

Management Diversity goes beyond affirmative action to affirming diversity. Instead of finding slots to help minorities adjust to the dominated majority, the Management Diversity values differences and acknowledges range of styles as business case.

Therefore, Management Diversity has been introduced as a mechanism for serving EEO through organisational self-interest and efficiency, rather than a response to the moral demand for justice. Advocates believe that the concept, as a voluntary cultural change notion, offers a new challenge to tackle equality and representation issues through the "business case" argument and that the regulatory EEO legislation is not sufficient to bring about fundamental change, since implementation requires a transformation in organisational beliefs to combat prejudices and stereotypes.

However, there are others who do *not* consider the notion of Management Diversity as a serious alternative in the public sector if compared to the formal merit system. The latter has an instrumental connotation today as a set of principles and practices that distinguishes personnel systems in the public sector from those in the private sector. These principles act as a body of values that guides public personnel management practice. Noon and Ogbonna (2001) draw the line between the Management Diversity approach as opposed to the formal merit system approach in public organisations by arguing that there are two different rationales underpinning the two approaches: 1) the need for social justice (the moral case), and 2) the need for organisational effectiveness (the business case). According to them, this leads to different prescriptions as to the appropriate course of action: 1) government intervention through regulatory formal procedures, since human resources in the public sector is of necessity more than a business application (the moral case), or voluntarism allowing self-regulation (the business case). Noon and Ogbonna (2002:2) note that the two alternatives have a different logic and direction:

In practice, if not in theory, there may be occasions where both an equality of opportunities approach and a management diversity approach might be pursued with equal vigour and with some complementarity. But for analytical purposes, characterising these two approaches as offering a competing emphasis provides a conceptual map to locate various equality initiatives and policies.

However, other experts reject the principle of comparison between the Management Diversity approach and formal merit system in public organisations from the outset. For instance, Kaler (2001) and Cornelius *et al.* (2001) argue that voluntary managerial beliefs should be separated from legislative codes that govern personnel policies in the public sector (e.g. affirmative and positive actions). They indicate that the formal merit system is based on public actions and these actions are imposed rules, whereas the Management Diversity approach is a voluntary organisational practice.

In fact, Kaler (2001) criticises the Diversity approach for being based “naively” on the faith of organisational self-interests and argues that the rationale of this approach is fundamentally different from the formal EEO actions in the public sector. He writes:

Conversely, though arguments based on organisational self-interest might well be the norm amongst advocates of diversity, in principle nothing prevents diversity being argued for as a way of serving the very same moral ends as equal opportunity (Kaler 2001:59).

Kaler (2001) adds that the notion of Management Diversity is not something that should be actively pursued as it rests on a “somewhat shaky foundation”. He explains that diversity has little to offer for fulfilment of moral ends, which are definitive of equal opportunity regulation. He criticizes the notion for being morally “vacuous and antithetical”. His conclusion is unequivocal: “Nothing is to be gained by moving to the Management Diversity” (*ibid*: 59).

However, the concept of Management Diversity is ambiguous, especially as there is a lack of evidence for its successful implementation. Wise and Tschirhart (2000) are of this opinion. They support their argument with empirical research findings. For example, Experimental Psychology Department of the Financial Times’ top 500 companies in the UK found that while a third of these companies claimed to be actively involved in the management of diversity, they do not perceive diversity as being different from EEO. In addition, a UK Equal Opportunity Review Report (August 1999) based on a survey conducted with a range of organisations found that only 3% of the participants had distinct Management Diversity strategies and 6% were in the process of introducing a clear strategy. The obtained results reflected the lack of understanding of the notion.

If this is the case in an advanced country like the UK, where EEO principles were introduced decades ago, indeed the chance of implementing the Management Diversity approach in Oman is almost nil. In Oman, the notion of Management Diversity can be

seen as a complementary means to achieve equal opportunity, but undoubtedly cannot be considered as a practical solution to secure employment equality in the public sector. The notion of Management Diversity can be introduced to managers and government officials as an organisational notion to advance efficiency and productivity, but not as an alternative to replace the regulatory merit-based procedures. The implementation of the concept may have a better potential of success if it is introduced to the private sector in Oman as a business case. In the private sector, selection procedures can be manipulated to enhance productivity. However, such attitudes are not allowed in the public service where personnel regulations apply.

This argument is most forcefully expressed in the notion that Management Diversity can be treated as an accompanying phenomenon to the formal merit system, but not as a substitute. We have shown in the first section of this chapter the strong influence contexts on the Omani bureaucracy. Although regulations in Oman demand merit as the basis of employment, favouritism still has strong influence in public employment policy. Given this situation, it can be argued that voluntary driven notions would not provide effective solution. Flynn (2002:60) discusses the weight of context when considering reform: “the choice of approaches to management should be informed by analysis of the contexts.” Theories intuitive in developed countries might be matters of great debate in the developing countries and blind adoption of Western concepts may, indeed, result in an ineffective implementation or failure. Therefore, the notion of Management Diversity is rejected as an alternative to secure EEO principles in Oman.

2.4.3 The Regulatory Merit-based Approach

The process of development of the merit-based personnel system in the public sector reveals how shifting political, economic, and social contexts have complicated the meaning and interpretation of merit both in principle and practice. Before discussing the advantages of the merit system in public organisations, it might be constructive to start with the views of those who oppose the adoption of this system in modern bureaucracy.

When discussing reform in personnel policies, the specific issue of merit is rarely raised. In fact, Osborne and Gaebler (1993), for instance, dismiss the idea of merit in personnel management, seeing it as “an anachronism” from the past. The merit system is criticised for being inefficient and unresponsive to development and change.

Rosenbloom and Carroll (1995) argue that the meaning of the merit in public office is shifting under the pressure for efficiency. They indicate that HRM practitioners are struggling to balance merit-based practices with the new emphasis on business-oriented government. According to them, the system is being criticised for the overwhelming control of rules against managers' discretion. They argue that line managers do not recruit and have limited flexibility. Personnel rules control how employees could be disciplined; "merit had come to signify a narrow and negative focus on positions and jobs, rather than competence, accountability, and effective public service" (*ibid*: 275).

Kandola and Fullerton (1994) and Lorbiecki (2001) add that the restrictive compliance-oriented regulations found in the merit system affect efficiency and make organisations less responsive to modern personnel systems. They emphasised that reinvention tends to look to private sector businesses for models of effective personnel management system. At this point, based on the above arguments, merit in principle and merit in practice have lost their vigour and focus and become connected with what is considered bad about modern government.

However, and despite the argument of the collapse of the traditional merit system as an effective personnel system, there is strong evidence that the basic concept of merit still survives in professional practice. Merit in principle appears to continue to hold a serious place in the value system of public personnel management. This is basically because employment policy in the public sector is subject to conditions that may not apply to the private sector. Experts in public administration see this difference. For instance, Mosher (1982), Shafritz *et al.* (1992), Ingraham (1995) and Peters (2001) clearly emphasise that personnel management in public organisations is of necessity more than a business application. These scholars agree that merit has an instrumental connotation as a set of principles and practices that distinguishes the public sector from the private sector.

Ingraham (1995) explains that merit principles act as a body of values that guides public personnel management practice. He says it directly: "Whether or not there is now merit in the merit system, it is a major force in government and governance and is fundamental to the effectiveness of both" (*ibid* 129). Ingraham (1995) adds that the public workforce directly affects the government's capacity to act, as public servants manage a national resource through the allocation of public jobs and services as one of the managing processes that sustain public organisations.

Therefore, merit HRM is the foundation that lies at the heart of public systems and the political context in which governments operate. Its principles in public organisations are implemented and govern based constitutional rules, whereas the private sector may not strictly be obliged to follow these principles. Shafritz *et al.* (1992:177) see the direct link between merit and governance. Reviewing personnel policies in the US, they state:

When one considers the tremendous implications that government employment holds for the economic health of American communities and the aspirations of various interest groups, it is understandable that the processes controlling entry to these jobs are subject to both intense scrutiny and widespread concern.

They argue that the principles and practices of merit evolved from those values inherent in a democracy: openness, fairness and equity. Merit, thus, dictates normative as well as instrumental roles in governance. Merit and bureaucracy become quickly intertwined as a means of control and of maintaining the separation of politics and administration. The merit system is based on clear-cut personnel rules, such as the position classification which institutionalized the concept of hierarchy in the public service and emphasized standardization processes across organisations (Ingraham 1995). As a result, the merit system *intentionally* reduced management discretion in dealing with employees. As will be observed in a later stage of this research, this particular requirement proves to be the most beneficial to control the patronage system the country and its public service face.

Today, there is some movement in a positive direction. At least in some circles, merit principles are making a comeback. Woodward (2000) who conducted a field research to see if merit values are reflected in the HRM practices of some government corporations in the US, mentioned that the US Civil Service Department is marketing training in Merit System Principles for federal supervisors and managers and made a major political splash by eliminating the highly procedural personnel manuals. She indicates that significant progress has been achieved in developing the merit system to be responsive to modern work requirements without suspending its values. For instance, line managers are being delegated some authority for HRM policies and practices.

Most modern public personnel systems are governed by the provisions of the merit system. This has evolved incrementally over the past 100 plus years through the growth of government, legislation, and judicial decisions. A review of public HRM texts in personnel management revealed several perspectives in describing the formal merit-based system in public office. The main concern is the procedures required to secure the

use of objective criteria when hiring or promoting public servants. This was emphasised decades back by Stahl (1971) when he stated, “the merit bureaucracy...is governed by objective standards.” The system is defined by Stahl as:

In its broadest sense a merit system in modern government means a personnel system in which comparative merit or achievement governs each individual's selection and progress in the service and in which the conditions and rewards of performance contribute to the competency and continuity.

Rosen (1975:7) refines this into more specific forms of positive advantages and things to avoid. His description captures the essence of what merit comprises:

...a fair and orderly process for hiring, paying, developing, promoting, retaining, disciplining, and retiring people on the basis of ability and performance. It is the antithesis of employment based on racial, ethnic or religious preference, political reward; discrimination based on sex, personal favouritism, or invalidated selection devices. In other words, a merit system is based on merit principles; it is designed to produce a competent, stable work force to carry on the business of government.

Once again we find the definition and practical establishment of personnel management is not wholly a pragmatic-functional business, but also has normative content. The merit system is formulated based on an organised process that includes all personnel functions from hiring to retiring or firing. As indicated, the objective is to avoid non-job-related factors such as patronage or any other forms of favouritism and to evaluate people on the basis of relative ability and job performance. Nigro and Nigro (1994:22) discuss what the merit system dictates in terms of principles and practices. They write:

In application, the merit principle dictates that appointments, promotions, and other personnel actions should be taken exclusively on the basis of the employees' relative ability and job performance. Since the turn of the century, this has usually meant the administration of competitive examinations for appointments and promotions. Test scores have been relied upon to distinguish accurately among candidates according to their capacity to perform satisfactorily on the job.

The consistent theme running through these descriptions is that of competence and the protection from political abuse or favouritism. The literature includes some description of practices that have been used to identify competence but nothing prescriptive about how to assess relative competence. In the U.S., the Pendleton Act of 1883 is seen as the traditional basis of the merit system. The theme in this act was that examinations should be used to ensure competition and to reduce patronage (Ingraham 1995).

The above definitions of the merit system reveal that merit recruitment usually is not discussed as a topic by itself, but rather as an element of the general merit-based human

resources management. Definitions focus on the general objectives of the system rather than the means to achieve such objectives. Woodward (2000:12) argues that there is no single operating definition of the term merit. Rather, she notes, “merit operates more as a value or underlying principle with connotations of fairness and earned achievement in public employment in lieu of political or other acts of favouritism or discrimination”.

Therefore, implementing merit principles in public office has brought many benefits. Most obviously it assures the civil service of the recruitment of appropriately qualified and skilled personnel. Public servants are made confident that fair terms of employment provide the basis for their careers, either when first hired or when progress in their posts. The removal of non-job related factors and establishment of fair conditions encourages commitment to the public good and in turn the service with legitimacy.

The environmental context of the public bureaucracy in Oman suggests that a regulatory merit-based system is the most appropriate approach to be adopted. In Oman, merit recruitment and selection is demanded by the country’s constitution (see Article 12 and 17 of Oman 1996) and the civil service law (Oman 1980:5-9). Hence, the foundation is established. However, as explained previously, legal measures, by themselves, are not enough to counter the patronage system. Regulations must be accompanied with a working model that can lead to rational and practical procedures and, ultimately to secure the declared regulations. It is the standpoint of this study that efforts should be directed now towards securing the implementation of the declared rules.

The need to have a working model of the merit-based approach was discussed by Woodward (2000). Woodward stresses that merit, as a foundational principle of public organisations, appears to be in crisis due to the lack of a working model as governments struggle with the merit system as a system of practices. She emphasises that the reinvention movement in the public sector requires clear procedures to guide policy.

This concern is the focus of the next section. In the following section, we will try to identify the proper merit-based recruitment procedures that can be followed to secure efficiency and EEO. As a tool of analysis, a merit-based model will be identified. This model will be used at a later stage to evaluate the factors that retard progress towards implementing merit-based recruitment in the Omani civil service.

2.5. A Working Model of Recruitment by Merit

When adopting a merit-based personnel system in public organisation, the issue that arises underneath the surface is can we eliminate or change the more restrictive “merit practices” without putting the “merit principles” in jeopardy? How does merit fit into more effective HRM systems? Are there specifically defined practices that must be present in to reflect merit principles and objectives in personnel policies and procedures?

2.5.1. Career Service and Position Classification

A review of textbook content on the merit-based personnel system in public organisations settings provides how field specialists address recruitment and selection procedures and policies (e.g. Plumbley 1985, Nigro and Nigro 1994; Parry1994). It was found essential before exploring the merit-based recruitment procedures to start by comprehending two personnel systems that are directly connected to the processes of hiring and promoting public servants. These are the Career System and the Position Classification System.

The term Career System or the Service System, as it is labelled in some countries, is widely used to indicate the progression of individuals in their field of work throughout their employment life (Al-Lamki 1998). Although the way the term is used differs from one country to other, all personnel systems acknowledge the importance of the career system and the direct effect this function has on other personnel management functions.

Watts (2000:64) attaches the use of the term Career System to the occupational lifetime of an employee who carries out work in a specific professional field. He explains the importance of this function and its direct connection to recruitment procedures. Hazzaa (1992:18) classifies career systems into two types: the Open System and the Closed System. According to him, the Open System is characterised by its flexibility in terms of regulation and duration. In this system, recruitment is permitted at any grade level, known as “lateral entry”. Entry to public service posts in the Open Career system is governed only by qualification and experience relevant for each job category. The main feature of the Open Career system is to make the organisation more dynamic by bringing in people with fresh ideas and approaches.

Countries like the U.S have found the Open System of career service suitable to their work environment and needs. In the U.S, according to Cayer (1986), entry to public service is at almost any level of service, at any age. It is not limited to individuals who

can meet educational and other prescribed qualifications for openings at the lower service posts; instead, proof of competence for a particular post is sufficient requirement. Nigro and Nigro (1981:118) (cited in Hazzaa 1992:18) discussed the way the American system permits the admission of new employees:

The importance of education was recognized, but Americans did not believe that top administrative posts necessarily were best filled by persons originally recruited directly from university. Everybody should have the chance to enter the public service, no matter what the person's age, schooling, and other characteristics.

Cayer (1986) elaborates that recruits in the Open System are expected to have relevant prior training and experience and the system cannot be fully operational without a sufficient education system, as well as an effective private sector from which competent personnel may be drawn. Accordingly, this kind of career system is most suitable for advanced societies where skills and resources are available, as the system relies on the availability of sufficient numbers of applicants from outside public organisations.

The Closed System, on the other hand, is based upon a different set of administrative structures and rules. Appointment to the civil service is based on the notion of the lifetime career and is generally limited to the bottom ranges of the established career ladder. In this system, Hazzaa (1992) explains, employees are appointed from the entry-level posts and continue in their posts until they resign or retire. Higher positions in the Closed System are filled mainly through the process of advancement from lower to higher positions by personnel already inside the service and thereby eliminating the stagnation often created by the socialisation process when employees join the service. The characteristics of this system were explained by Nigro and Nigro (1981:110);

[the closed career system] protects the employee's interest and guarantees lifetime employment...it means making promotion and other personnel decisions on the basis of seniority, and protecting the job holder in any one administrative unit from competition for advancement by 'outsiders'-persons not employed by the government jurisdiction or, if so employed, holding positions in other administrative unit. It also entails providing appeal rights that make it very difficult to dismiss the employee for incompetence or misconduct.

Unlike the Open System, training in the Closed System is provided by the employer either on appointment or while in service in order to equip appointees with the requisite skills to develop effectiveness in the job. If an employee is no longer needed in the post, public agencies in the Closed System are obliged to find that employee another job. This can be done by transferring the employee to another post within the agency or to other agencies within the public service (Cayer 1986:56).

Watts (2000) supports the Closed System and indicates that this type of career service works by recruiting young people and training them in the service for higher posts. He explains that this system is developed by European states, such as Germany and France, and the system usually discourages free movement of individuals from private to public employment, whereas in the US there is a great deal of movement between the two sectors. He adds that lateral entry and movement is, generally, uncommon at the middle and top grades in the Closed System.

A further distinction between these two career systems is made by Cayer (1986:56) when he distinguishes between “rank-in-person” and “rank-in-job”. According to him, the first expresses the operative principle of the British Civil Service system, while the other reflects the American Civil Service system. He writes:

Rank-in-person means basically that the individual is evaluated and ranked according to his or her performance and compensation and that other benefits are based on the person's rank, regardless of duties performed. Qualifications such as education and experience also help determine the rank. In the rank-in-job system, the position determines the rank and hence the emoluments.

Cayer (1986:56) explains that in Britain, the career prospect or career potential is “an influential principle” where the basic element is the person rather than the post, while in the U.S the opposite is true. The subject of which of the two systems is more efficient is open to debate. What is important is the fact that the practical effect of adopting one or the other of the two career systems is significant to recruitment policies. If the civil service adopts the Open System, competition to public posts should be open to all prospective candidates, whether from the private or the public sector. This requires the availability of skilled candidates in all areas of specialisations in sufficient number. In the Closed System, however, recruitment competition can be limited only to employees within the civil service, or even within the public agency where the post is vacant.

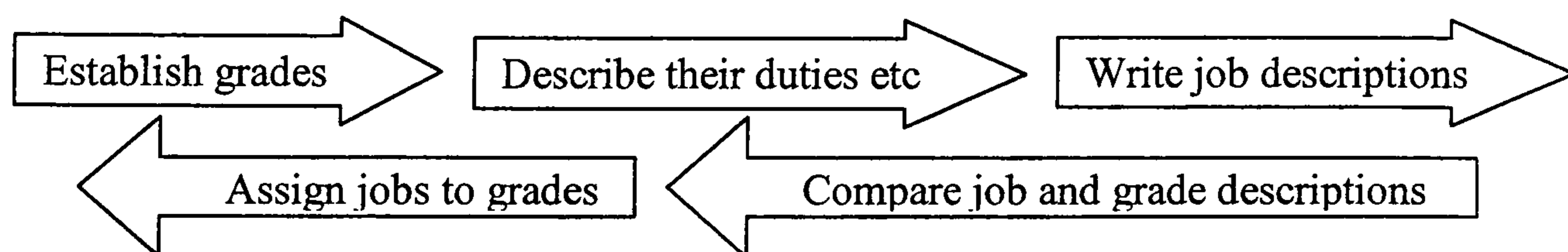
The Closed System is more suitable in developing countries such as Oman where the availability of qualified candidates to managerial posts in sufficient number is limited. In fact, the Omani civil service adopts this type of career service, as advancement to key and managerial posts is subject to internal recruitment only. Jreisat (2002) confirms that Arab countries follow the closed career, basically because the public sector in these systems attracts the most qualified personnel and is considered prestigious if compared to private sector employment. Hence, if a merit-based recruitment system is adopted in

personnel systems such as that of Oman, public agencies can limit senior key posts to in-cadre employees, unless there is a lack of sufficient qualified personnel within the public agency, particularly in managerial posts.

Position classification is another area of concern when discussing recruitment policies and procedures. This function is the cornerstone of all personnel management functions and is the starting point of the recruitment and selection activity, as all processes depend to a large extent on the successful execution of an efficient classification system (Davies 1991 and Thomson 2002). According to Caruth *et al.* (1989), position classification is used to implement the concept of the right person in the right job and to guarantee the principle of equal pay for equal work. Consequently, this essential function has existed for quite some time and techniques have been refined considerably over the years by various organisations around the globe. The process of position classification as listed by Thomason (1980:62-64) is summarised in the following five points:

- *The first step is to establish grades: how many are to be recognised in the job 'population'? Bench mark' jobs may be used as anchor points here.*
- *The second step is to describe their duties, which leads naturally to...*
- *The third step: writing job descriptions in the light of those duties.*
- *The evaluators then need to compare the job descriptions with the grade descriptions (the fourth step), and to...*
- *Assign the jobs to grades, which is the final step (see Figure 2.2).*

Figure 2.2: The processes of job classification



Source: Based on Thomason (1980:62-64)

In the public sector, position classification involves the process of grouping positions into different occupational categories according to posts' duties and the requirements of those who fill them. The contributions of effective position classification system are numerous. According to Thomson (2002) position classification: 1) sets the basis to determine job titles and job duties, 2) facilitates procedures of placement, transfer and training, 3) aids the gauging of job performance and, accordingly, procedures of promotion, and 4) promotes the rationalism of pay levels to control pay structure. The overall effect is that position classification leads to the standardisation of recruitment and selection procedures. As will be observed when we explore steps of 'good practice'

recruitment and selection, job analysis and description, which are the main two components of position classification, are vital to the application of the merit principle.

Therefore, public organisations should have a career system that serves their needs. The selection of the appropriate system depends on many factors; among which the human resources available to fill vacant managerial or key posts. If there are adequate resources inside the organisation, the closed system is more practical, for the reasons listed above. Further, public organisations should establish systematic position classification system. This system is particularly essential when adopting the merit recruitment system as the foundation of selection. As explained, position classification leads to the standardisation of recruitment procedures and is essential to reflect the principle of the right person in the right job. After exploring these two personnel systems, the aim in the next section will be to identify the recruitment and selection procedures that can lead to secure merit.

2.5.2. Good Practice Merit-based Recruitment Procedures

The recruitment of employees and the proficiency with which this activity is conducted is of crucial importance. Taylor (2002) indicates that this personnel function is perhaps the most challenging task to be undertaken by organisations, whether in the private or in the public sector. In the public sector, recruitment is linked to the political ideology of states. For instance, Parry (1994) considers recruitment of public servants part of states' political culture, as the outcome of such activity affects the entire political system, while Peters (2001:86) advocates that recruitment of public servants is linked to democracy and representation; "recruitment is a question about democracy". Plumbley (1985:8) explains how this link can be established by pointing to the importance of recruitment:

Recruitment is not only concerned with engaging a required number of people: it is also concerned with measuring their quality. It is not only a matter of satisfying agency's present needs; it is an activity which influences the shape of the agency's future and its surroundings. Its cumulative results predetermine the future health of the entire system.

Effective recruitment techniques have been researched and developed over the years to ensure fairness and equality, on the one hand, and the selection of the best candidate available for the job, on the other. Parry (1994: 27) asserts that the topic of recruitment has attracted growing recognition and there has been noticeable growth in the area as new important developments in the research literature appear. She explains that the importance of this activity arises from the simple fact that every time a successful match between an individual and a job is achieved, good performance and good working

relationships can be expected. On the other hand, staff turnover can be costly in several ways: 1) recruitment cost and subsequent training cost may be wasted; 2) organisations may waste the benefit of employing the best candidates; and 3) the reputation can be affected if unfair selection was the case. Hence, both efficiency and justice demand that agencies, private or public, must pay paramount attention to their recruitment policies.

Shackleton (1989:15) considers recruitment as the most important task in the field of HRM. He argues that the ability of the bureaucracy to function effectively depends greatly upon the quality of its employees. He notes:

All in all, it is obviously better to get it right first time and employ someone who will do the job well. Getting good people in place is only part of the business of running an effective organisation. But it is a very important part.

It becomes obvious how the patterns of recruitment have a fundamental effect on the structure of any given organisation. When it comes to the public service, specialists in personnel management (e.g. Rosenbloom and Carroll 1995; Ingraham 1995) assert that it is governments' responsibility to decide and implement sufficient recruitment policy to reflect EEO and efficiency in the adopted procedures. Peters (2001:89) elaborates: "Governments have a special responsibility for fostering greater equality of employment through the adopted recruitment patterns". If this responsibility is fulfilled effectively, this will not only secure EEO, but also will increase the efficiency of services provided by the public sector and will enhance the government's image in the eyes of its citizens.

Krislov (1967) stresses that it is the civil services' authority to decide which recruitment policy are to be adopted in order to fulfil the objectives. He explains that even in democratic systems where people select chief executives through popular elections, these systems do not have an efficient instrument to control employment in the public service since civil servants are recruited through the adopted personnel system, not by direct election. Hence, recruitment in the public service is controlled by organisational norms and ethics developed by governments and, therefore, it is states' responsibility to ensure the adoption and the implementation of the appropriate personnel policies.

Recruitment and selection are two elements or components of the Personnel System or the Staffing System, which is a part of the whole system of Personnel Management or HRM (Torrington *et al.* 2002). Defining HRM can be problematic when one confronts

the literature, as there are a variety of definitions on offer. Mullins (2002:685) offers a comprehensive definition for the term HRM. He states:

Human resources management is 'resource-centered', directed mainly at management needs for human resources to be provided and developed.

Caruth *et al.* (1988:9) (cited in Ammaj 1993:106) indicate that HRM comprises six major sub-systems, of which staffing is one, and the others are: 1) personnel research, 2) compensation, 3) training and development, 4) safety and health, and finally 5) employee relations. Staffing as a sub-system consists of eight components. They are:

1. *job analysis and design*
2. *human resource planning*
3. *recruitment*
4. *selection*
5. *performance appraisal*
6. *career planning and development*
7. *human resource administration*
8. *effectiveness evaluation*

Caruth *et al.* (1988:9) explain that staffing is the process that sets the other processes in motion, and in turn is influenced by the other processes of the HRM system. In other words, while HRM emphasises the link to organisational strategy, the staffing system is traditionally viewed as a separate part of the organisation that is concerned with the process of hiring and firing people. The purpose of the personnel system is mainly to attract, hold, and motivate the right quantity and quality of employees to perform the work of the organisation and in both systems and sub-systems, recruitment is the phase that immediately precedes selection and comes after human resource planning and job analysis. Its purpose is to pave the way for the selection by producing, ideally, the smallest number of candidates who appear the most qualified individuals to be selected.

Parry (1994:4) provides views the recruitment activity from a wider angle. She points out that recruitment, as a key element of HRM, involves more than simply reacting to events of job vacancies. Instead, it is an activity that shapes prominently the strategic planning process of every organisation. She notes, "Human resource planning involves forecasting requirement for staff and evolving strategies for their development". Obviously, to do this effectively, those in charge of staffing in personnel departments should be familiar with the strategic plans of their organisations. According to Parry (1994:4) planning involves knowledge of the current economic climate and the job market and those involved in recruitment should be aware of such conditions. She states:

Recruitment strategies need fine tuning from time to time...in times of high employment the emphasis may be on attracting sufficient numbers of applicants from which to draw up a good shortlist. When unemployment is high the emphasis may shift to techniques for reducing the numbers of applicants as unemployment may reflect national trends but may also be affected at a local level.

Accordingly the civil services' authority (in the case of Oman the MCS) are responsible of developing personnel to meet the declared states' recruitment principles (e.g. merit as the criterion for appointing public servants), and those in charge of staffing should be familiar with the values of their organisations and should be aware of the economic climate and the job market. Nevertheless, it is important, before adopting a particular recruitment and selection system to comprehend the procedures that would result in pragmatic, efficient and fair appointments. Field experts have developed and identified a range of recruitment techniques to suit different political and socio-economic needs. For instance, some civil services adopt merit procedures to fill all posts, entry or lateral, while others allow administrative appointments in lateral posts.

Procedures need to be identified that would minimize potential bias by highlighting areas of potential risk to good practice. The initial objective is to build a theoretical perspective on which criteria identified to evaluate research findings in Oman. The aim, thus, is to gain an understanding of procedures and determine the factors that may retard progress in Oman or may help to make the system more responsive to merit principles.

For the purpose of clarity and specification, one model of merit-based recruitment procedures is identified and discussed in this section. Parry's (1994) seven-step model of 'good practice recruitment' was selected for this objective for four reasons:

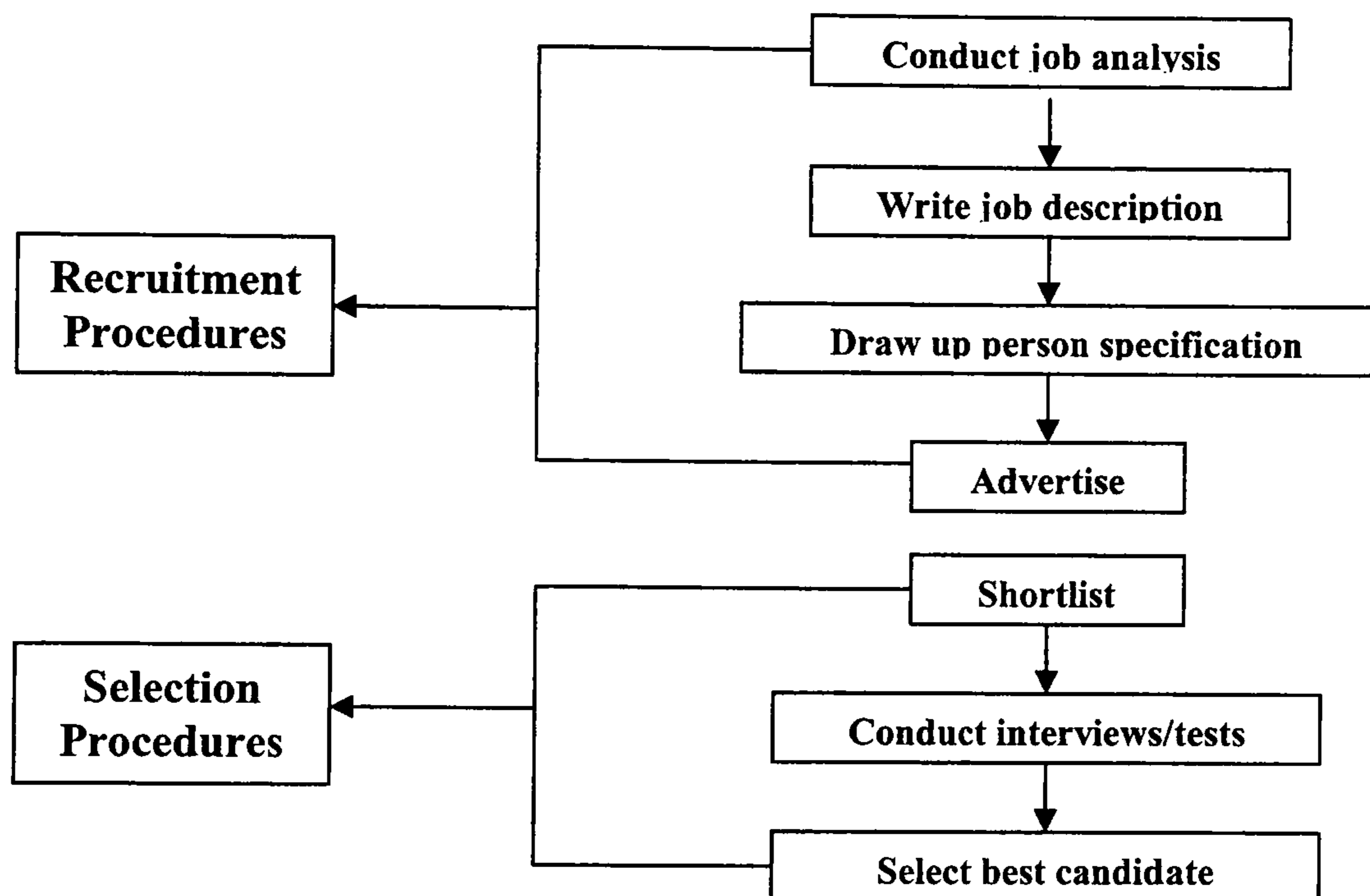
- 1) It is based on experience and real-life practice.
- 2) It is concisely written and easy to follow.
- 3) It demonstrates, logically, how theory can be translated into practice.
- 4) It suits the Omani Civil Service, if the merit-based EEO approach is adopted.

Although Parry's (1994) model was originally designed for library posts, it was found applicable to most types of posts. This fact is confirmed by Parry when she indicates that the model covers all aspects of effective recruitment and selection procedures, from job analysis to job offer. In addition to Parry's model, ideas and contributions from other field experts were used to obtain details and to assure that issues are well covered.

According to Parry (1994:1), recruitment takes place in response to an existing post becoming vacant or a new post being created. It is essential that the personnel system

adopted leads to candidates being assessed objectively on their ability to carry out a job, regardless of other irrelevant factors. Seven steps that are organised in sequence are recommended to this end (see Figure 2.3).

Figure 2.3: Parry's (1994) seven-step model of recruitment and selection procedures



Source: Parry (1994:1)

Before discussing Parry's model, it might be useful to start with a definition of the term *recruitment* and the term *selection*. Various definitions of these two instruments of personnel management have been generated in the literature. Parry (1994:4) provides an inclusive definition. She defines recruitment as "the process of locating individuals, with appropriate qualification and in sufficient numbers, and encouraging them to apply for jobs with a particular organisation", whereas selection is defined as "the process of choosing from a group of applicants that are individually deemed to be the best qualified for a particular job opening". This definition implies that selection is the most difficult process since it involves making judgments about people.

1. Conduct Job analysis:⁵ (recruitment stage)

When a vacancy is identified and an organisation decides that an appointment is to be made, the first step is to reach a clear understanding of the nature of the post to be filled;

⁵ The word 'job' is commonly used in many senses. Plumbley (1985:16) provides definitions of this word and other associated words:

Job: a collection of tasks which constitute the work of one person.

Task: a major element of work intended to achieve a specific result.

Occupation: all jobs sufficiently similar with regard to their main tasks to enable them to be grouped.

this step is referred to as “job analysis”. Hughes (2003:45) defines job analysis as “the methodology that allows the requisite skills and abilities to be identified to derive accurate job and person specification”. He argues that without job analysis, systematic selection becomes impossible. Taylor (2002) adds that job analysis is not only important when a new job is created, but also when an existing post becomes vacant, as job duties and responsibilities change over time. Thomson (2002) connects job analysis to other fields of personnel management. He emphasises that although job analysis is most commonly used during recruitment, it is used by those who later become responsible for supervising the career of the post-holder. It is essential for a number of personnel functions such as appraisal preparation, performance assessment, training, promotion and staff development planning.

Mullins (2002) indicates that job analysis has two components: 1) the *job description* which lists the duties that the post holder will need to carry out, and 2) the *person specification* which lists the knowledge, skills and abilities the post holder will need to do the job well. Two exhibits that show the accurate method of designing practical job description and person specification were provided (see Appendix 2). Often these two components are collapsed into one, although they are logically distinct. According to Mullins (2002), the person specification is an indispensable component of good practice recruitment that should not be mixed with other procedures.

Taylor (2002:92) stresses that efficient recruitment depends on how efficiently job analysis has been carried out and applied. He notes: “Without effective and objective job analysis, it can be difficult to justify decisions in the fields of promotion, redundancy, disciplinary action for poor performance and changes in rates of pay”. Plumbley (1985:18) adds that job analysis is *the* essential foundation for all processes leading to effective HRD; “organisations will inevitably be adversely affected unless the important principles of job analysis are understood and skillfully applied.”

A number of techniques can be undertaken to conduct an efficient and a straightforward job analysis. Thomson (2002:16) suggests three sources for collecting reliable data:

1. *A verbal description of the purpose of the job and its position in the organisation from a person directly in charge of the work (e.g. supervisors, head of department).*
2. *Discussion with one or two people doing the job to identify the tasks performed, guidance needed, proportion of time spent on various tasks, difficulties encountered, etc.*
3. *Studying personnel documents which may reveal aspects of the job neglected in practice.*

Parry (1994:5) summarizes sources of job analysis in two commonly used methods: 1) written description by the current post-holder, and 2) interview with the post-holder or his/her supervisor. The aim is to gather the following information:

1. *the purpose of the job*
2. *the duties that make up the job*
3. *the level of responsibility*
4. *contact with other people*
5. *physical/environmental factors*
6. *the skills, knowledge and attitude required to perform the job*

Armed with professional job analysis, preferably in writing, selectors are ready to move to the next step. The outcome of the job analysis will be a job description (or job specification) and a person specification (or personal/employee specification), which need to be addressed separately.

2. Write job descriptions (recruitment stage)

As explained by Mullins (2002), the purpose of writing a job description is, literally, to describe the duties and responsibilities of a job. Ideally, the description should provide an accurate representation of what a job involves at any given time, as tasks and responsibilities change. Care must be taken to ensure that the description is not made so general that it could be open to misinterpretation by assessors in the selection stage. Torrington *et al.* (2002) also emphasise that the standard format of job description must be straightforward. They indicate that “transparency” is the most important principle of good selection practice and the better the quality of the job description data, the better the selection decisions are likely to be.

Thomson (2002:39) suggests that an efficient job description should include:

- *Title of the post and any further information necessary to identify it (e.g. grade, reference number, location)*
- *Purpose- a brief statement to sum up the overall aim of the job*
- *Relationships- to whom and for whom the post-holder will be responsible*
- *Duties- the main tasks to be undertaken*
- *Scope- circumstances affecting the job (e.g. size of budgets to be managed, potential for development)*
- *Contacts- indicates the range and frequency of contact with others*
- *Environment-physical factors (e.g. travel between sites required, no smoking is allowed in offices)*

Parry (1994) adds that the job description may also refer to salary scales and conditions of service such as holiday entitlements and pension arrangements, although this

information is often provided elsewhere. After the job description, the rest of the recruitment processes are, basically, aimed at finding the person who best meets the requirement described.

3. Draw up person specification (recruitment stage)

The person specification is an extension of the job description (Mullins 2005). Whereas a job description describes the duties and responsibilities of the post-holder and has a variety of uses, a person specification describes the ideal person to do that job and is used only for recruitment purposes. Writers (e.g. Torrington *et al.* 2002; Thomson 2002) lay emphasis on this step as the most essential for selection process and consider it as the foundation upon which selection processes depend to achieve a competency-based recruitment procedures. To this end, Parry (1994:7) writes:

The purpose [of person specification] is to reduce the likelihood of biased judgments based on subjective opinions. A systematic approach that uses person specifications throughout the recruitment process encourages managers [assessors] to concentrate on the qualities required for performing the job. Characteristics that are not pertinent to the job are not taken into account.

The person specification is *the* key document in the shortlisting and selection stages where the attributes of the candidates are matched against the characteristics specified. Plumbley (1985:19) touches another essential issue when writing the person specification; that is, the distinction between what an *essential* requirement and what is a *desirable* requirement. He advocates that organisations must get right down to the absolute essentials about person specification and think only of what qualities the newcomer must have in order to perform the task satisfactorily. He warns against the tendency to draw up an “over-idealised” specification based on actual people who filled the post. He writes:

If we are seeking to replace someone who has held down a job for a number of years, it is pointless drawing up a specification which accurately portrays the person concerned minus all blemishes but with all the necessary in company knowledge: this will almost certainly be an impossible specification against which we can recruit. The more flexible the person specification, the more flexible the recruiter can be at the later stages.

Torrington *et al.* (2002) discuss this issue, as well, and provide a clear distinction between what is *essential* and what is a *desirable* requirement when writing a person specification. They write:

An essential requirement is defined as a requirement without which the postholder would be unable to do the job. Examples, for certain jobs, are required professional

qualification and the ability to travel around the area in which the post is located. A desirable requirement is defined as a requirement which contributes to effective performance, but which is not essential.

Parry (1994:26) also emphasizes that the essential attributes are those which are indispensable to perform the job to satisfactory standards, while the desirable attributes are characteristics which may be little more than preferences. She adds to these criteria the “contra-indications” which refer to attributes that would disqualify an individual, even if all other criteria are favourable. Plumbley (1985:20) provides guidance on methods that are frequently used to list human attributes. He identifies two methods, within this context, that are drawn from systems devised by Alec Roger and J. Munro Fraser. These are called Roger’s Seven-Point Plan and Fraser’s Five-Point Plan. Both plans list a number of attributes that can be assessed by standard selection procedures (see Table 2.2 below).

Table 2.2: Roger’s and Fraser’s plans for person specifications

Roger’s Seven-Point Plan	Fraser’s Five-Point Plan
Physical make-up	Impact on other people
Attainments	Qualifications
General intelligence	Innate abilities
Special aptitudes	Motivation
Interests	Adjustment
Disposition	
Circumstances	

Source: Plumbley (1985:20).

Plumbley (1985:21) indicates that the real purpose of these plans is to enable both jobs and people to be measured with the same “yardstick”, so that simply matching point by point can result in efficient and fair selection. He notes, “By so doing, assessors can be dissuaded from becoming psychologists”. Herriot (1989) stresses that organisations must ensure that no inexcusable discrimination is explicit or implied in the person specification. This list should include only factors that can actually be assessed, and if a person is to be excluded, there must be concrete reasons; otherwise, procedures become artificial. Within this context, Herriot (1989:20) states:

It is important that the person specification be drawn up not in terms of abstract human qualities but in terms that may be recognized and measured objectively so far as possible.

The person specification should be accurate; that is, it should not include unnecessarily requirements, nor ignore essential ones. Taylor (2002:101) explains that excessively

high expectations can lead to the appointment of someone over-qualified, who may soon become bored or “demotivated”, while a vague and low-demanding specification can lead to appointment of someone either unable to reach the required standard or working under physical and psychological strain that leads to conflict with fellow employees or dismissal. Therefore, whether the employee resigns or is dismissed, s/he will struggle and the result is costly in economic and human terms.

Parry (1994:8-11) lists six attributes that should be included when drawing up a person specification. These are summarized in the following:

1. **Attainments/qualification:** These are the academic achievement and work experience. Care must be taken not to over-specify these requirements. For instance, specifying a degree as essential may disadvantage a group of older but highly competent and experienced people. One solution would be to make a degree a desirable qualification, rather than essential.
2. **Skills/knowledge/aptitudes/abilities:** This covers a whole range of abilities required to do the job. Skills needed by professionally qualified staff may include managerial, technical and professional skills such as supervisory ability and a good deal of knowledge. Other posts, which are suitable for colleges and university graduates, may require a high level of motivation and willingness to undertake development, more than existing skills.
3. **Disposition/adjustment:** These are qualities concerned with relations with other people. For instance, if a team system is in place, it will be important to appoint a person who feels comfortable contributing to team effort, rather than working on his/her own. Qualities relating to disposition are difficult to assess without in-depth interview.
4. **Motivation:** This encompasses qualities such as flexibility and determination. As suggested earlier, level of motivation may be one of the strongest determining factors in posts likely to attract staff that lack experience.
5. **Physical qualities:** If given sufficient information about the physical requirement of the post in the person specification, applicants can make their own choice about whether or not to apply and therefore, they assess their own capacity for performing the duties and responsibilities.
6. **Circumstances:** These involve special circumstances relating to the job, such as the need for late evening duties, weekend work, and travel between distant branches for

which a driving licence would be necessary. It is important to state clearly in the person specification if any such factors form part of the job.

4. Advertise (recruitment stage)

The aim of advertising is to attract the best person for the vacancy. If well structured, advertisement reduces the number of unsuitable applicants whilst ensuring that credible candidates are motivated to apply. Informing candidates inside and outside the agency that a vacancy exists is not just essential to attract sufficient credible applicants, but also a prerequisite within the equal opportunity context, which stresses the right to give everyone who might be interested the chance to apply. In other words, advertisement: 1) attracts the best person, and 2) provides EEO to all who are interested.

Once the basics of recruitment have been identified (job analysis, job specifications and person specifications), the staffing specialists must next choose the methods that will have the best chance of encouraging qualified candidates to apply for the job. According to Parry (1994), there are two types of candidates that might be attracted: internal and external candidates. Internal candidates are those within the existing staff. Those can be informed by using in-house methods such as a vacancies bulletin and newsletter or, alternatively, through informal communication. For externals, the two best methods are direct advertisements and recruitment agencies.

Effective advertisement should have a good layout and look professional to sell the vacancy. The principle source of information must be the job description and the person specification. It should include full data about the post (title, salary, location etc.) and adequate information about the selection procedures (criteria of selection, how to apply).

After the recruitment process has been successfully undertaken, the next step is to select the individual best suited for a particular post. The recruiting process should end with a sufficient pool of applicants where selection begins and proceeds through three stages. These stages, based on Parry's (1994) model, are: shortlist, assessment, and selection decision making. Applicants may be refused at any point during these stages, yet only through objective and systematic methods (see Taylor 2002:98).

5. Shortlist (selection stage)

Some writers (e.g. Caruth *et al.* 1989; Gatewood and Field 1998) refer to this stage also as Initial Screening. The aim is to whittle down applications to a manageable number

and to identify those who will be invited to participate in further selection processes. Responses to advertisement can run into hundreds, particularly for supporting staff posts and during high unemployment periods. However, if advertisement is precise and clearly lists the requirements, the number can be reduced noticeably and the process of shortlisting can be much easier. Parry (1994) stresses that there is no quick and easy solution to shortlist applications, as securing merit procedures requires every application to be afforded equal treatment. Organisations cope by assigning reasons for rejection to bundles of applications rather than to each one individually. However, the reasons for rejection should be carefully analysed and based on the criteria or the integrity of the shortlisting process, which is the responsibility of the selection panel. Accordingly, the panel must consist of more than one person to reduce the likelihood of subjective judgement. Thomson (2002) mentions that it is inappropriate to involve in the selection panel someone who is not part of the procedures, as applications contain personal and confidential material that should not be circulated.

The shortlisting criteria must be assessed only against the criteria listed in the person specification and the information provided in the advertisement. Gatewood and Field (1998) discuss this issue and suggest that the structure of a straightforward application form can be more helpful during the shortlisting stage than a CV. The aim is to avoid subjectivity due to unnecessary data provided by applicants. An initial shortlist will consist of candidates who meet all of the essential criteria (see Appendix 2, part B). Most essential, the panel must have a standard form based on which applications can be accepted or rejected. This not only helps to maintain consistency, but also represents a formal record. If there is any case of alleged bias, this record is used as evidence.

Thus in the shortlisting, a clear person specification and standard methods of assessment are essential processes to have a small number of strong candidates from which a selection can be made on an objective basis. This will certainly ease the duty of the interviewing team in order to give full attention to all prospective candidates.

6. Conduct interviews (selection stage)

Organisations may start with a long list for preliminary interviews that lead to a shortlist for final interviews. In most cases the interview list should not exceed 4-8 candidates per post (Cook 2004). Before the interview, candidates should be provided with some advance information about selection processes (interviews, tests etc.) At this stage, it

should be kept in mind that everyone who is interviewed is a potential employee. A good image of the organisation is reflected through the efficiency of the procedures.

Before the interview, practical tests are useful to assess likely job performance. Tests have the advantage of being relatively straightforward to administer and to assess. For instance, no amount of interviewing will provide proof of word-processing skills as accurately as a practical test. Naturally, tests must reflect the nature of the job. Instead of predicting performance, taking the trouble to conduct practical tests can help to assess objectively. Tests can be also in the forms of presentation or group discussion. The time required for preparing and administering tests is significant, but well worth the effort as they can reduce the likelihood of making poor appointments. Hence, careful preparation is the key for successful procedures. Parry (1994) stresses that people assessing the results need to understand the criteria being evaluated. In other words, the aim of these tests should be clear and acknowledged by all of those who are involved, whether candidates or assessors. Most essential within the merit-based model, all candidates must be given exactly the same tests that reflect the real work tasks. General or irrelevant questions are rejected (Caruth *et al.* 1989; Thomson 2002).

With regard to interviews, some field experts often express the opinion that interviews are a poor way of assessing how well someone will perform in a job (e.g. Herriot 1989; Gatewood and Field 1998). Supporters of this view argue that research proves that interviews are ineffective in judging abilities as they depend on predicting performance. Interestingly, interviews remain the most popular method of staff selection. Parry (1994) and Cook (2004) suggest that interviews can be a useful and valid selection tool if they are structured, based on careful job analysis, used with other assessment techniques and conducted in a systematic manner by competent people.

Interviews may be conducted on a one-to-one basis, sequentially or by a panel. Each has its advantages and disadvantages (see Parry 1994:26). The most important issue within the merit-based model is to involve more than one assessor to check on the objectivity of the process and its result. A small panel of 3-4 people is recommended. The chair must possess the necessary skills to lead an effective interview, while other members should help him/her by providing feedback during the process.

When conducting interviews, attention should be paid to questions being asked. It is essential for the interview panel to set aside time in advance to decided what questions

will be asked that will lead to a sound decision. Questions should be worded clearly and concisely. Open questions are useful at the beginning to encourage the candidate to talk freely. Closed questions which can be answered with a single word (e.g. yes or no) can be used at a later stage in pinning down a candidate who seems vague or to bring a line of questioning to an end. Leading and hypothetical questions should be avoided. The first type does not give the candidate the chance to respond, while the latter lead to hypothetical answers. In general, conducting interviews requires skills and training. According to Parry (1994), research has demonstrated that interviewers often make a decision within the first four minutes of the meeting and the remainder is spent on confirming those first impressions. Reducing subjectivity is the main issue and the panel is required to hear what candidates have to say in order to establish how closely each one matches the requirements of the post.

7. Decision making (final selection stage)

The final decision must be supported by as wide a range of evidence as possible to reflect a merit sound selection. It is vital that the same systematic and fair approach employed right from the start to be followed at this final stage. Again, preparation is the key. At the end, it may be tempting to try to rush, especially if interviews have run over time. However, sufficient time should be allowed to reach fair assessment. Members of the panel should make their views based on the full range of criteria employed during assessment (e.g. practical tests; interviews etc.) to ensure that all candidates are fairly assessed. This should be done systematically and based on evidence. According to Parry (1994), the panel is required to keep a written record of the results and the selection criteria. This record can be used in case of subsequent complaint about unfair conduct.

As we can see from the above seven steps, objectivity is a feature of the merit-based recruitment system. The study intends to use Parry's model of good practice procedures as a theoretical basis for its critical analysis when examining the procedures followed in Oman. The major question which compounds the important themes of this research is: how can the central public personnel agency (the MCS) develop the capabilities to execute recruitment and selection policies meaningfully and efficiently to reflect the merit-based EEO approach? This question leads to a focus on the way public agencies recruit and promote their employees and the criteria used for selection. The findings will be articulated in relation to the contexts of the Omani public personnel system.

2.6. Summary and Conclusion

The main objective of this chapter was to explore EEO approaches in the literature and to identify the approach and the personnel policies and procedures associated with it that may suit the public bureaucracy in Oman. However, it was acknowledged that this must be preceded by a comprehension of the contexts of the examined personnel system. We explained that reform and its implementation requires the identification of relevant national contexts and change cannot take place without proper understanding of the social, institutional, and political contexts of the public bureaucracy under investigation. Accordingly, the chapter started by exploring the contexts of the Omani bureaucracy, and a particular attention was given to the dynamics of the social and cultural forces that adversely affect the implementation of efficient EEO policy and practice.

Despite the introduction of modern organisations and methods, we have seen how the administrative behavior in Oman is still highly traditional and has the characteristics of a prismatic society, as described by Riggs. We explained that the material development achieved in Oman due to the sudden oil wealth has not changed much in citizen social norms and a system of backing and support is still articulated through extended family and tribal linkages. Tribal identity has never lost importance in Oman and kinship links are maintained in what is a carry-over of tribal tradition. As a result, mutual obligation and interdependence becomes a main feature of the society, where citizens rely on their lineage for their welfare. This negative attitude directly affects the function of the public bureaucracy and, eventually, led to the existence of strong patronage system. It is not surprising, therefore, to find a certain amount of influence being exercised in favour of relatives when employees are recruited or promoted to public posts.

The existence of personalistic values may necessitate the adoption of a particular EEO policy and a particular recruitment system to correspond with context in order to reflect the merit values declared and demanded by country's laws and regulations. After comprehending the contexts of the Omani bureaucracy, we discussed two EEO approaches: the Representative Bureaucracy and the Management Diversity, as opposed to the traditional merit-based EEO approach. Definition, advantages and disadvantages, and methods of implementation of each approach were discussed, based on the views of specialists in the field, both supporters and opponents. While attempting to create a clear image about these approaches, we kept in mind the context of the Omani public bureaucracy discussed earlier and the nature of its administrative setting. We concluded

by accepting the regulatory merit-based personnel approach as the most suitable and practical EEO system that can be adopted and implemented in Oman. Consistent with Max Weber's views of the rational/legal authority, it was suggested that the success in securing efficient and equality-based recruitment procedures in Oman can be achieved through the existence and the implementation of clear-cut formal rules and procedures.

The other two approaches were challenged on various bases. The Diversity concept was challenged for being solely based on organisational self-interest (the business case) and for the lack of successful implementation. We explained that voluntary managerial beliefs in the private sector are fundamentally different from the legally-based personnel policies and procedures in the public sector. In the public sector, personnel policies are more of a necessity than a business application, since this sector relies on constitutional rules and relevant personnel laws of concerned states. Further, there is a direct link in the public sector between personnel policies and governance values and policies have an instrumental connotation as a set of principles and practices. This is basically because the workforce in the public sector directly affects government's capacity to act and its members manage national resources. Therefore, HRM here is not wholly a pragmatic-functional business, but also has normative content. We concluded our discussion of the diversity concept by arguing that this concept can be perceived in the public sector as a complementary means to the legally-based merit EEO system, but not as a substitute.

Representative Bureaucracy was challenged for the lack of practical procedures that can be followed to achieve its objectives. We explained that quota hiring means that the selection process is not based on job-related criteria, instead on individuals' background and this, in practice, means securing EEO through unjust means against eligible and qualified candidates from other backgrounds. In a political context such as that of Oman, this approach is rejected on the basis of the popular perception that Omanis are Arabs and Muslims and social stratification will affect the national unity. Further, from a functional perspective, the public sector in Oman, as in many developing countries, is a middle-class occupation, particularly if we exclude the key level posts which are filled through political appointment. We explained that entrance to the public service in Oman is accessible to all components of the society and all citizens have equal access to free education and training (the bases of competence). Hence, the objectives of the representation concept can be achieved without enforcement. Equal access to education and training qualifies citizens to compete fairly for posts, if an accurate merit-based

system is adopted and implemented. Finally, we argued that intervention in the selection outcome in Oman can be *a double edged sword*, as there is serious worry that if officials were allowed to interfere in the recruitment results, the dominant group (tribesmen and elites) might end up twisting the objectives of the representation concept in their favour, rather than helping the unrepresented minority groups.

Given the context of Oman's public bureaucracy, the objectives of EEO can be secured through the regulatory merit-based recruitment system if properly implemented. Despite the argument of the collapse of the traditional merit system, we have shown how the basic principles of this system still survive in professional practice and continue to hold a place in the value system of public personnel management. We explained that the main objective of the merit system is to avoid the effect of the non-job-related factors (e.g. nepotism and favouritism). When adopting this system, people should be evaluated on the basis of relevant ability and job performance. The consistent theme is to hire the most qualified personnel, regardless of their backgrounds and orientations and to protect the system from the abuse of authority and other forms of influence.

We explained that the foundation for implementing the merit-based recruitment policies and procedures are already established in the Oman system (Articles 12 and 17 of the Constitution and 15 of the Civil Service Law). However, we argued that the major obstacle is to secure implementation of the declared rules. There is a serious need now, more than ever, for these values as the system struggles with the merit system as a system of practices, due to the lack of a working model.

In the last section we attempted to comprehend the policies and procedures required to implement merit-based good practice recruitment and selection. After discussing the some related personnel functions (career service and position classification), a working model was identified as a tool of analysis. This model is intended to be used at a later stage of this study to evaluate the factors that retard progress in the Oman.

In the next chapter, the Methodology Chapter, we will specify the research questions and hypotheses, and identify the instruments that can be used to answer the questions and to test the hypotheses. The data obtained from the field work is expected to clarify some of the issues discussed in this chapter, particularly those related to the effects of the social value system in Oman and the procedures that can be followed to reflect merit in the country's public personnel system.

Chapter Three

Research Methodology

3.1. Introduction

This chapter gives a description of the methodological procedures followed to conduct the field study. The construction of study questions and hypotheses and the systematic gathering of data to support/reject the adopted theories are central parts of research that require an in-depth understanding of the main research methodology ideas and debates before adopting a particular paradigm or selecting specific methods and instruments (May 1997; De Vaus 2001; Collis and Hussey 2003). Such concerns are central to this chapter. The chapter aims to provide comprehensive answers to two main questions: 1) why particular methods were adopted, and 2) how the adopted methods were carried out.

To begin with, Schwab (1999) suggests that research should follow a linear design with certain steps constituting a necessary pre-requisite for the subsequent step. The steps identified by Schwab (1999) can be summarised in the following three points:

- **Problem definition**; which includes the research questions and hypotheses.
- **Methods of data collection**; which covers issues related to tools of investigation, methodological style, and the objectivity of the employed methods. Issues related to validity and reliability are also considered within this context.
- **Sampling**; this consists of an explanation of why and how a particular sample was selected and the extent of its generalisability.

Acknowledging the above requirements along with ideas adopted from other field experts (e.g. Punch 1998; Alvesson and Deetz 2000; and De Vaus 2001), the chapter starts by identifying the research design. In this section, the clarification of three issues is provided: 1) the study's paradigm, 2) sources of research data, and 3) the category of the field study. Next, research questions and hypotheses are presented. The development of these two essential items was of paramount importance to set research boundaries and to channel energies into a specific direction. As will be shown, a list of questions and hypotheses was presented based on clear reasons. Then, attention is drawn to the methods of data collection. Detailed discussion is offered of the procedures by which

each method was used and implemented. The discussion of methods is divided into two parts. The first discusses the use of the questionnaire, while the second discusses the use of the interviews (triangulation of methods). A description is provided of why and how these two instruments were employed in the field study.

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, learning about research methodology was among the objectives of this study. Achieving this aim necessitated an in-depth learning process including the attendance of various training modules during the study duration. Developing the required skills was indeed not easy for someone who started with limited knowledge in the field, yet was essential for this study and future studies in Oman.

3.2. Research Design

According to De Vaus (2001), social research needs a structure before data collection can commence. In this stage, researchers should keep in mind the aims and limitations, and the focus should be on establishing a clear strategy for action. He writes:

When constructing a building there is no point ordering materials or setting critical dates for completion of project stages until we know what sort of building is being constructed...the function of a research design is to ensure that the evidence obtained enables us to answer the initial question as unambiguously as possible (De Vaus 2001:9).

Research design, therefore, deals with logic, then the work plan flows. Issues of sampling, data collection, and so on, are all subsidiary to the question: “what evidence do we need to collect?” De Vaus (2001) explains that *design* is where researchers are allowed to select between rival plausible hypotheses to draw unambiguous conclusions, and dictate boundaries. Nachmias and Nachmias (1996:9) add that *design* should not be confused with methods, but rather refers to “the logical structure of the inquiry.” Hence data collection is irrelevant to the logic of design.

This study investigates challenges for implementing merit recruitment procedures in Oman. It aims to evaluate the extent to which current procedures fulfil the principles of EEO demanded by the country’s rules and regulations. It investigates the issue after it has accepted that merit-based personnel management is the most suitable EEO approach given the social, cultural, and political contexts of the Omani public bureaucracy.

As mentioned in the problem definition in the first chapter, in 1996 Oman witnessed the creation of its first written constitution. This document demands that merit should be the

basis for public employment (see Oman 1996 Articles 12 and 17). The civil service is expected to adjust its regulations to meet the requirement of this supreme document. The study argues that the current recruitment policies and practices do not fulfil the declared principles. It argues that due to the lack of clear procedures, favouritism and nepotism are currently the driving force when filling public posts, particularly key posts. The assumption, however, remains parochial without evidence. The study, accordingly, seeks to investigate the extent to which merit is reflected in the current practice by hypothesising that procedures do not secure merit.

Another dimension that requires empirical evidence is the study's argument that context plays a critical role in the functions of the Omani public bureaucracy. The study argues that social forces in Oman play a key role in adversely affecting the implementation of merit values required by the civil service rules. In Chapter Two, we have shown how social and cultural norms affect the way personnel policies are implemented in Oman. We supported our argument with the views of commentators such as Rippenburg (1998) and Peterson (2004c) who argue that favouring friends and relatives when filling public posts in Oman is perceived by citizens as a socially-recognised attitude. In this context, this study seeks to examine empirically this assumption by hypothesising that policies in the public sector cannot be treated as autonomous functions, but rather as a sub-function of the complex socio-cultural context of the system, and accordingly a particular approach should be adopted when formulating and implementing personnel policies. The study argues that tribal affiliation, exchange of benefits, social influence, and origin (*Fulan ben Fulan* or the son of so and so) play a critical role when public servants are selected to key posts. It hypothesises that clear-cut recruitment procedures are necessary to secure the implementation of merit and any reform must consider the environmental variables surrounding the public bureaucracy.

Hence, the study challenges the conventionally held belief that the current recruitment system is effective in securing the merit and equality values demanded by rules. Such an attempt may produce evidence that challenges not only our own beliefs, but also those with political power. It is at this point that the debate over Positivism enters. The question that arises is: "Is it possible or desirable for researchers, as members of a society, to suspend their sense of belonging?" The answer is, "No". Yet, objectivity to positivists is the same as that of natural science (Bhaskar 1993:308). The researcher

believes that current policies and practices can be assessed in the same way as natural phenomena. He asserts that there are facts about the social world that can be gathered and the phenomena can be tested in terms of cause and effect; hence the adoption of a quantitative approach.

3.2.1. The Construction of a Positivist Model

Epistemology and methodological approaches are open to debate in the field of social research. Johnson and Duberley (2000) elaborate that research students in management studies are increasingly expected to demonstrate a reflexive understanding of their epistemological commitments as they engage with empirical research. They explain that researchers in this field have been criticised for being “uncritical and ill informed” in their adoption of particular positions. Thursfield (2000:73) elaborates that ontology refers to the nature of existence, “what the world is like”, while epistemology refers to the theory of knowledge that asks the question: “How can we know the world?” A review of relevant literature on research paradigms suggests that our research comes under the positivism paradigm.

From a positivist viewpoint, the social world exists independently of our knowledge of it. Advocates of this paradigm believe that scientific research starts with a hypothesis, which is then tested (Collis and Hussey 2003). This is known as the hypothetico-deductive model. Advocates argue that social research should be scientific, since society consists of social facts and social laws that govern behaviour. Objectivity, from this standpoint, is the best way to approach decisions through collection and analysis of statistical data that consist of correlation and causation, hence the use of questionnaires. However, although the adoption of positivist approach necessitates the use of quantitative methods, understanding people’s interpretation sometimes requires the employment of qualitative method (interviews). In this context, writers such as McNeill (1985), May (1997) and Thursfield (2000) agree that the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods when adopting a positivist paradigm might be beneficial and confirm that such paradigm research is common.

According to May (1997), the first principle of Positivism is the assumption that the social world can only be understood through the identification of observed regularities between phenomena. Thursfield (2000:73) discusses May’s assumption, and argues that

for researchers working in the positivist tradition, social reality is explained by the identification of constant conjunctions between variables which are then assessed for their predictive power using statistical techniques of analysis. She stresses that statistical significance between regularities is taken as evidence and these regularities can be generalised from the survey sample to the whole of the population.

Finally it has to be mentioned that perspectives do not simply dictate the nature of research itself, nor how it is conducted. May (1997), for instance, argues that methodological choices are steered by quite other considerations as there are various traditions. Among these, May (1997:40) explains, is the independent approach with its own channels of transmission. He notes:

These issues [methodological choices] should not deter us. On the contrary, they provide food for conceptual thought by producing new ideas about the process of validating our inquiries and the concept of objectivity itself. Instead of seeing these as a problem, perhaps we should be subjecting our own values and practices and those of others to critical scrutiny in the pursuance of social science.

Thus, we are the product of our environment, created by it and are the mirror image of it. That defines our nature when we predict how policies should be. The aim, hence, is to collect and assemble data to test from which our assumptions. Data, within this context, is theory-driven and designed to test the accuracy of the theory (in our case: to secure merit recruitment procedures should be based on clear-cut rules). Hence, we are not proclaiming disengagement from our subject matter as a condition. Instead, the study acknowledges the sense of belonging and the methods adopted should not be a barrier to provide balanced assessment as long as they are built on a solid base.

3.2.2. Sources of Data

Rajab *et al.* (2000) and Robertson *et al.* (2002) are among the few who have recently conducted empirical studies on Oman using survey instruments. Both confirm that management research in Oman is a relatively new phenomenon, as several cultural, political, social, and religious boundaries limit the ability of researchers to conduct research through survey methods. They stress that cultural limitations and data gathering problems pose challenges to conduct research in this region. This is indeed true particularly when we consider the fact that Oman in general and its civil service in particular has been exposed to limited explorations in the literature.

Oman, as mentioned earlier, may be developing in terms of infrastructure, yet it still encounters difficulties in terms of research and higher education institutions. Omani researchers, such as Muharami (1993) and Maawali (2000), emphasise that collecting data in Oman is expensive in terms of time and convenience. They explain that the major difficulty arises because documents, reports, and statistics published by the government are not made available to individuals on the grounds of confidentiality. The researcher faced similar difficulties. During the literature review stage, it was found difficult to obtain the required data because of the shortage of books and articles on Oman and about its civil service. In fact, no single article or book was found that discusses directly the civil service and or its employment policies.

To deal with the issue rationally, a distinction has to be made between the data obtained through primary sources (the researcher) and data obtained through secondary sources (others). In this study, the latter are used to supplement primary methods and to provide a constructive chain of ideas to expand the extent of knowledge on various issues, whereas the former are used to support/reject the study's assumptions (Thursfield 2000). This includes the processes of building the research questions and hypotheses.

Secondary Sources: These include official statistics, documents, books and journals available in British and Omani libraries. Library research and government documents were the major sources of secondary data. A comprehensive and content analysis of the literature has been conducted. Further, dissertations written by Omani authors and others from the region (e.g. Saudi Arabia) were found useful (see Section 1.3, page 16).

The chapters on the Omani civil service and its personnel policies rely mostly on printed documentary materials in Arabic. These include reports by the government, newspapers, articles, and papers presented in seminars and conferences. These were translated into English if quoted. Otherwise they were analysed directly from Arabic.

Primary Sources: These are the data collected by the researcher through the field study. The primary sources mainly rely on the result of a questionnaire administered during the summer of 2004 to 250 civil servants and interviews conducted with 16 officials before and after that period. The experience of some Omani researchers (e.g. Maawali 2000 and Shafae 2001) reveals that questionnaires are the most appropriate tools of data collection in Oman, given its political and the social nature. As will be explained in the

coming sections, a questionnaire was employed as the main tool of data collection, while semi-structured interviews were used a supplementary method to give the analysis depth and strength and to gain confidence in the obtained results from the first method.

3.2.3. Category of the Field Study

Based on Collis and Hussey's (2003) typology of empirical studies, this study can be categorised as an "Explanatory type of Phenomenological Case Study". First, it is phenomenological in the sense that it is constructed to be responsive to a particular phenomenon (recruitment in public office). Second, it is explanatory in the sense that it aims to investigate an unexplored topic to see if there is something of practical significance (effects of social norms on personnel policies). Third, it is a case study, since it focuses on a particular organisational setting (Oman's Civil Service). To clarify, Collis and Hussey (2003: 65-72, 352) identify these three characteristics as follows:

- *Explanatory: A case study where existing theory is used to understand what is happening.*
- *Phenomenological: An approach that assumes the social world is constantly changing, and the researcher and the research itself are part of this change. It assumes that social reality is in our minds; therefore, the act of investigating reality has an effect on that reality by paying considerable regard to the subjective state of the individual.*
- *Case Study: An extensive examination of a single instance of a phenomenon of interest. It is used in areas where there are few theories or a deficient body of knowledge.*

3.3. The Research Question

The Research Question is the heart of any given research and specifying this question is more important than identifying the research topic (Saunders *et al.* 1997). Punch (1998) notes that there are plenty of examples of unfocused studies that report insignificant information because they fail, from the start, to provoke a particular question. Hence the way the research is designed is fundamentally directed by the type of questions asked. Two types of questions are usually formulated: 1) what is going on? (Descriptive), and 2) why is it going on? (Explanatory) (De Vaus 2001:1).

According to De Vaus, *Descriptive* research answers questions only after making sure about facts and dimensions of the research. This type of research usually describes the shape and nature of the society. It can be physical, e.g. the ethnic mix of a community, or abstract e.g. how secular is the society. In the other hand, *Explanatory* research focuses on the *why* question. This type is concerned with explaining why a certain

phenomenon is as it is and involves developing causal explanations. Some explanations are simple, while others are complex and may require particular research tools.

As mentioned, the study is mainly explanatory. However, part of it requires descriptive analysis. It is explanatory in the sense that it seeks to look at the relationship between recruitment procedures and their outcome (the extent to which the system secure merit), while it is descriptive in the sense that it seeks to verify the current procedures when public servants are recruited. Therefore, the study seeks: 1) to understand the system, 2) to evaluate it, and 3) to identify methods to develop it. The experience of the researcher in the civil service allowed ample opportunity to identify some of the major questions related to these issues. He approaches the study with following main question:

What recruitment policies and procedures can be adopted in Oman's public service that would lead to secure the principles of merit declared by country's regulations?

Answering the above question necessitates producing valid and reliable recommendations at the end of the study that would help to develop the system to make it responsive to merit in both principles and practices. However, this cannot be achieved without: 1) evaluating the effectiveness of the current policies and practices, 2) understanding why these policies and practices are not working, and 3) identifying methods through which EEO and merit can be implemented and secured in Oman. Several subsidiary questions arise to fulfil these concerns, which all together, will formulate and direct the structure and the content of the field study's questionnaire and interviews.

1. On current recruitment procedures

- a) External recruitment: To what extent were the procedures followed to hire our survey's participants compliant to the merit principles declared in the rules of the Omani Civil Service Law? (e.g. were posts advertised? did anybody intervene to help candidates get selected? was there a proper use of job analysis?)
- b) Internal recruitment: Based on the views of the experts group of the survey, what are the factors that actually influence grade-to-grade and post-to-post promotions? To what extent are job-related criteria (performance, skills...etc) considered? Do social influence and personal interests have an effect on the selection processes?

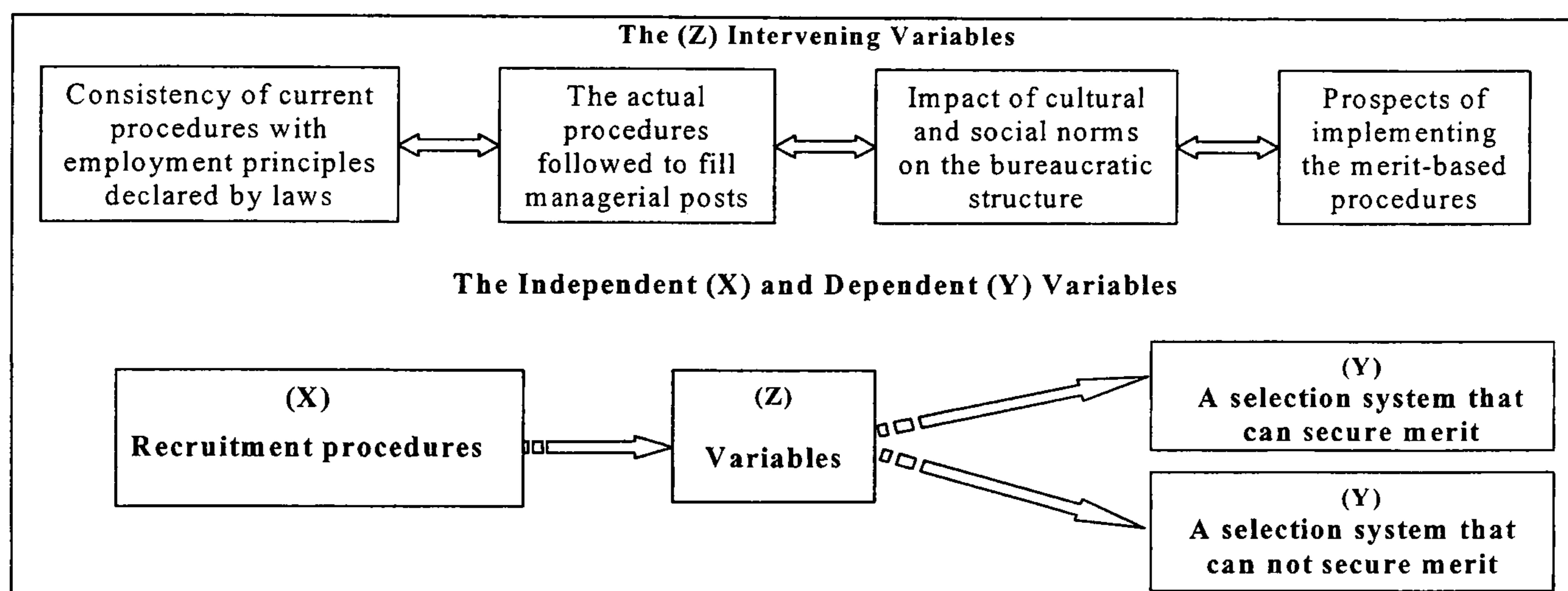
- c) The representativeness of the workforce: To what extent do participants think the workforce is representative in term of gender, region, and social groups)? If not, what type of representation are we witnessing in Oman (active/passive)? Does participants' background have any effect on their views and positions?
 - d) Extent of satisfaction: To what extent are participants satisfied/dissatisfied with the current recruitment and selection practice? Is there any correlation between participants' background characteristics (e.g. gender, age, education level, work experience, and managers/non-managers) and their extent of satisfaction?
2. **On effects of contexts on the function of the bureaucracy:** To what extent do social and cultural norms affect the function of the public bureaucracy in Oman? Are we looking at the outcomes of a prismatic society? To what extent do favouritism and nepotism adversely affect the objectives of merit recruitment in Oman? How can we overcome deficiencies that retard progress? To what extent do the study's participants think formal rules and their literal implementation can help to solve the problem?
 3. **On challenges and methods to develop the system:** To what extent do participants think the current recruitment system needs to be replaced with a newly developed merit-based recruitment system? What procedures should be followed if the new system is adopted (e.g. to whom in-service posts be should opened? Who should be in charge of the procedures? Finally, what obstacles are expected to arise if a new merit-based system is adopted? How can we overcome such obstacles?

A closer look at the above questions reveals that we seek two different kinds of data. On the one hand, we seek to understand a particular problem better (the extent to which current policies secure merit recruitment and the affect of context on personnel policies), on the other hand, we seek to measure and evaluate attitudes of study participants on particular issues (extent of satisfaction and views to develop the system).

Having established that the research is mainly explanatory, we may need to consider whether the sort of causation involves deterministic or probabilistic patterns. De Vaus (2001:16-24) explains that deterministic causation is where variable (X) invariably produces (Y), while in the probabilistic version (X) is less likely or more likely to affect (Y). If we apply the above criteria to our study, the current procedures can be considered as the (X) variable, whereas whether or not these procedures secure merit

can be considered as the (Y) variable. Between these two variables are other intervening variables, referred to by De Vaus (2001) as the (Z) variables. These are the *means* by which cause (X) produces effect (Y). A closer look at subsidiary questions reveals that the study falls into the deterministic pattern. Figure 3.1 below describes the researcher’s understanding on how the deterministic pattern between variables as explained by De Vaus can be reflected in his study.

Figure 3.1: The interactions between the dependent and the independent study variables



Source: Based on De Vaus (2001:20).

3.4. Statement of the Hypotheses

Once a research question has been formulated, a fundamental strategy of social research involves formulating hypotheses, particularly if a quantitative method is adopted. This is basically because anticipated explanations and results are not always consistent. De Vaus (2001:13) notes;

Good research design will anticipate competing explanations before collecting data... people do not even think of alternative hypotheses and simply conclude that since the evidence is consistent with their theory then the theory is true.

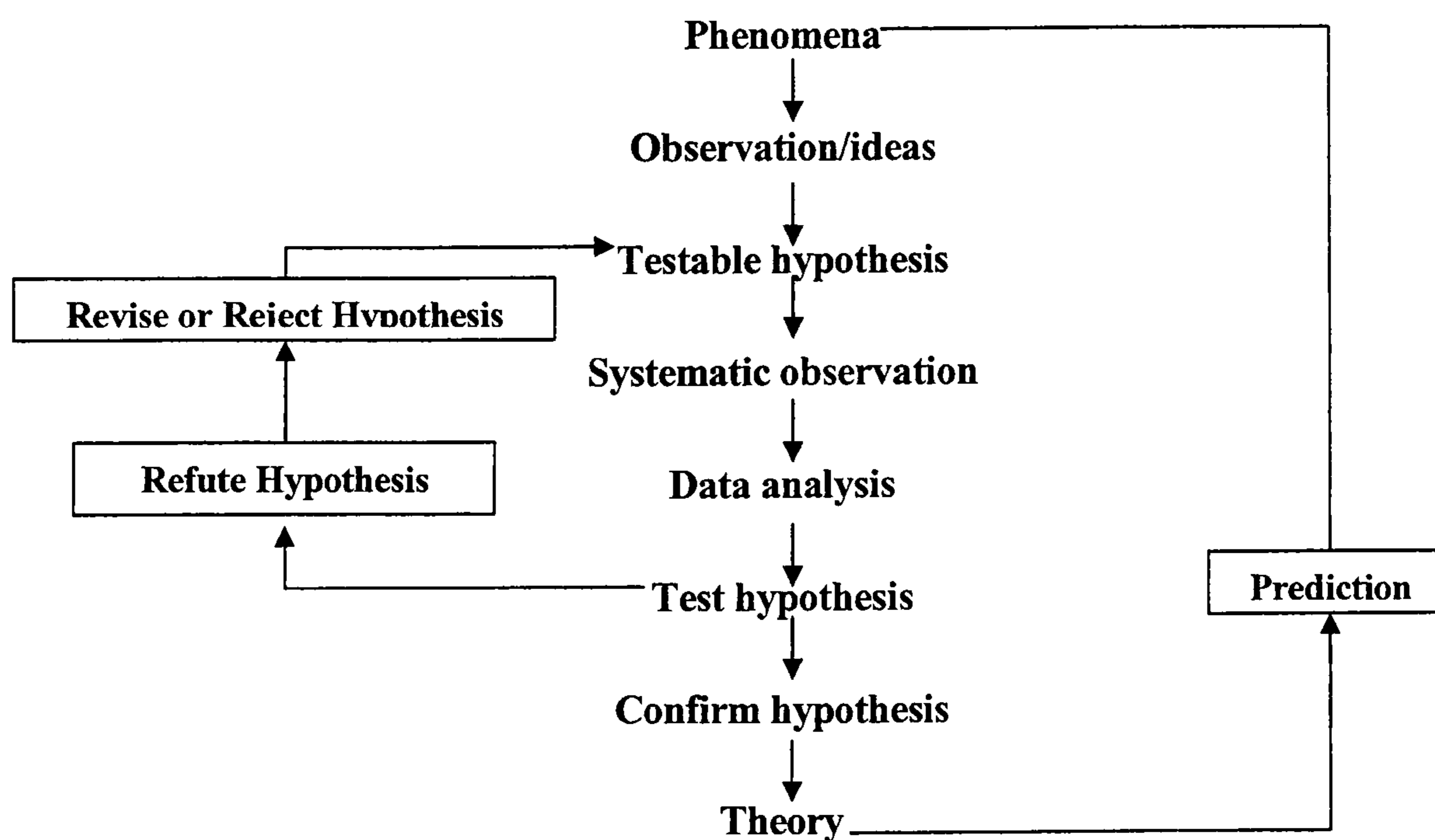
Collis and Hussey (2003:10) identify a hypothesis as: “a proposition which can be retested for association or causality by deducing logical consequences which can be tested against empirical evidence,” while May (1997:83) holds that it is: “a conjecture which is deduced from a theory, which, if found to be true, will support the theory and, conversely, if found to be false will falsify all or part of the theory.” Bryman and Cramer (2001) discuss the advantages of formulating research hypotheses and assert that the advantage is manifested in the fact that hypotheses force researchers to think

systematically of their research plan, while they exhibit the potential disadvantage of diverting attention away from facets of data they have amassed.

De Vaus (2001:13) proposes a simple formula, if hypothesis testing is based on questionnaire or statistical significance; If (A) is true, (B) should follow. We observe (B), if (B) is true, (A) should be true. If we apply the above formula to our study: if recruitment procedures are not based on merit, equality cannot be secured. If merit is not served (A), there will be a statistically significant number of civil servants who will be dissatisfied with current procedures (B). We observe (B). If (B) is true, (A) is true.

As illustrated in Figure 3.2 below, the study employs a hypothetico-deductive model. In this model the researcher approaches the field study with his own experiences of being involved in the daily functions of the civil service for the last 14 years, 4 of them as the Director of the Office of the Minister of Civil Service. It cannot be ignored, therefore, that the field study and the analysis reflect what he perceives to be the pertinent issue. In other words, the way the researcher investigates the issues reflects his perception of the problem and his proposition for solution. This leads to a deductive method, where theory comes before data and data is used to test the theory.

Figure 3.2: Hypothetico-deductive model of a positivist paradigm



Source: McNeill (1985:42).

Since the beginning of his career as a civil servant, the researcher has begun to question some of the basic functions of the system as they were manifested in the daily practices. The researcher began to relate his experiences to various theories, notions, and models in the field of public HRM and, consequently, he came to formulate his perspectives that constituted the foundation for research hypotheses. This does not mean, however, that we cannot search out the truth; but that we should be aware of our direction.

Based on the above research questions, the study was formulated in the light of several hypotheses that are to be tested against the views and attitudes of selected participants (to be discussed later in this chapter) through the use of a questionnaire. As indicated, these hypotheses are proposed to examine factors that are influential in determining if the Omani civil service personnel functions actually secure the declared merit principles. The researcher constructed a number of composite variables that are used in hypotheses testing. These variables are based on the relevant literature discussed in Chapter Two. Accordingly, the dependent variable is always participants' attitudes, while the factors that influence the merit system are the independent variables.

The hypotheses were organised to into three sets based on the above listed research main and subsidiary questions to test participants' views on: 1) current recruitment procedures, with emphasis on managerial posts, 2) the role of contexts on the general functions of the bureaucracy, and 3) methods to develop the system to responsive to merit recruitment. To elucidate, a review of the literature relevant to the main study assumptions has given rise to the following hypotheses:

1. On the current recruitment and selection procedures

Hypothesis 1A: There is no significant difference between the numbers of participants who went through merit-based recruitment procedures when they were recruited to their first post in the civil service and those who did not go through these procedures.

Hypothesis 1B: There is no significant difference between factors that influence grade-to-grade promotion and factors that influence post-to-post promotion, based on the attitudes of the experts group of the sample.

Hypothesis 1C: There is no significant relationship between participants' background characteristics and their attitudes toward the extent of representation of the workforce in terms of gender, region, and social or economic status.

Hypothesis 1D: There is no significant difference between participants with different background characteristics (gender, age, education, and work experience), in their attitudes toward whether or not current recruitment procedures followed in the Omani civil service to fill managerial posts reflect merit and equal opportunity principles.

2. On The effect of the social norms on the daily work environment

Hypothesis 2A: There is no significant relationship between participants' attitudes toward the effects of negative social norms on the daily functions of the bureaucracy and participants' background characteristics (gender, age, region, and payment grade).

Hypothesis 2B: There is no significant correlation between participants' attitudes toward the need for formal regulations and clear-cut rules to minimise the effects of negative social norms and their post level (managers and non-managers).

3. On challenges and methods to develop the system

Hypothesis 3A: There is statistical significance in the number of participants who think the current recruitment system should be replaced with a newly designed merit system.

Hypothesis 3B: If participants are consulted about the merit recruitment and selection procedures that should be followed to fill a managerial post, there will be a significant number who will suggest:

1. The post should be opened only to employees in the civil service system.
2. Personnel Committees in each public agency should be in charge of all recruitment and selection procedures.
3. The selection decision should be made by the authority in charge of the procedures.

Hypothesis 3C: If participants are asked about obstacles that retard implementation of the proposed merit system, a significant number of these participants will consider the lack of willingness on the part of ministers as the most pressing obstacle, followed by the lack of qualified personnel to carry out procedures.

The results of testing these hypotheses are presented in Chapter Seven along with an explanation of the statistical methods used to analysis the obtained results. Quantitative data are expected to provide parameters by which recruitment policies and procedures in Oman can be assessed. These results are also expected to provide some insight into challenges and prospects to implement merit by identifying the procedures that can be

followed in the actual practice. Further, the results of the hypotheses will be analysed along with the results obtained from the second research method, the interviews. The interviews will discuss the same issues but will provide an in-depth understanding of the discussed research issues to gain confidence in the obtained results.

3.5. Research Instruments

According to Schwab (1999), organisational research can be conducted using secondary data unless the study seeks empirical evidence, or seeks data in specific organisational settings that are not available through secondary sources. In our case, both needs apply. We require quantitative data to test hypotheses, whereas qualitative data is required to gain confidence of the obtained results. In this research study, the researcher decided to employ both methods. He felt that the questionnaire alone would not fulfil all objectives and, accordingly, he decided to supplement its use by employing interviews. Further, the researcher was convinced that using more than one method can help to triangulate findings to avoid misleading results or biased views. Punch (1998:247) discussed the logic of triangulation and indicated that by adopting such a research design, the finding from method one can be checked against the findings derived from another.

Increasingly researchers recognize the benefits of combining quantitative and qualitative methods. Punch (1998:247), for instance, argues that by combining these two methods, researchers can have confidence about the findings, as findings from one method can be checked against those derived from the other. May (1997) and Johnson and Duberley (2000) also agree that combining methods into a single project can be highly productive, resulting in greater methodological mixes to strengthen the research design. The strengths of quantitative research are seen as lying in its highly structured nature, its reliability, and the possibility of generalizing findings, whereas the strengths of qualitative research are seen in its investigative nature, its in-depth focus, and the detailed complexity of the data provided. With regard to HRM types of research, Collis and Hussey (2003:77,166) note:

It is not unusual in business research to take a mixture of approaches, particularly in the methods of collecting and analyzing data...it is perfectly possible and even advantageous, to use both qualitative and quantitative method in business research... survey researchers have often noted the potential value of combining their work with interviews.

Johnson and Duberley (2000:12) and Alvesson and Deetz (2000:80) also are supportive of the use of multi-research methods, where one method is dominant and the other is

supplementary. However, these writers draw attention to the importance of the proper use of such design. They explain that the use of more than one method may produce different kinds of result, leading to different conclusions.

The researcher has paid considerable attention to this possibility, as each method was employed carefully. The questionnaire was employed to provide large-scale numerical data that can be statistically analysed and represented in the form of tables. Cross-case analysis was used to identify the similarities and differences of the views and attitudes of the participating sample. Through the use of the survey, participants can be less hesitant to answer sensitive questions, since their identity is undisclosed. On the other hand, the interviews gave more details of the discussed issues and interviewees were asked questions that suited their background, positions, and experiences. The interviews allowed the researcher to probe more deeply into participants' thoughts to get a clearer picture of their views. As will be seen in Chapter Seven, the results of this method supplemented and validated those obtained from our first method, the questionnaire.

3.6. The Questionnaire

3.6.1. Rationale

As mentioned above, the researcher decided to employ a questionnaire as the main method of data collection. A closer look at the research hypotheses reveals that most of the data sought are in the form of opinions. The questionnaire was expected to elicit participants' views on three major issues: 1) views on the current recruitment procedures (divided into four sub-issues), 2) views on the effect of social norms on the daily work environment (divided into two sub-issues), and 3) views on challenges to develop the system (divided into two sub-issues). The construction of the questionnaire and the way its sample was selected were based mainly on these topics.

Regarding types of surveys, May (1997:82) holds that surveys have been characterized under four headings: Factual, Attitudinal, Social Psychology, and Explanatory. According to May, Factual surveys aim to gain data from individuals concerning their material situation; Attitudinal surveys target public opinion, whereas Social Psychology and Explanatory surveys are theoretically oriented and concerned with small groups' behaviour rather than the general population. With regard to the Explanatory survey, May (1997) emphasises that this type is designed to test hypotheses that are derived

from a deterministic bases. Our survey fits within the last type, as the study seeks to examine the opinions of a particular group in a specific organisational setting.

Schwab (1999) discusses the topic from another dimension. He discusses two types of questionnaire which are classified based on their types of respondent: 1) the Self-report questionnaire, and 2) the Observations questionnaire. According to him, the first seeks to collect information about individuals' biographical data and opinions, while the second seeks the same but applies to individuals who serve as observers. Schwab (1999:53) indicates that the use of any type has no necessary implications for the format used, and he notes: "The same questionnaire can be used for self-reports or by external observers if the information sought is the same".

Based on the descriptions provided by May and Schwab, the researcher decided to develop one explanatory type of survey that could be applied to three different groups of participants. The Self-report type was used for the first and second groups (Civil Servants and Managers), whereas the External-observers was used for the third group (Experts). In the first format, questions address the internal mental states of individuals to obtain opinions and preferences to statements, whereas the second seeks observations based on expertise. The third group was expected to provide consistent assessment and to be less biased. In this way, effort and time could be saved without affecting strength.

Another important issue that needs to be addressed when employing a questionnaire as a research method is the advantages and the disadvantages. Blaxter *et al.* (1996) and De Vaus (2001) list a number of advantages, among them:

- Questionnaires provide enough time to help respondents think about questions, and the absence of personal contact allows respondents to feel at ease.
- Questionnaires enable data to be gathered from a large number of respondents simultaneously in less time and at less cost than, say, personal interviews.
- Questionnaires, as a central part of social research, provide an inexpensive way of discovering the attitudes of the population at large.
- Data can be collected in a standardized form that facilitates statistical analysis.

In contrast, the following points explain the potential disadvantages of the use of questionnaires and how the researcher attempted to overcome them:

- If questions are vague or badly phrased, it may lead to misunderstanding and consequently unreliable responses. To overcome this, the researcher conducted two pilot studies followed by a reliability test (Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha).
- Questionnaires cannot probe deeply into respondents' attitudes and may not provide in-depth data. Interviews were employed as a secondary method.
- Statistical analysis may complicate the task of distinguishing correlation between variables since most surveys are cross-sectional. Here, the researcher decided to use more than one statistical analysis to minimize effects.

3.6.2. Sampling

A sample is described as a "subset of a population" (Collis and Hussey 2003:365), and is taken because studying the whole population is near to impossible; instead, a smaller group can be selected and then generalization can be made about the whole population. De Vaus (2001) holds that case studies in social research are used for theoretical rather than statistical generalisation; hence, the main task is to locate a representative sample that can provide valid tests. In other words, a large sample is not essential in these types of studies, as long as the purposes are served.

In order to locate the proper sample, it might be practical to start by comprehending the issues we are investigating. As will be observed in Chapter Six, there are two methods of recruitment followed in Oman: external and internal recruitment. The external type is used to fill entry level posts by candidates from outside the service, while the internal type is used to fill key posts (e.g. managerial posts) by in-service employees from within each public agency through promotion. Recruitment policies differ in these two types of recruitment, depending on the post to be filled and its financial grade.

Preliminary investigation revealed that both types encounter deficiencies to secure merit-based recruitment; however, the internal type encounters more problems. A closer look at the study problem and objectives reveal that more attention needs to be given to the internal type where key posts are filled. This type is important because currently posts are filled through ministerial appointments and without competition procedures.

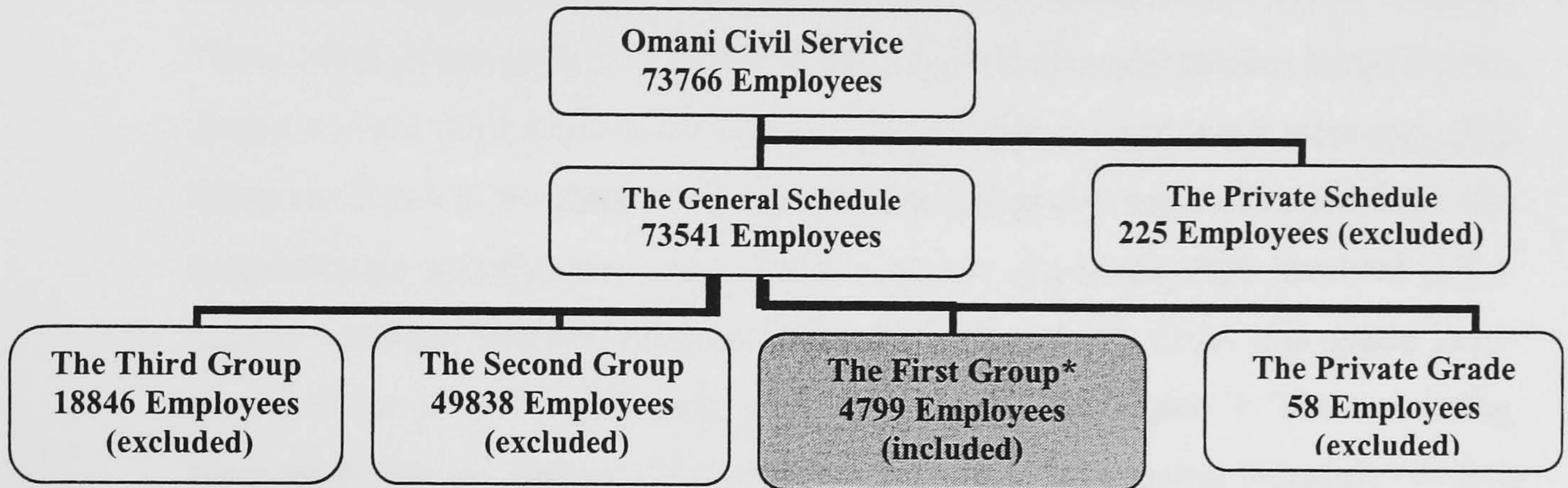
Testing our research hypotheses requires the views and opinions of participants who have experience and knowledge of the recruitment policies. These criteria can be met by those who occupy the grades of the First Group of the General Schedule of the echelon.

Occupants of these grades occupy positions largely at the centre of the recruitment activity. They range from ordinary civil servants, to managers and experts in personnel functions. The main factor that unites the targeted population is the fact that all have adequate experience in personnel policies. The targeted population is the most qualified to give reliable opinions if compared to other groups of civil servants (reasons why other groups were excluded are discussed in the later in this section).

Due to the fact that the targeted population is professionally diversified, the researcher decided to categorise the sample into three occupational groups: experts, managers, and civil servants. By selecting these three categories, the questionnaire was expected to bring better results by enabling views to be compared. Miller (1991) and Cramer (1994) advise that selecting participants from different backgrounds can help to ensure the validity and the reliability of the findings. Further, distinguishing participants based on speciality, position, and expertise would enable triangulation of the findings and by ensuring that the research was not receiving a biased view (Punch 1998). This also would allow responses not to be mixed, mainly when analysing responses to statements of a sophisticated nature. Between the manager and the non-manager participants comes the third group, the expert group. This group consists of officials who have more experience and knowledge of personnel policies in the Omani public service, and are expected to provide a more neutral response, if compared to the other groups.

Comprehensive procedures were followed to decide the sample population and size. To start with, the Annual Statistical Report of the Ministry of the Civil Service, the most reliable national source that provides statistics on the civil service, indicates that the total number of civil servants until 31/12/2003 was 91237 (MSC 2003b). Out of this number, 17471 representing 19.1% were non Omanis. Those employees were excluded from the sample for two reasons: 1) non-Omanis have a different recruitment and selection system, and 2) managerial posts are filled only by Omanis (see the Limitation Section in Chapter One). Accordingly, the sample population was reduced to 73766 (all Omani civil servants). Figure 3.3 below illustrates the hierarchy of the grade groups of all Omani civil servants and the total number of employees in each grade group. The targeted group (the First Group of the General Schedule) is highlighted. As can be seen, this group consists of 4799 employees, representing 6.5% of the total workforce. The figure is followed by an explanation of why other grade groups are excluded and how the selected sample population was divided into three participating groups.

Figure 3.3: The size of targeted grade group among the other grade groups of the Civil Service hierarchy



Sources: Based on the Annual Statistical Report of the Ministry of the Civil Service (MCS 2003b: 44-65).

* The sample population.

3.6.2.1 The Civil Servants

This group represents all civil servants of the echelon. Participants of this group are *not* occupying managerial posts, yet their grades qualify them to occupy such posts (see Oman 1980:5-9, articles 15, 16 and 18). By selecting this group, the researcher aimed to compare their responses with the responses of other two sample groups (managers and experts). The following explains how this group was selected.

Chapter Two of the Executive Regulation of the Civil Service Law (Oman 1984:15) divides grades of the echelon into two schedules; Private and General. The General Schedule is further divided into four grade levels (Private, First, Second, and Third).

1) The Private Schedule: Occupants of this schedule represent 3% of the total civil service workforce (225 out of 73766). Grades in this schedule are designed for specialised occupations (e.g. Medical Doctors). The law requires that occupants must have special skills and qualifications to fill grades of this schedule and, until recently, only non-Omanis were allowed in this schedule. Nowadays, there are 225 Omanis occupying non-administrative posts. These employees have a different recruitment policy. Accordingly, occupants were *excluded*.

2) The General Schedule: If we subtract occupants of the Private Schedule from the total number of Omani civil servants (225-73766), the number left (73541) represents occupants of the General Schedule (see figure 3.3 above). The General Schedule, in turn, is divided into four grade groups. These are.

The Private Grade: occupants of this grade represent .4% of the total occupants of the General Schedule. This grade is the highest in the hierarchy and its occupants are political appointees (e.g. Under-Secretaries, Ambassadors and Senior Judges). These officials are appointed to this grade only through royal decrees issued by the Sultan and are not subject to the CSL regulations. Hence, occupants were *excluded*. However it has to be mentioned that although occupants were excluded from the questionnaire participation, some of the occupants this grade were involved in the second research method, the interviews. In fact, officials from this grade level provided the most valuable data, as will be shown in Chapter 7. The remaining three grade groups represent the massive majority of the General Schedule (99.6%)

The First Level: Grades in this level are occupied by officials who have, on the average, a minimum of 10-12 years of work experience. Grades in this level are devoted to senior civil servants, including occupants of managerial posts. There are 4799 civil servants who occupy this grade level, representing 6.5% of the total Omani civil servants. All occupants of this level were *included*. As will be shown, occupants of this level are the only group that meets our sampling requirements.

The Second Level: Occupants of this grade level represent 67.8% of the total civil servants. This grade level is devoted to entry-level posts. Occupants were *excluded* because of their limited knowledge and experience in personnel policies and procedures, particularly if compared to the occupants of the First Group Level.

The Third Level: This grade level is devoted to service occupations (e.g. drivers, gardeners and cleaners). There are 18846 employees in this grade, representing 25.7% of the total workforce. Occupants of this grade were *excluded* for the same reasons mentioned in relation to the occupants of the Second Grade Level.

From the above description, it seems obvious that employees who occupy the First Level of the General Schedule were the most suitable to fit into our first sample group (Civil Servants). To avoid duplication, the sample frame from this group should not include participants from the other two sample groups (managers and experts) who all share the same grade level. To do this, the researcher subtracted the number of managers and experts based on a 5% stratified sample. Accordingly, the sample frame of the first group was 2596 (4799-1203). Based on the 5% stratified sample procedure, it was decided that 140 participants would represent this sample group in the survey.

Further, to ensure a representative sample, the researcher used a stratified sampling technique to separate males and females. By applying this method, the population was divided into homogenous groups or strata and then the appropriate sample was selected (Nachmias and Nachmias 1996). This method allows a greater degree of representation by decreasing the probable sampling error. Accordingly, participants were divided into two subsets. The MCS (2003:44) females represent around 20 % of the total occupants of the first group level ($854 \times 100 / 4799$). Hence, the participants of the first sample group (140) were divided into 110 males and 30 females.

3.6.2.2 The Managers

Managers are those who occupy posts of a decision-making nature. In the Oman system, managers' financial grades range between 6/1-4/1, and include General Directors' posts, where post holders supervise more than one department. In this study, the researcher approached the field work with hypotheses that reject the existence of differences in views between non-managers (first group) and managers (second group). The analysis may reveal differences in terms of satisfaction with current recruitment policies or in relation to other research issues. It was found necessary to separate these two groups to allow accurate measurements and to avoid any misleading results.

In terms of the sample size of the managers group, the Statistical Report (MCS 2003b) does not indicate the number of civil servants who occupy managerial posts. Instead, the report provides a general description of the distributions of civil servants in terms of grades, educational status, and so on, regardless of designations.

To overcome this, the researcher contacted the Directorate of Statistics in the Ministry of Civil Service to find out the number of civil servants who occupy managerial posts. The data provided indicated that the end of the 2003, there were 1203 managerial positions, distributed between Ministries' headquarters in Muscat and in local divisions (MCS 2003a). The document also clarified that 1138 of these posts are occupied by males, while 65 are occupied by females. Hence, the 1203 managers were the population of the second sample group. Applying the 5% sample quota, 60 participants should represent this sample group in the survey. The population was further divided into subsets (strata) of males and females. The calculation revealed that 56 of the participants of this group should be males and 4 should be females.

3.6.2.3 The Experts

Members of this group are the occupants of the First Grade level who have the most relevant experience in personnel policies and regulations in the civil service. Participants from this group were expected to provide valuable views due to their expertise in recruitment and selection procedures. The group includes civil servants who work at or manage personnel departments with no less than 10 years experience in the field. In addition, participants were selected from particular public agencies that are responsible for legislating, financing, and supervising recruitment policies in the civil service.

The agencies selected included: the Ministries of Civil Service, Finance, Legal Affairs, and the Institute of Public Administration. The purpose behind separating participants of this sample group from the other two was to benefit from their experience when discussing sophisticated personnel issues where opinion should be based on experience. Such opinions were expected to enrich the analysis. It was important not to mix the views of participants from this sample group with the other groups, in order to see if there was any statistically significant difference in opinions.

In terms of the number participants needed to represent this sample group, a different sampling technique was followed. Neither the Statistical Annual Report (MCS 2003) nor the concerned authority in the MSC has the details of civil servants who meet the required criteria. A personal assumption was used to decide the number needed. Based on his experience, the researcher decided to involve 50 participants in this sample group. This number was to be divided between the selected agencies, depending on the agencies' size and responsibility. The number was divided as follows: 20 from the Ministry of Civil Service, and 10 from each of the other three agencies. Further, and as mentioned above, the researcher decided to include in this group only participants who have a minimum of 10 years experience in personnel departments.

With regard to sample size, that there is no clear-cut answer in the literature on the appropriate number. De Vaus (2001:187) argues that a small sample size of good quality is better than a large one of poor quality; "accuracy is not linked to the large sample size, but to the way it is taken". Kotler (2001: 69) adds: "samples less than 1% of a population can be reliable with a credible sampling procedure". In this study, and owing to constraints such as time, access, and resources, and acknowledging the fact that most of our study's participants are senior staff, the researcher decided to limit the

questionnaire targeted responses to 250 participants. This number represents a little more than 5% of the total survey population (4799). Table 3.1 below summarises how the three sample groups were selected and illustrates the distribution of the sample.

Table 3.1: The distribution of the questionnaire sample

Group	Population		5% Sample distribution		%
	Sub.	Strata	Strata	Rep.	
Civil Servants	2596	Males = 80% of 140	Males 110	140	55.0
		Females = 20% of 140	Females 30		
Managers	1203	Males 1138	Males 56	60	25.0
		Females 65	Females 4		
Experts	1000	Ministry of Civil Service	20	50	20.0
		Ministry of Finance	10		
		Ministry of Legal Affairs	10		
		Institute of P. A.	10		
Total		4799		250	100%

The number of the target sample for each of the three groups in the study has been clarified, yet another issue that needs to be addressed: to whom of the 4799 possible candidates (the population) should the 250 questionnaires be distributed? In other words, what sampling technique should be followed to locate participants from the targeted population?

There are many sampling techniques available and the choice is determined by the purpose and the design of the study. The most popular, according to Punch (1998), is probability sampling. Here, the sample is drawn in such a way that each member of the population has an equal probability of being included, and “have a specific non-zero probability of being included” (Zikmund 2000:45). When adopting such a method, the probability of each case is known and is equal for all cases, and, hence, results can easily be generalised to the wider population.

Although probability sampling is advantageous, it was difficult to be implemented in this study. In order to use this technique, particular requirements must be met, most of which could not be fulfilled. For instance, names of prospective candidates should be known and should be systematically selected from. In our case, the targeted population consisted of 4799 employees distributed between 38 public agencies in all Omani regions and towns. Further, no list is made available that includes names and grades of

all civil servants from which a random sample can be selected. To overcome this, the researcher adopted a non-probability sample based on the availability of subjects, or what is referred to as convenience sampling. Punch (1998: 105) explains that a convenience sample is where the researcher takes advantage of an accessible situation which happens to fit the research context and purpose. He confirms that very often researchers must take whatever sample is available, and notes, “The incidence of convenience samples is increasing”.

Finally, every attempt was made to have a broad distribution across all the categories of gender, regions, age group, pay grades, and educational attainment. The aim was to enhance the representativeness of the sample and to ensure that it reflected the population as much as possible. Details on how questionnaire was distributed and to whom, is provided in the Implementation Section of the chapter.

3.6.3. Scaling and Construction

Scaling is the process designed to measure attitudes with equal intervals between categories, whereby opinions may be compared relatively assigning numerical values to each response (Schwab 1999). The literature on Organisation Studies reveals that researchers have developed a wide variety of formats to scale questionnaire items from varied theoretical positions and that has resulted in what Shane *et al.* (1995:34) termed “a complexity of measurements”. Generally, three scaling formats are mainly used in Organisational Studies, namely: Thurstone Scale, Likert Scale, and Guttman Scale. Each has its advantages and disadvantages. Shafae (2001) notes that the literature reveals that there is no one superior operational measure for assessing the most suitable method. The choice depends on the type of the research and its requirements. However, it can be said that the Likert Scale is the most common measurement format used.

Discussing the use of the Likert scale, Punch (1998) indicates that there are differences of opinion concerning the appropriate number of response alternatives to use in Likert scale. Some investigators prefer a 7-point scale, adding the alternatives “slightly agree” and “slightly disagree”. There is also a diversity of opinion about the advisability of including an explicit category labelled “uncertain”. Some researchers (e.g. Maawali 2000, Shafae 2001) argue that the inclusion of this option makes the task less objectionable to participants who cannot make up their minds or have no strong feelings

about an issue. Others (e.g. Junaibi 2001; Lin 2001), however, feel that the use of the undecided category encourages fence sitting or the tendency to not take sides.

Weighing the advantages and limitations, the researcher decided to use a five-point scale ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”, or equivalent, with a neutral midpoint. The guiding factors for this decision were: 1) the simplicity and ease of analysing answers to the type of questions intended, 2) the suitability of using this scale in Oman. This last point is based on the views of Omani researchers, such as Maawali (2000) and Shafae (2001) who indicate that Omanis are more familiar with this scale.

The development of the questionnaire was of paramount importance. The main objective was to obtain the necessary information without unduly influencing the participants, while also ensuring that answers would provide the data needed to test hypotheses. This is vital in questionnaire construction, as argued by Oppenheim (1996). In this stage, the researcher is required to specify the overall areas of investigation by translating aims into specific questions and sub-questions (May 1997).

The first step was to review the related literature to identify validated and reliable questionnaires used in previous studies of similar nature, particularly those conducted in Oman or in its close geographical region. Within this context, five studies that used questionnaires as the main tool of data collection were identified (discussed separately below). Verma and Mallik (1999) support this step when they stress that researchers should benefit from existing validated and reliably tested surveys when developing new ones. When constructing the questions, the following points were considered:

- Participants were provided with clear instructions on how to answer questions to ensure that all would understand questions in the same way.
- Due consideration was given to the length of the questionnaire (reduced from 13 pages to 7 after the pilot studies).
- While attempting simplification, efforts were made to ensure that the questionnaire did not lose its academic identity.
- Parts discussing issues not familiar to Omani civil servants were provided with an introductory paragraph to explain the objective of including them (e.g. questions related to the concept of the representative bureaucracy).
- Key questions were left to the end of each section so participants could clarify their positions before determining responses (Alvesson and Deetz 2000).

With regard to question formats, there is disagreement among researchers about the preferable form, closed or open-ended. Both types have advantages and disadvantages. The researcher decided to use, mainly, the closed-ended form. Oppenheim (1996: 114) supports the use of closed-ended question and indicates that this format gives specific information and a good opportunity to compare answers; “these forms are easier and quicker to answer; they require no writing, and quantification is straightforward, this often means that more questions can be asked within a given length of time”. Although most questions were of closed-ended format, the researcher added one final open-ended question to the end of each subscale to allow the capturing of opinions not covered in the main body of the subscale.

The questionnaire was designed in five sections. Each was intended to answer one set of the study’s subsidiary questions (see p.91-92) and to test one set of its hypotheses (see pp.95-96). The questionnaire scales were developed, mainly, based on validated and reliability tested questionnaires. If no previous study was found, the researcher designed questions within the mainstream of the selected scales. All items, whether developed by the researcher or borrowed from other studies, were validated and tested for reliability.

The First Section sought to obtain participants’ basic data and to identify their sample group category (Civil Servants, Managers and Experts). Items were constructed based on questionnaires designed by Maawali (2000) who investigated challenges of providing job opportunities to Omani graduates in the private sector, and by Shafae (2001), who investigated determinants of job satisfaction in Muscat governorate. Both questionnaires were measured on a five-point Likert scale encompassing dimensions such as work environment, workload and interaction. The demographic distribution of the sample allowed the researcher to compare the rates of managerial posts occupied by males to those occupied by females, the educational level of participants in relation and the posts they are occupying, and the age structure of the sample and its relevance to future job opportunities (see Section One of Appendix 6).

The section consisted of 11 items in a multiple-choice format. The first six items asked the usual demographic data, while the last five sought data particularly relevant to this study’s requirements. Respondents were asked whether they occupied managerial posts and the length of service in these posts. The same format was used to determine whether

participants occupied posts in personnel departments. Demographic data that were found irrelevant to the core of the study (e.g. marital status) were avoided.

The Second Section included items that intended to answer the study's first set of subsidiary questions (the extent to which current recruitment procedures reflect merit) and to test the first set of the hypotheses (1A, 1B, 1C, and 1D). This section evaluates compliance to merit procedures when participants were appointed (external recruitment), factors that influence promotion (internal recruitment), the extent of representation of the workforce, and the extent of satisfaction with current recruitment policy and practice.

Some items in this section were adopted from Awaji (1972). Although conducted more than three decades ago, Awaji's study was found very valuable, as it was conducted in Saudi Arabia, which has a similar social setting to that of Oman. The study uses a survey method to evaluate the effects of culture on employees' attitudes. The measures developed by Awaji (1972) do not demonstrate a sophisticated approach, yet questions were formulated based on in-depth experience of the nature of the society and touch, in a very moderate way, a range of sensitive issues that cannot be observed by outsiders.

In his study, Awaji identified some aspects (facets) that were viewed as hypothetically separate: pay, task, recruitment, organisational beliefs, and interaction, and developed an instrument containing around 10 items for each facet. His analysis indicated that the facets and items selected theoretically were related empirically. Item 19 (14 sub-items) in our questionnaire reflects some of the ideas adopted from Awaji (1972). However some of these items were modified to suite our study. The wording of some items were shortened to make items clearer and focused and to reduce the likelihood of participants being deterred by lengthy and difficult-looking items. For instance, item 15 (sub-items 1 and 6) the words "Based on what I heard" were simplified to "In the daily work environment..." Similarly, in the role of social status and tribal affiliation in item 19 (sub-item 13), the words "It has been argued..." were deleted. These words were considered redundant, as the degree of certainty towards the core concept, "Based on my experience" or "I believe" would be captured by the rating given to the item on the Likert scale. Other changes were made to match more closely to the Omani environment.

The Third Section included items that aim to provide an answer to study's second subsidiary questions (the effect of contexts) and the second set of hypotheses (2A and 2B). Questions were designed around the argument that bureaucracy cannot be treated

autonomously, but rather as a sub-system of its contexts which, directly or indirectly, affects citizens' attitudes when carrying out duties (see Section 3 Three of Appendix 6).

Here, the researcher employed subscales based on another established study. The design was adopted from Robertson *et al.* (2002), who investigated the relationship between Arab values and work beliefs. Their scale was originally developed by Buchholz (1977) and measures a range of beliefs that relate to values in the workplace using 37 Likert scale items. The internal reliability for each variable was reported to range between .79 - .85 using Cronbach's coefficient alpha test. In their study, Robertson *et al.* (2002) provide strong theoretical support for the amalgamation of three countries into one sample by testing the dimensions of individualism vs. collectivism, and masculinity. Results suggest the cultural value dimension individualism ($p < .001$) and masculinity ($p < .001$) are related to both an individual's beliefs and work ethic. They found that people with individualist traits in the studied countries tend to care for themselves and their immediate families and neglect the needs of society (Robertson *et al.* 2002:588). The study touches issues that are relevant to our study. The researcher selected the items related to the effect of contexts and modified them to suit his study needs, as the pilot study revealed that some items required further reliability testing. Participants' views were examined in relation to the effects of social norms on the daily work activities and methods that can be adopted in such social contexts to overcome negative effects, if any.

The Fourth and the Fifth Sections were designed to identify challenges and methods to develop the system to make it more responsive to merit recruitment objectives. The design of the items aimed mainly to assist the researcher to understand the obstacles that may arise if a new merit system is adopted in Oman. For instance, participants were asked about the extent to which they thought the civil service system is ready to adopt and implement the merit-based recruitment system in terms of regulations, capabilities the human resources, and the willingness on the part of heads of government agencies to delegate authority. Sections 4 and 5 also sought to benefit from participants' experience, particularly experts, when formulating procedures of good practice.

Items in these two sections intended to answer the third set of the study's subsidiary questions and to test the third set of hypotheses (3A and 3B). To be specific, participants' attitudes were examined in relation to three interrelated issues: 1) the extent to which reform is needed, 2) mechanisms of implementing the new merit system,

and 3) potential obstacles to adopting the new system. Later, the pilot study revealed that these two sections (4 and 5) were motivating, due to the fact that the questions led participants to think, objectively, about alternatives when criticising the current recruitment practice (see Sections Four and Five of Appendix 6)

Although some ideas and items were derived from other studies when constructing our questionnaire, most items were modified to suite the study's purpose and others were designed by the researcher to meet some specific requirements.

3.6.4. Validity

The term validity is one that is frequently used in the world of research. According to Thursfield (2000:20), validity is "the extent to which the study measures what it is meant to measure". Neuman (2000) notes that the validity of a survey is the degree of fit between a construct a researcher uses to describe, theorise, or analyse the social world and what actually occurs. He adds that validity means truthfulness, as it aims to make sure that survey items are clear and understandable.

Chapelle and Jamieson (1991) explain validity by dividing it into two types, internal and external. Internal validity refers to the accurate attribution of observed results to the factors that were supposed to be responsible for these results, while external validity denotes the applicability of research results to instructional and research contexts other than the one in which the research was carried out. Neuman (2000) adds that both internal and external validity are primarily used in experimental research; the internal validity is to indicate whether there are possible errors or alternative explanations to account for the results, while the external is to measure the ability to generalise findings from a specific sample to a wider population.

Although it is not possible to have absolute confidence about measurement of survey validity, some measures are more valid than others. Chapelle and Jamieson (1991) explain that there are many types of validity, such as face, content, criterion, concurrent, predictive, construct, and convergent validity. The easiest and the most common are the face and the content validity. Face validity is a simple judgement of whether the instrument used seems relevant to the stated objectives, while content validity implies a more systematic matching of items with some defined domain of content (Neuman 2000). Field experts (e.g. May 1997; Punch 1998; De Vaus 2000) agree that content

validity can be tested through the judgement of the scientific community. They indicate that it is becoming common to use a panel of experts to evaluate the instruments used.

To test the clarity of the items used and their relevance to their scales, the face and the content validity of the questionnaire was tested through the following procedures:

- 1) The questionnaire was reviewed thoroughly by the researcher supervisors (Dr. Richard Common and Dr. Steve Armstrong) to check on the clarity of the questions, their appropriateness to fulfil the research aims, and to ensure that the meaning reflected the content of the scales.
- 2) Copies of the questionnaire were distributed to 4 specialised assessors, 2 from the University of Hull, and 2 from Sultan Qaboos University in Oman. A letter was addressed these assessors explaining the aims of the study and asking for their evaluation of validity and of whether or not the items met the necessary criteria (see Appendix 3). Later, copies were collected and around half an hour was spent with each assessor, face to face, to discuss notes and comments.

Assessors who scrutinised questions concentrated particularly on the sentence structure so that those sentences would be more meaningful and appropriate to participants. They advised that some items were irrelevant to the measured scale and some were ambiguous and may need to be deleted. Their comments resulted in a few changes. Among these, for instance, were the following:

- The first section included a question about the name of the government agency in which participants worked. This question was deleted based on the suggestion that this may affect the anonymity afforded to participants.
- Question 12/2 (How did you apply...?) and Question 12/3 (How were you selected...?) were changed from a true/not true format to a multiple choice format. It was advised that the true/not true format may cause repetition.
- Questions 14 which included factors affecting promotion were split into two questions; the first discussed pay grade-to-pay grade promotion, while the second discussed post-to-post promotion. It was advised that mixing these two types of promotions may affect analysis.

Assessors' suggestions were taken into consideration modifications and changes were made accordingly. Items, then, were rearranged in a new sequence for the pilot study.

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statement with participants to ensure clarity. The pilot study helped to locate repeated questions, understandable or misinterpreted ones, and weak questions. Questions that took longer to answer were located, in order to consider whether they might need to be re-worded or broken down into separate parts. The average time taken to complete the questionnaires was 40-50 minutes; this, later, was reduced to 30 minutes.

Participants of the pilot study provided very useful feedback due to the fact that most of them were postgraduate students have good knowledge of research methods. They were very cooperative and some expressed their support and appreciation of the topic and considered it beneficial. Two participants suggested that a few items were inapplicable in their situations and some were ambiguous. Apart these comments most participants thought that the questions were, generally, clear and understandable.

All comments were reviewed alongside the feedback from the researcher's supervisors and changes were made accordingly. The results of the pilot work revealed that the process of data collection should proceed smoothly.

3.6.6. Reliability

After the validity and pilot study were completed and the suggested changes were made, the data collected from the 12 participants was entered into the computer software SPSS file (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). The aim was to check on the reliability of the instrument. Reliability was defined by Neuman (2000:164) as "the extent to which the results of the study would be similar if carried out again by a different researcher". Bryman and Cramer (2001:63) explain that the reliability of a measure refers to its consistency, and this often involves two separate aspects: external and internal reliability. The external reliability refers to the degree of consistency of a measure over time, that is, the researcher should expect the same results if s/he applied the same scale on different occasions or with a different set from an equivalent population. The internal reliability, which is the more common and connected with multiple-item scales, raises the question of whether each scale is measuring a single idea and hence whether the items that make up the scale are internally consistent.

After consultation, the researcher decided to apply the internal reliability to test the questionnaire's consistency. A number of methods exist for estimating the internal reliability of a questionnaire. Among those are the split-half (subdivided test), the

Kuder-Richardson method of rational equivalence, Guttman, Hoyt's Analysis of Variance Procedure and Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha. Each method is used with a specific type of data, according to the aims. The currently widely used is Cronbach's Alpha which calculates the average of all possible split-half reliability coefficients. A correlation coefficient is then generated that varies between 0 and 1 and the nearer the result is to 1 (preferably at over 0.8) the more internally reliable is the scale (Oppenheim 1996: 159; Bryman and Cramer 2001:63).

The researcher decided to use the Cronbach's Alpha method to test the internal consistency of the scales, primarily because this test it is most common, and can easily be computed in SPSS. To conduct this test, the questionnaire items were rearranged into 7 subscales, each intended to measure attitudes toward a particular issue. The subscale issues were: 1) impact of the environment variables, 2) the current recruitment procedures, 3) the concept of representation, 4) prospects of the merit-based procedures, 5) compliance of current procedures with principles of law, 6) factors affecting promotion, and 7) obstacles that may rise if the merit-based system is implemented. All items were evaluated on a five-point Likert scale with a fifth neutral midpoint. The first 5 ranged from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree, while the last two ranged from Very Important to Not Important at all (see Appendix 4).

As mentioned previously, the data obtained from the pilot study (the 12 civil servants) was used to determine the internal reliability. After the recoding processes, the first Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha test resulted in low interaction between some items, while others were within an acceptable range. The removal of the low-scoring items (Alpha if item deleted) was essential to improve the reliability of the subscales. The researcher extensively modified each of the seven subscales by deleting unessential items (items with a correlation of less than 0.35 were deleted unless was core). In this way, the internal reliability of the subscales improved from an average of 0.53 to 0.81. As shown in Appendix 4, the final overall Cronbach's Alpha for all subscales ranged from 0.77-0.87. This result was within the acceptable range and indicated statistical reliability. This version of the questionnaire was, therefore, used in the main study.

3.6.7. The Statistical Analysis

The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was used to analyse data. This computer software is a comprehensive tool for managing and analysing survey data,

and most statistical tests can be easily employed through its use. The tests used mostly involved non-parametric and descriptive statistics. Only in one case inferential statistics were used to compare the values of continuous variables for two different groups.

One of the unsolved issues in quantitative data analysis is when parametric rather than non-parametric tests should be used. The term “parameter” refers to a measurement that describes the distribution of the population (e.g. mean and variance) while “parametric tests” refer to tests that assume the underlying distribution of the data being examined is known (Bryman and Cramer 2001: 115). Parametric tests are a branch of statistical tests, which makes assumptions about the underlying mathematical distribution form of observed variables; the most familiar distribution is the normal distribution. However, non-parametric tests are distribution free tests that do not depend on assumptions about the precise form of the distribution of the sampled population.

Due to the type of instruments used (different kinds of questions and a mixture of nominal, ordinal and interval data), the researcher decided to employ non-parametric statistical tests. While they are criticised for being not as powerful as their parametric counterparts, non-parametric tests interpretation of data is more direct and do not rely on assumptions than the interpretation of parametric tests (Bryman and Cramer 1997; Punch 1998; Pallant 2001). Within this context, Rose and Sullivan (1996:244) note:

Some statisticians believe that parametric tests are inappropriate to the social sciences, since they rest on assumptions that are violated by much social science data and prefer instead to rely on non-parametric tests.

From the variety of non-parametric tests available, the researcher mainly used the Chi square (χ^2) test. The test is widely used in conjunction with contingency tables (cross-tabulation) which contain a cell for each combination of categories of the two variables. It is used to test statistical significance, meaning that it allows the researcher to ascertain the probability that the observed relationship between the two variables may have arisen by chance. The test is used with ordinal and nominal variables and calculated by comparing the observed frequencies in each cell in a contingency table with those that would occur if there was no relationship between the two variables (Bryman and Cramer 1997). The chi-square test was used to test most of the study hypotheses. However, on one occasion where the means of two groups differed statistically, the researcher employed a parametric test (see Hypothesis B2, p.267).

In that particular case the data was based interval or ratio where it was appropriate to use the t-test. The t-test is calculated by comparing the difference between the two means with the standard error of the difference in the means of the different groups (Bryman and Cramer 1997). If the difference in the means of the two groups is close to zero, it is more likely that this difference is due to chance. To reject a null hypothesis, the test calculates the degree of freedom (df.) which is the number of subjects or respondents (N-1). If the calculated value of t is larger than or equal to a critical value (in the t-distribution table) at the chosen significance level (the significance levels commonly used in statistical research are the 0.05, 0.01 and 0.001 levels, though the usage of the 0.05 level is the most common) then the null hypothesis can be rejected at that particular significance level and degree of freedom (Pallant 2001).

3.6.8. Implementation

Before conducting the field study, the researcher was aware the research environment in Oman requires attention. Blaxter *et al.* (1996) emphasise the importance of context and advise that the choice of research strategy should be based on the ground realities in which the research is being conducted. This is absolutely true; conducting a field study within the Arabian context is significantly different from that of the West. In Oman, the cultural setting imposes a number of constraints and limitations. Government officials are usually hesitant to participate, particularly in studies that criticise the system, unless researchers obtain written letters from the concerned authorities indicating approval. Further, Omani researchers (e.g. Muharami 1993; Maawali 2000) indicate that it is difficult to investigate organisational issues in Oman from a position outside the organisation. They advise researchers to benefit from personal and informal contacts, as nothing meaningful can be achieved through official means only. They also advise that researchers should administer procedures in person to obtain good results, although doing so may require more time and effort.

Keeping these considerations in mind, the researcher was aware of the need to prepare adequately for the field study. As mentioned in the sampling section, the researcher adopted a non-probability sampling method based on the availability of subjects, or what is referred to as a convenience sample. The researcher benefited from the fact that he works in the Ministry of Civil Service. During his the period of his work as the Director of the Minister's Office, he built good personal contacts with many officials in

various public agencies. The researcher selected nine public institutions where he had good contacts and where he knew there were people who could really assist. He was convinced that if adequate response rate was obtained from these agencies, participants would reflect the population and it would be possible to generalize findings. The following procedures were followed to distribute and collect the questionnaires:

1. Before travelling to Oman, the researcher obtained an introductory letter from the University of Hull indicating the importance of co-operation with the researcher. In Oman, a support letter was obtained from the Ministry of Higher Education which indicated that the researcher had been given permission to conduct his field study present and encouraged public agencies to cooperate. These letters were useful and were welcomed by government agencies.
2. After determining the number of questionnaires to be distributed to each agency, the researcher contacted agencies, in person, and explained the kind of help needed. Agencies were provided with a guide explaining how questionnaires should be distributed and when they would be collected.
3. In the covering page of the questionnaire, participants were asked to enclose completed questionnaires in an attached envelopes addressed to the researcher and to make sure that envelopes were sealed and to return them to the authority they were received from. Participants were assured of confidentiality and were requested to take the time to answer all questions carefully (see Appendix 6, p.1).
4. To ensure a smooth process, the researcher identified one “contact person” in each of the agencies where questionnaires were distributed. These people were mostly colleagues, friends, and in some cases, relatives. They were individually briefed about what was required and were asked to follow up questionnaire collection.

The distribution of the questionnaire started in the last week of June 2004 and a period of four weeks was allowed for the completed questionnaires to be returned. During this period, lines of communication were opened with the contact people. Completed questionnaires were collected on Monday 26th July 2004 and before that data a reminder letter was sent with a closing date, but there were no more responses.

The means by which the researcher was able to distribute and collect the questionnaire required real effort. It involved travelling from one region to another, many phone calls, and months of hard work in the hot summer of Oman. As will be explained in details in

Ch.7, out of the 320 questionnaires distributed, 288 (90%) were returned and 250 (78%) were accepted as valid. The main factor behind this good response rate was the fact that the contact people were instrumental in encouraging participants in their organisation to complete questionnaires and in following up collection on time.

3.7. The Interviews

3.7.1. Rationale

The second research instrument employed was interviews with selected government officials whom position and experience enabled them to provide useful opinions on the study's issues and who work in agencies that are directly involved in formulating and implementing recruitment policy in the civil service. An interview was described as "a conversation between the researcher and the subject" (Thursfield 2000:73). It allows researchers to probe more deeply into emergent research's issues and considered a very useful tool of investigation. Kerlinger (1981) suggests that interviews can supplement and validate other research methods, such as questionnaires, as they allow researchers to go deeper into the attitudes of respondents by asking for reasons behind their responses. In Section 3.7, we explained that the questionnaire survey lacks of flexibility, where questions and their wording are the same for all participants. In this case, the researcher cannot obtain explanations and understand the reasons behind responses.

To avoid this limitation and to strengthen and validate results and findings, interviews were used as a second method of data collection. Interviews were carried out to add the richness of qualitative data and to generate support to the findings obtained from the first research method, the questionnaire (May 1998). Experts' views and observations were expected to provide the opportunity to develop a comprehensive understanding of recruitment policy in Oman based on real world managerial practice, rather than on theoretical prescriptions, and to add additional perspectives from those directly involved in the actual practice. Materials from this source also were expected to indicate the patterns and trends that currently influence thinking at the decision-making level.

In employing the interview, the researcher had two specific aims in mind: 1) to validate the questionnaire results and 2) to obtain extra data not available through secondary sources (e.g. documents and publication). The latter was mainly important to fill the gap in relation to the data required when discussing institutions and laws responsible for

recruitment in Oman (Chs. 5 and 6). As will be shown in the remainder of this section, each of the above two aims imposed particular requirements in the way the format, schedule, and implementation of the interviews were decided and carried out.

3.7.2. Format

Interviews are classified into four types; structured, semi-structured, unstructured and focus group (Borg and Gall 1996). Each is relevant to a particular research paradigm. A review of the characteristics of these four types revealed that the semi-structured interview was the most appropriate to meet this study's requirements. More flexibility in interviewing is found in semi-structured interviews (Oppenheim 1996). By using this interview format, respondents are encouraged to talk about the topic raised from their perspective. The role of the researcher is as a mediator to direct and control the interview. The researcher is expected to seek for more information when s/he feels that at a particular point during the course of the interview there is a gap that needs to be filled (Oppenheim 1996; Punch 1998).

However, a number of impediments need to be considered if semi-structured interviews are used as a method of data collection. These, as illustrated by Thursfield (2000), are:

- Interviews are social conversations and it cannot be assumed that information generated by them correspond with the situation under investigation. This is not to argue that interviewees are dishonest. Instead, it is simply to suggest that the interview itself may affect the accuracy of interpretation.
- Interviews are expensive and time-consuming.
- There is a high dependence on the skill of the researcher.

The above ideas were taken into consideration and the researcher was convinced that the semi-structured interviews would be very beneficial to the research. By employing this method, structured questions were designed to achieve the first aim (to validate the questionnaire's results), while unstructured questions were used to achieve the second aim (to obtain data not available from secondary sources). The latter type of questions was designed to suit each interviewee's position, background, and experiences. Further, the combination of structured and unstructured questions allowed the researcher to be free to modify questions, change the way they were worded, and include or exclude others based on each interviewee's situation (De Vaus 2000).

3.7.3. The Interview Schedule

Apart from the unstructured questions, an interview schedule consisting of six questions was developed. Some of these questions were included in the questionnaires, but needed more elaboration to support the results (see Appendix 8). The first three questions were directly derived from the questionnaire. Question One was a general question about respondents' views on the current recruitment and selection procedures. The answer to this question helped to gauge the depth of the participant's knowledge of the issues, and accordingly, led, on some occasions, to in-depth questions being raised. Question two was designed to assist the researcher to formulate a picture about the role played by the public agency of the interviewee in relation to recruitment policy and practice. Question three probed into the issue of merit when public servants are selected to fill key posts. Interviewees were asked about the extent they thought the current promotion policies reflect the merit principles demanded by the country's rules and regulations. Questions four and five were mainly designed to set the stage for the final question. The fourth question traced opinions on the effects of social norms (e.g. nepotism and favouritism) when Omani public servants carry out their duties, while the fifth question asked about the extent of interviewees' satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the procedures, in general.

The final question, Question Six, concluded the interview by asking officials about their views on how to develop the system to be more responsive to the merit-based personnel system. If respondents agreed that change is required, they were asked about their views on procedures that can be followed to reflect merit in both principles and practice. Respondents were also asked about the challenges expected to arise to implement the merit system, and the policies that can be followed to overcome challenges. Through such discussion, the researcher aimed to benefit from these experts' experiences when deciding the procedures that can be implemented to secure merit recruitment as an outcome of the research. This particular part of the interview is similar to Section Four of the questionnaire. The aim was compare responses from both research methods.

3.7.4. Interview Respondents

After consultation, it was decided that the selection of respondents should be based on: 1) their long involvement in personnel management policy and practice in Oman, and 2) their familiarity with the current recruitment rule and regulations. To select interviewees who met these requirements, a list of potential candidates was prepared and discussed

with the above mentioned experts in U.K and Oman (see p.113). A decision was made to limit the number of interviews to 16 from five government agencies whose activities were the most relevant to the study (see Table 3.2). The selected participants ranged from a Minister level to a Department Director in a ministry or government agency. Most participants occupy positions directly connected to employment policy in the civil service and personnel activities, including the recruitment function. By and large, they were within the main stream of personnel regulations, and some of them were, indeed, policy-makers of high status (see interviewees' list in part 2 of the Bibliography).

Table 3.2: The interview participants

Government Agency	Number of Interviewees
Ministry of Civil Service	4
Institute of Public Administration	4
Ministry of Finance	2
Ministry of Legal Affairs	2
The Administrative Court of Justice	2
others	2
Total	16

3.7.5. Implementation

The experiences of Omani researchers (e.g. Maawali 2000; Shafae 2001) provided useful guidance about the most effective way to conduct interviews in Oman. They, for instance, emphasised that obtaining support letters from the concerned authorities is important, as these letters can significantly ease the process. They also advised that questions that criticise government should be avoided or carefully designed, because officials avoid answering this type of questions, particularly if interviews are tape-recorded. This advice was considered. The researcher also followed other procedures to ensure success. Before selecting interviewees, he asked about their experiences in relation the study's topics to make sure the interviews would be useful. When an interviewee was selected, the researcher arranged the first appointment through various means. This was sometimes done through official means (letters from the MCS), and on other occasions through mutual friends, depending on the situation.

Interviews were carried out in respondents' offices. In the first meeting, the researcher started by explaining the objectives of his research and its importance. If required, the letters obtained from the Ministry of Civil Service and the Ministry of Higher Education

permitting the research to be carried out were shown. In most cases, the researcher in the first meeting had a general discussion and was content with presenting his Interview Schedule and asking for another meeting. The idea was to give officials time to think about their answers. If this is not possible, questions were discussed straightaway. Permission to use a tape recorder had to be obtained before the start of the interview. The researcher explained the difficulties researchers face if interviews are conducted without tape-recording. In our case, all officials agreed without restrictions. In fact most officials were very supportive of the research and its objective and showed no reluctance to use tape-recorder and to set more than one interview meetings.

The interviews started with Question One, which is a general question. The researcher acted here as a listener with attention to what the respondent was saying to make the conversation more interesting to him/her. Soon the interview moved away from surface talk to rich discussions of thoughts and feelings.

In total, sixteen interviews were conducted during the summer of 2004, immediately after the completion of the questionnaire. Most of these interviews involved more than one meeting and were transcribed directly while still fresh. The researcher read the transcripts several times to familiarise himself with the content and located the main “themes” of responses. The themes, then, were defined and related to the study’s issues. Potential quotations were highlighted and translated to English and a “Cut and Paste” process was used to put appropriate responses under appropriate headings. As will be shown in details in Chapter Seven (the analysis chapter), three themes were identified. These were: 1) factors that influence recruitment and promotion, 2) effects of social contexts that adversely affect the objectives of merit personnel management, and 3) proposed procedures if a new merit system is adopted in the Omani civil service..

3.8. Summary and Conclusion

The chapter has explained the methods used to carry out the empirical research to assess the factors that affect the implementation of recruitment by merit in Oman. It began by explaining the research paradigm and the aims of selecting such a methodological approach. It was explained that a triangulation method was adopted to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. The main instrument was a survey questionnaire administered to 250 civil servants designed to provide quantitative data, supplemented

by qualitative data derived from interviews with 16 officials from government institutions responsible for formulating and implementing public personnel policies and regulations. The two methods offer different types of data, which fit well together to meet the study's objectives. Evidence was provided on how gathering data through such research paradigm provide accurate testing of the hypotheses made by the study and contributes positively in gaining confidence on the obtained results.

In terms of the questionnaire, a comprehensive account was provided of the methods followed to select the sample. It was explained that the sampling technique used (a non-probability convenience sample) minimises time and cost while fulfilling objectives. The occupants of the grades of the First Group of the Omani civil service hierarchy were selected as the sample population and were categorised into three sample groups (Civil Servants, Managers and Experts) to give the analysis of the results strength and clarity. An explanation was also provided of how the targeted sample was located and why other grade groups were excluded. Further, the development of the questionnaire, its construction, scales, validation, piloting and procedures followed for implementation were described. The statistical reliability tests carried out revealed that the questionnaire was found to be valid and have a high alpha reliability.

Similar explanations were provided in terms of the interviews. After explaining the rationale behind employing the interviews as the second research method, the format used, the way respondents were selected, the development of the interview schedule, and methods followed for implementation were presented. We explained that the semi-structured format of interviews was selected for its flexibility to meet the listed aims. Structured questions were used to achieve the first aim (validation of the results of the first research method), while unstructured questions were used to achieve the second (obtaining the data required not available through secondary sources).

The results of the field study and the analysis and discussion of these results will be presented in Chapter Seven. The next three chapters (Chs. 4, 5, and 6) are intended to set the stage for the analysis and the concluding chapter. In these three chapters, we will discuss the environment of the public bureaucracy in Oman, followed by an explanation of the institutions and laws responsible for formulating and implementing personnel policies. In Chapter Six, the focus will be narrowed to the current recruitment, selection, and promotional policies followed when public posts are filled.

Chapter Four

The Context of Public Bureaucracy in Oman

4.1. Introduction

Decades ago, Riggs (1964) emphasised that analytical assessment of any given organisational activity must draw attention to the environment within which the public bureaucracy works. He noted that geography, history, political culture, religion, and social norms are environment variables surrounding public bureaucracy that play an essential role in the way bureaucracy and bureaucrats function; he writes:

What must be demonstrated is the connections or interdependencies between particular environmental variables and administrative behaviour. To do this a nomothetic approach is essential. Without identifying relevant variables and showing how they are linked, it is impossible to demonstrate ecological relations (Riggs 1964:27).

Peters (2001) confirms the same principle when he notes that public bureaucracy can no longer be treated as a neutral or autonomous institution, but must be seen as a sub-system of its surroundings. Other writers, e.g. Haque (1997), McCourt (2002) are more specific when they emphasise that the assessment of personnel policies is rooted in the way societies function in light of the impact of their past and present conditions. Haque (1997) argues that bureaucratic activities and the social contexts of the society are two interconnected variables that should be looked at jointly. Political structure, economic conditions, religion, and social upheaval, together, contribute in determining the overall nature of the system and the way its subjects perform administrative tasks.

It is necessary, therefore, before examining recruitment policy in Oman to comprehend the environment of its public bureaucracy. The purpose is to show the manifestation of the environmental dynamics in the bureaucratic structure and its effects on bureaucratic behaviour, particularly if assessing EEO issues and their connection to the social norms of the society. This chapter, accordingly, is devoted to a discussion of this essential field. It also aims to set the stage for the analytical assessment of personnel policies in Oman in the coming chapters by providing an accurate account of the environment within which the bureaucracy operates. This is particularly required to enable valid suggestions to be made in the concluding chapter of this study.

The chapter provides an overview about Oman. It reviews the country's geo-historical setting, political and economic structure, and the characteristics of the population in terms of social and class orientation. As indicated, an attempt is made to link these variables to the overall bureaucratic setting. The chapter, for instance, explains how Oman's geographic location, being naturally isolated from the rest of the Arab world, had affected the development of its administration, how the historical background, being an Ibadhi Islamic sect state, shaped its political culture, and how the political structure, being an absolute monarchy, directs the functions of its government. Emphasis is placed, as well, on the reign of the previous sultan, Sultan Said (1932-1970) in order to comprehend the background of the establishment of the current political structure. This information is intended to relate this research to the circumstances that shape and affect Oman's past and present.

4.2. Country Profile

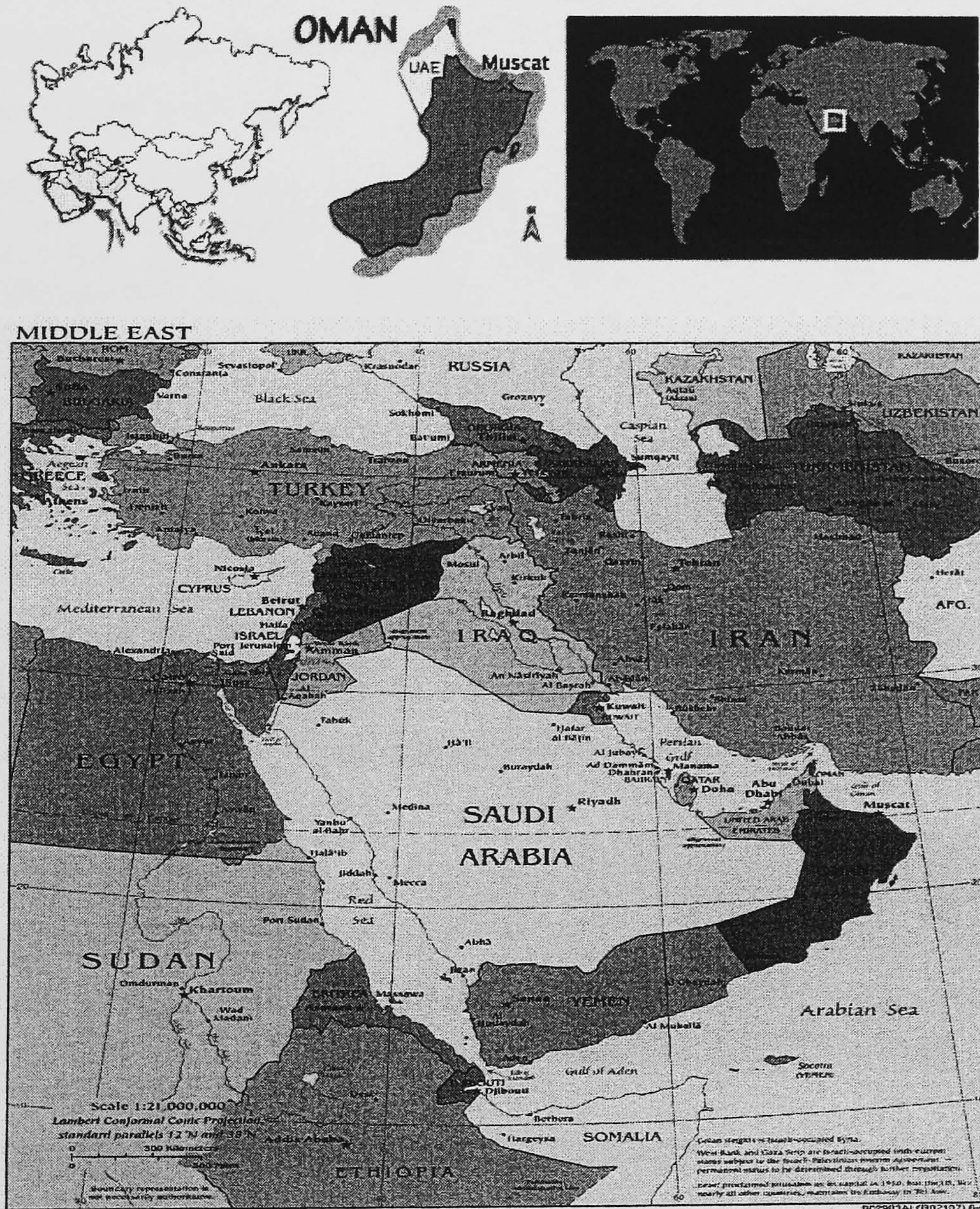
Geography has made Oman virtually an island, bordered by mountains, deserts, and seas. The country is located in the extreme southeast corner of the Arabian Peninsula, between Latitudes 16° 40' and 26° 20' North and Longitudes 51° 50' and 59° 40' East with a total land boundary of 1,374 km. It is bordered by the Republic of Yemen to the south with a border 288 km in length, Saudi Arabia to the west (676 km), and United Arab Emirates to the north-west (410 km). As shown in Figure 4.1 below, the country overlooks three seas: the Gulf of Oman, the Arabian Sea, and the Persian/Arabian Gulf, with a total coastline of 2,092 km, which extends from the Strait of Hormuz in the north to the frontier with Yemen in the south (National Survey 1999; MI 2003).

The Mousandam Peninsula is the northernmost point of the country, separated from the main body of Oman by an 80 km strip of land belonging to the UAE. Oman is the third largest country in the Arabian Peninsula, occupying most of its south-eastern corner with an area of 309,500 sq km (120,000 square miles), though 82% of its landscape consists of desert and rough mountains (National Survey 1999).

Further, Oman has the most diverse topography in the Arab countries; it could well be called a microcosm for almost every topographical feature found around the world (Dickey 1990). Its topography consists of plains, desert, mountain ranges and *Wadis* (dry river beds). The Hajar and the Qara Mountains (the two main mountain ranges)

occupy about 15% of the total landscape. Hajar extends in the form of an arc running from Ras Mousandam in the North to Ras Al-Had, while the Qara range is in the southwest running from Dhofar to the borders with Yemen. The remaining area is desert which includes part of the Empty Quarter (Hourani 1995; Cordesman 1997).

Figure 4.1: Oman's location



Source: MI (2002) [On-line] Available <http://www.omanet.com/english/geo/geog.asp> (25/8/02)

Physical geography has played a critical role in shaping Oman's history and culture, as both have developed separately from the rest of the Arabian Peninsula. Allen (1987) and Riphenburg (1998) observed this fact and note that geography placed Oman outside the major currents of Arab history. They indicate that the country, until recently, subsisted as a private, distant, and isolated corner of the Arabian Peninsula. Riphenburg (1998) explains that on the one hand, over half the length of its total border is open seas, and,

on the other, much of its land borders are either mountains or desolate desert. Remoteness has been further reinforced by the harsh Hajar Mountains, which form a ridge between the coast and the desert.

Kechichian (1995) adds that the vast and desolate *Rub al-khali* (the Empty Quarter) with its harsh environment has presented a “nearly insurmountable” natural barrier to social and political intercourse for Oman with the rest of Arabia. He describes how this natural barrier helped Omani rulers in the past to manage their affairs far better than their counterparts in the region:

Indeed, the Rub al-khali was and remains the Sultanate’s most important border, as it provides natural security. Its effect on Omani rulers may be equivalent to the influence that both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans have had on successive American administrations in devising U.S. policy. As rulers on the Arabian Peninsula have fought over their emerging borders throughout the twentieth century, the Rub al-khali presented Omani rulers with some unique opportunities (ibid 17).

Historically, the country has been viewed as strategically important, given its position at the mouth of the Gulf. It lies on the Tropic of Cancer, as a gateway between the Indian Ocean, East Africa and the Arabian Sea (Cordesman 1997). In the past, Allen (1987) points out, Oman dominated regional commodity trading, and its prosperity rests on its land and the seas that embrace its coastline. She explains that this location straddles the monsoon trade routes which link India and Africa and both with the Gulf. This has been traditionally exploited by enterprising Omanis: “their country has long been a major seafaring nation” (*ibid* 57). Peterson (2004c) adds that trade and political relations with non-Arab nations on the Indian Ocean provided Oman with an opportunity to gain knowledge and experiences that were not made available to many Arab countries.

Al-Siyabi (1994:11), an Omani historian, points out that the geographic setting of the country served Omanis in times of war, as well. He argues that given such natural defensive positions, Omani tribes living in village oases throughout the region were uniquely situated when called upon to defend the country from foreign invasions: “Location proved especially valuable and played a vital role in keeping the country remarkably free of foreign interference, either military or cultural.”

Nowadays, Oman’s location plays critical role in keeping it physically outside the dimensions of the wars the region has witnessed. Kechichian (1995) explains that the coastline on the Arabian Sea (a subdivision of the larger Indian Ocean) is much more secure than the Gulf or the Red Sea and this location helped Oman to avoid being

directly involved in the Iran-Iraq war of 1980 and Kuwait war of 1990 (we add, the 2003 Iraq war). Riphenburg (1998:183) elaborates on this point by explaining how the insularity of Oman plays a significant role in its foreign policy. She writes:

An unequivocally striking feature about Oman, and a characteristic that may provide the most understanding about its past and present, is its insularity. Geography has formed the history and the direction of the country for millennia. It is part of the Gulf, and it is part of the Middle East, however, it has always been somewhat isolated from the immediate pressure that have been more momentous to its neighbours in Jazirat al Arab [Arabian Peninsula].

Oman commands one of the most strategic waterways in the Middle East; the Strait of Hormuz. Situated at the entrance to the Gulf and the Gulf of Oman, the “indispensable” and militarily crucial chokepoint, the Strait of Hormuz, is “flanked” on the south by Oman’s Mousandam Peninsula through which pass oil tankers from the Gulf to most of the industrialised world (Cottrell 1980:6). According to Gause (1994) Gulf oil represents 40% of the world’s petroleum supplies, which must pass through this Strait, enhancing Oman’s strategic importance.

4.2.1. Oman’s History

Nothing is so difficult as to briefly describe the history of a country whose history is so diversified in depth and kind as that of Oman. Although much of the country’s early history is obscure, the antiquity of human occupation in the region has long been recognised in sites along the coast, in inner Oman, and in Dhofar (Darlow and Richard 1976). According to Hourani (1995), Oman’s ancient history provides evidence of an early civilisation. He indicates that earliest known settlements in Oman date from the late fourth or early third millennium BC and the Stone Age implements found in Oman are regarded as being among the first evidence of organised human activity.

A report issued the Ministry of Information indicates that archaeological surveys have located seventeen settlements which can be attributed to the third millennium BC, and these settlements point towards the existence of an organised bureaucratic structure (MI 1997:32). The report also indicates that a Sumerian inscription in the early phase 2350-2025 BC of the third millennium reports maritime relations between Mesopotamia and a country called Magan. Magan is now agreed to be Oman (Hourani 1995:6). The first indications of life in Oman are seen in pottery that has been excavated, proving that Oman enjoyed widespread contacts with people from other lands and it was a melting pot for other cultures (Allawati 1990).

By the end of the third century AD, Magan came to be called Mazun by the Persians, who were increasingly involved in the region's trade. The name is thought to refer to its plentiful water (Rippenburg 1998). During that period, there was mass tribal relocation through the Arabian Peninsula, leading to several waves of Arab migrants into Oman. Al-Salimi (1981:10) explains that the name Oman is said to originate from Arab tribes who migrated from the Uman region of Yemen. He notes, "Modern Omani families can still trace their ancestral roots to that period".

Oman was one of the first countries to embrace Islam during the lifetime of Prophet Mohammed (peace upon him). In AD 630, the prophet's envoy, Amr Ibn Al-As (later famous as the conqueror of Egypt), met with the two sons of Al-Julanda, Abd and Jaifar, who were ruling Oman jointly, and won their acceptance of the new faith. Other Arabian tribes supported the decision and a delegation was sent to Medina (the capital of Islam) to declare that Oman embraced Islam. The Prophet's envoy remained in Oman, imparting the tenets of the new religion and encouraging the Arabs to move against the Sassanid Persians who refused to submit to Islam. The Rulers of Oman and their supporters among the Arab tribes succeeded in forcing the Persians to withdraw and Oman, since then, has been an Islamic state (Al-Salimi 1981).

Islam has strongly shaped Oman's history and culture. From the 6th century Oman became a stronghold of Islam, helping to spread the message of Islam, as well as the Arab culture and language to eastern and central Africa and Asia, reaching as far east as China (Allen 1987). Ibadhism, a form of Islam distinct from Shiaism and the orthodox Sunnism, became the dominant religious sect in Oman by late 7th century. Omani Ibadhis are among the Moslem world's few remaining Ibadhis. The only other location where Ibadhis are found is in North Africa, particularly western Algeria and southern Tunisia (Risso 1986). Various writers (e.g. Ketchikan 1995; Chatty 1996; Rippenburg 1998) emphasise that understanding the role of Ibadhism in Oman is essential when conducting social studies due to the fact Ibadhism has had a decisive effect in shaping Omanis' polity and culture, in both the past and the present.

4.2.2. Ibadhism; an Early Adherence of Merit Principals

Oman has a long tradition of religious tolerance, due in part to its Ibadhi interpretation of Islam (Miller 1997). Like other Islamic sects, Ibadhism traces its distinctive identity

back to the year 657 AD, the time of Ali, the fourth Caliph, who agreed to arbitration for leadership with his challenger, Umayyad, the governor of Damascus. The debates are too complex to discuss, but the central issues can be reduced to: 1) the problem of succession, 2) the scope of the ruler's authority, and 3) the possibility of deposition. Ibadhis were originally followers of Ali, but broke with him on the principle that by consenting to discuss the leadership issue, he had compromised on a matter of faith. This compromise, they believed, rendered him improper of their loyalty and leadership (Risso 1986; Wilkinson 1987). As a result, Muslims were divided into three major sects, Shiites (supporters of Ali and his sons), Sunnis (supporters of Umayyad), and Ibadhis (neutral). In present Oman, the three sects have supporters; however, the Ibadhi doctrine is the dominant sect (in terms of governance, not population).

Riphenburg (1998) discusses the effects of the Ibadhi ideology in Oman and argues that this ideology has shaped Oman's political and administrative history significantly. She indicates that the Ibadhi Imamate ruled Oman and it continued to govern the country through elements of democracy until the mid-18th century, when the Al Bu Said dynasty changed the form of rule to obsolete monarchy, followed by subsequent sultans. She emphasises that the choice of ruler by "communal consensus" is the major feature distinguishing Ibadhism from other sects of Islam and that this makes the Omani political experience "unique" in the Arab world; she writes:

They [Ibadhis] believe that any worthy Muslim may be chosen as leader regardless of ancestry. They feel an obligation to remove an Imam who acts improperly; if there is no suitable candidate, then the office can remain vacant...Selection of the Imam is the responsibility of the community's scholars, who elect the Imam and offer him Bay'a (oath of allegiance), after which he is presented to the community at large (Riphenburg 1998:26-29).

Riphenburg (1998) indicates that adherence to Ibadhism accounts in part for Oman's distinctive character and historical isolation from other Arab states. She argues that Ibadhis were not predisposed to integrate with their neighbours, given that the majority Sunni Muslims considered Ibadhism to be a heretical form of Islam. Al-Salimi (1981: 71-88) elaborates by noting that Ibadhism is known for its "moderate conservatism", as its philosophy contains elements of democracy. Ibadhis throughout their history, "with gaps", elected their Imams, deposed of them if required, and considered their system to be the authentic expression of Islam which depends on the early orthodoxy of the *Shariah* (the Islamic law). Kechichian (1995) supports Al-Salimi's (1981) argument and points out that early on, Ibadhi leaders agreed that no absolute power, civil or military,

should be in the hands of a single person, and this explained why tribal balance was maintained in relative harmony for so long in Oman. Kechichian (1995:25) states:

Given these numerous checks and balances, the Ibadhi political-religious ideology proved to be an impractical basis for the permanent development of a state in Oman.

Wilkinson (1987) adds that Omani Ibadhism remained fervently loyal to precepts of the Qur'an and the *Hadith* (reports concerning the actions and utterances of the prophet). He argues that the legal system is, in substance, the application of the *Shariah*; nevertheless Oman does not apply the strictest sanctions for infractions of this law; there is no severing of the hands, and no stoning or beheading of criminals. Ibadhis were capable of making commonsense exceptions to their own moral rules.

Although there is certainly room for research and debate on these claims, what is important within this study's context is the fact that Oman in its early days accepted the literal interpretation of the *Shariah* law which necessitate the implementation of merit principles when selecting leaders. Within this context, Kechichian (1995:37) notes: "Historically whenever someone called for different approach [the right to select leaders], Omanis refused to waive their system of laws." The role of Ibadhism in Oman has largely determined the administrative and the social organisation of the country in the past and, to certain extent, the present.

Apart from religious orientation, politically, Oman had known little unity since the early period of Islam (Eason 1995). A traditional Ibadhi Imamate rule emerged in Oman from the mid-8th to the 9th centuries, when it was suppressed by the Abbasid Empire. However, the Imamate continued in the remoter parts of Oman's interior. Oman's medieval history had witnessed a series of foreign invasions, division by domestic rivalries with competing Imams, and periods of rule by *Maliks* (kings). Contacts with Europe were established in 1508 when the Portuguese conquered parts of Oman's coastal region. Portugal's influence predominated for more than a century; however, except for that period and when the Persians conquered parts of the coastline in the mid-16th century, Oman has basically been an independent nation (Kechichian 1995).

In the seventeenth century, the situation changed as the country first experienced a civil war and then it was reunited under the Imamate of Naser ibn Murshid al-Ya'aribi, whose successors finally expelled the Portuguese and the Persians. Under the Ya'aribah

dynasty (1624-1749), and the first century of the Al Bu Sa'id dynasty, the Omani navy, forging Oman's imperial age, challenged Portuguese, Dutch, British, and the French merchant ships at sea, while extending its authority to the coasts of Iran, the Gulf, and East Africa (Risso 1986; Kechichian 1995). The Muscat rulers established trading posts on the Persian coast and also exercised a measure of control over Pakistan. By the early 19th century, Oman was the most powerful state in Arabia and on the East African coast (Al-Ma'amiry 1980; Rippenburg 1998).

Nevertheless, after the mid-19th century, the state's strength diminished as Europeans gained control over the Indian Ocean trade. Domestically, political leadership shifted in Oman from the Ibadhi Imams (elected leaders), to the hereditary Al Bu Said dynasty. During this period, the discord between the religious ideal of the Imamate and the reality of Al Bu Said's commercial empire led to political confusion, ending with the reestablishment of an Imamate in 1869 (Wilkinson 1987). The Ibadhi Imamate, residing in the interior of Oman and centred on the town of Nizwa, wanted to be ruled exclusively by their Ibadhi ideology. They considered the British influence over the Al Bu Said in Muscat to be a form of occupation. Hence, they considered the Al Bu Said illegitimate (Wilkinson 1987; Cordesman 1997).

Oman and Muscat, effectively divided politically in 1785, saw the situation formalized in 1920 with the Treaty of Seeb (Kechichian 1995). This treaty resolved the conflict temporarily between the Imamate in the interior and the Al Bu Said dynasty in Muscat, by granting the Imamate autonomous rule in the interior, while recognizing the nominal sovereignty of the Sultan elsewhere (Cottrell 1980).

According to Cordesman (1997), during the first half of the 20th century, the Al Bu Said dynasty found itself involved in a struggle for survival. Cottrell (1980) explains that the conflict between Muscat and the interior flared up in 1954, when the new Imam in the interior led a sporadic 5-year rebellion against the Sultan's efforts to extend government control into the interior. As a consequence, Sultan Said (1932-1970) welcomed British interference to help him to keep the country united under his control. Kechichian (1995) indicates that London benefited from several concessions from the dependent Sultan, including a lease agreement on Masirah Island as a base for its forces, thereby establishing a significant foothold near the strategic Arabian Peninsula. The political division between Imamate and Sultanate did not end until 1959, when Oman was

reunited by Sultan Said's British-trained and equipped Armed Forces after several decisive battles (Cottrell 1980).

4.3. The Public Bureaucracy Before 1970

It is difficult to understand Oman's current administrative system without understanding the country's situation before 1970, or the "dark days", as some Omani officials referred to that period.¹ Before 1970, Oman had a reputation as the recluse of the Middle East. Kechichian (1995:32) indicates that the country was almost "hermetically" sealed off from the outside world, although less than a century before it had been an imperial power that opposed, first, the Portuguese, and later the British in the Gulf and along the coasts of India and East Africa. This situation was mainly the result of Sultan Said's rule, which Riphenburg (1998:12) considers an exception in Oman's history. Describing Said's era, Riphenburg (1998:45) writes:

Sultan Said was an unusual personality, an arch-reactionary of great personal charm. He was opposed to any sort of change and attempted to isolate Oman from the modern world. Under his rule, a country which only a century earlier had engaged in empire building became a medieval anachronism.

During the rule of Sultan Said, the entire machinery of government was merely an extension of his person. He forbade travel inland by residents of the coast and vice versa, and opposed education, which he saw as a threat to his power (Risso 1986, Hourani 1991). Most Omanis were not allowed to leave the country; and the few who managed to get out were rarely allowed to return. Sultan Said reserved for himself the ultimate authority in all matters, and if authority was to be given, it was limited to some aides who were loyal, not to the country, but to his person (Mustafa 1964).

The administrative system during that period was very simple and mainly concerned with managing citizens' simple activities. There was no written law or regulations, and the Sultan was the supreme authority, who supervised, personally, all matters, including the simplest one such as the procedures of issuing visas (Landen 1967). Kechichian (1995:35) summarises, "Oman was an almost classic example of a patrimonial state".

While Britain began to exercise significant authority over Oman during that particular period, commentators (e.g. Taryam 1987; Kechichian 1995; Riphenburg 1998) blame

¹ Omanis refer to Sultan Said's rule as 'the dark days'. Although 35 years have passed, it remains in the memory of many Omanis, particularly those who witnessed it. H.E Sheik Abdulaziz Al-Azizi, the former Minister of Civil Service, confirmed this during an interview (Muscat, 28/06/04).

London for not intervening to help its ally to improve governance. They argue that the British had enough influence to introduce reform, if they wanted, but preferred not to upset their ally who was serving their actual interests. Rippenburg (1998:89) writes:

Although Great Britain began to exercise considerable influence over the sultanate at the end of the eighteenth century, culminating in the country's becoming a virtual British protectorate with limited sovereignty, Oman was never a British colony; and no skeleton of colonial government or administrative rule was developed upon which the foundation of a modern governmental structure could be erected.

The British role in Oman was contrary to their commonly perceived imperial attitude. Taryam (1987:26) discussed this role and argues that British assistance to Oman was in contrast to their traditional policy of fostering fragmentation and the creation of small and weak political entities. She explains that the British helped Said to unify Oman only because an independent Imamate was against their interests, otherwise: "They did not realise that they had a responsibility in Oman." Al-Ansi (1994) supports this argument and added that the British played an "artificial parental role" as their role was purely based on strategic self-interest. Instead of assessing the people who so badly needed their support and contribution, their role was limited to securing Sultan Said authority; an authority everyone agrees now that it caused so much harm to Omanis. The above argument is consistent with other western writers who studied the role of colonial power in developing countries (e.g. Haque 1997; Hughes 2003). These writers emphasised that a universal feature of the role of the latter was neglecting legislature bodies able to maintain control and accountability for strategic self-interests.

In sum, before 1970 no government in the normal sense existed in Oman. Economically, oil had been discovered in commercial quantities in 1964, with its exports beginning in 1967, and Sultan Said no longer had an excuse to delay development. Said's cautious policies made the impact of oil revenues on development limited and far too slow for Omanis (Risso 1986). Frustration was increasing among Omanis and this led to the formation of several opposition movements threatening to change the political direction from an ally of the West to a communist state (Kechichian 1995; Peterson 2004c).

4.4. The Public Bureaucracy After 1970

The growing success of the rebellion, PFOAG (the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Arab Gulf) stimulated opposition in Oman. Anger was mounting not just in Oman, but also in London, as the British were worried that Sultan Said's inability to

deal with the insurgency could allow Oman to become a communist state (Kechichian 1995). Sultan Said would have to be deposed, preferably before the date fixed for Britain's withdrawal from the Gulf (1970), and with enough time for his successor to consolidate his rule. Rippenburg (1998:49) writes:

Worried that Oman would go the way of Marxist South Yemen and that Said's policies were detrimental to the country's development, some British officials and a few disaffected Omanis decided to overthrow the regime.

With the tacit endorsement of the British, who saw the 30-year-old Qaboos, the son of the reigning sultan, as an acceptable alternative, Qaboos and a small number of the alienated political elite overthrew Sultan Said in July 1970. On July 26th the new Sultan informed his subjects of the coup and Said withdrew to London, where he died in 1972. The Omani *Al-Waten* newspaper in 1972 (cited in Muharami 1993: 92) quoted the words of Sultan Qaboos, describing the end of his father's era:

... [Sultan Said] knew five languages, but he wasn't cultured. Knowledge is one thing and culture is something else. He adopted a policy and would not agree to give it up, because he believed that this policy was the best one. He was headstrong and bigoted. His thinking went back to an age which is not this present age; so he had to fall from power, and this is what happened.

Qaboos is a direct descendant of the founder of the Al Bu Said dynasty, Said bin Sultan (1774-1783). His early years were spent in Salalah, until he was sent to school in England, followed by enrolment at the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst. Before returning to Salalah, he served a tour of duty with British units in West Germany and was trained in municipal administration in England (Hooglund 1995).

Upon assuming power, Sultan Qaboos concentrated on restoring control over the southern Dhofar region. In fact, this duty was his chief priority during the first five years. Unlike his father, Sultan Qaboos employed both economic and military means to fight the insurgents (Hammoudi 1993). Kechichian (1995) explains that the young Sultan was convinced that the poor economic conditions had played in motivating the rebellion; hence, he focused on development rather than relying on military means. Kechichian (1995:37) expresses his views of Qaboos as successful leader when he notes:

Qaboos was there not just to the throne he inherited from his father, but also to a dynasty that had provided Oman with impressive leaders. It was men like Ahmed bin Said (1744-1783), Said bin Sultan (1807-1856) and Turki bin Said (1871-1888) who shaped the country's history and who gave its policies an overall direction. To Qaboos' credit, this rich legacy was not abandoned for foreign imitation and short-term revolutionary rhetoric...much like Charles de Gaulle, who had "a certain idea of France," Qaboos set out to reinvent Oman.

Indeed many Omanis agree with Kechichian's view. Sultan Qaboos was able to win the allegiance of the people the civil action programmes he implemented throughout Oman. One of the sultan's first acts was to offer a general amnesty to all enemies of his father. He began an ambitious, socioeconomic campaign, building hospitals, roads, and schools, aimed at winning political support. Between 1971 and 1975, Dhofar received one-fourth of the country's development funds, and by doing so, the sultan ended the rebellion (Cottrell 1980). Peterson (2004c:130) elaborates by noting, "In the end, the sultanate victory appeared to result from a successful hearts and minds campaign as much, or more, than military superiority."

After the unification of the country, Qaboos immediately turned to development issues by establishing modern administrative institutions. The government launched a major programme to develop the country's natural resources, upgrade educational and health facilities and build a modern infrastructure (Curtiss 1995). Qaboos opened the country to the outside world and spent the newly acquired wealth to improve people's quality of life. According to Peterson (2004c), Oman has accomplished in a shorter period most of its infrastructure needs faster than its fellow Gulf monarchies, despite the fact that the country has less oil income and was dealing with a larger and more rugged geography.

Oil is, without a doubt, the distinguishing mark of Oman's socio-economic change. Its export is widely viewed as the source of prosperity, in the past 35 years and in the coming years. However nobody should ignore the role of leadership; Rippenburg (1998:52) summarises: "Omanis continue to say, before Qaboos, Oman was nothing."

4.4.1. Socioeconomic Development

The oil-price revolution in the first half of the 70s resulted in greater financial resources being available for development needs. Fuelled by these resources, the government initiated a wave of domestic programmes and activities. Peterson (2004c) notes that during the 70s development focused mainly on basic services infrastructure, such as health and education, while the 80s and the 90s saw a more systematic approach to the expansion of government. In the field of education, for instance, before 1970 there were only three schools with 909 students. Education was limited to urban areas and was available only in houses and mosques, where the curriculum was limited to the teaching of Arabic language and Islamic studies. After 1970, however, education spread all over Oman to reach the poorest Omanis. By 1984/5 the number of boys and girls in

government schools had reached 192,855 and increased to 469,844 in 1994/5. The number of government schools grew to 176 in 1974/5 and to 926 in 1994/5 (MD 1995: 571). By 2002, the number of schools had increased to 1010, the number of students had risen to 568,000, and there were 31,066 teachers (ME, 2002: 229).

In health services, the achievements were outstanding, for a country that 35 years ago hardly had any health care worth mentioning. For instance, the total number of hospital beds jumped from 2,111 in 1980 to 5,200 in 2001, while the number of working Doctors increased from 289 to 3,397, during that same period. Table 4.1 below summarises the noticeable development achieved in education and health.

Table 4.1: Indicators of the development of education and health in Oman during the period from 1970 to 2001

Year	Education					Health				
	Expenditure (OR M)*	% share of total Gov. expenditure	Schools	Students	Teachers	Expenditure (OR M)*	% share of total Gov. expenditure	Hospitals Beds	Doctors**	Life Expectancy
1971	0.5	2.8	42	15,334	445	1.1	6.1			
1976	10.6	2.2	269	65,446	2,882	9.0	3.0			
1980	31.8	4.0	373	107,000	5,150	19.1	2.4	2,111	289	57.5
1985	83.1	5.1	588	219,000	7,069	47.3	3.8	3,040	958	61.6
1990	124.3	7.2	779	356,000	10,665	69.5	3.9	3,873	1,441	65.9
1995	154.2	8.1	953	489,000	15,024	101.2	5.3	4,564	2,477	71.0
2000	217.7	8.7	993	555,000	17,141	134.8	5.5	5,190	3,258	73.4
2001	228.5	9.1	1,010	568,000	17,902	137.5	5.3	5,200	3,397	73.8

Source: Based on: DC (1991: 552,565) and MNE (2001: 273,416,459).

* In Million (1£ = .710 Omani Rial).

** Numbers of Doctors do not include doctors working for the Ministry of Defence and the Police.

As can be seen, expenditure in education and health increased enormously during that development era. Spending on education increased from 0.5 million Rials in 1971 to 228.5 millions in 2001, while in health services spending jumped from 1.1 to 137.5 during that same period. In general, the average annual rates of growth during the in the above periods were 108.1%, 65.4%, and 109% respectively. However, a closer look at these indicators shows that most spending was the result of the overall increase in the budget, rather than in investment in these two sectors, as the rate of spending depends on the overall international environment of oil prices (World Bank 1997).

If we look at the development based on the Human Development Index (HDI) and compare Oman to other countries of the world, it can be argued that Oman achieved acceptable standards. The value of 0.770 of the HDI in the year 2003 indicates that

Oman's ranking among the world's country was 74, next to a country like Saudi Arabia (73) and better than Tunisia (83), and Jordan (87) (see Table 4.2). This indicates that country has achieved satisfactory rates, particularly if compared to countries that started development decades before Oman (UNDP 2004).²

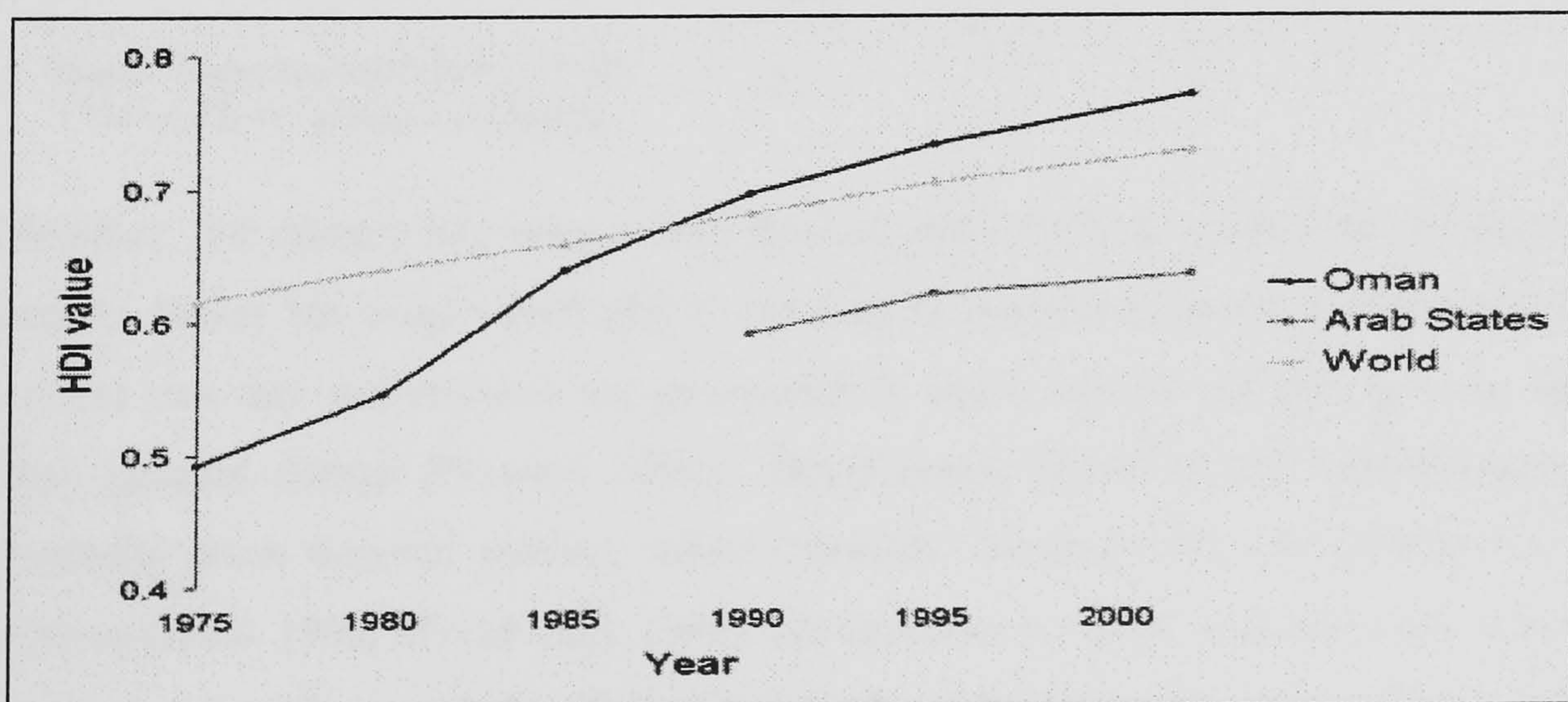
Table 4.2: Human development indicators of Oman and other countries of the world in 2003

HD Group	Countries	Life expectancy at birth (years)	Adult literacy rate (%)	Per capita real GDP	Human development index value	HDI rank (177 countries)
High HD	USA	76.4	99.0	26.977	0.943	4
	Japan	79.9	99.0	21.930	0.940	8
	UK	76.8	99.0	19.302	0.932	12
	Germany	76.4	99.0	20.370	0.925	19
Medium HD	Saudi A.	70.7	63.0	8.516	0.778	73
	Oman	72.3	59.0	9.383	0.770	74
	Tunisia	68.7	66.7	5.261	0.744	83
	Jordan	68.9	86.6	4.187	0.729	87

Source: UNDP (2004:128) *Human Development Report: Human Development Index*.

Further, and as shown in Figure 4.2, HDI trends in Oman are improving better than those in Arab countries and in the World, generally. However, it has to be mentioned at this point that although the HDI trends do not necessarily reflect development in all fields. Human development and governance are much broader and more complex than any summary measure of material progress. The HDI, for instance, do not measure social justice or democracy and does not reflect political or economic stability (UNDP 2004).

Figure 4.2: HDI trends; Oman compared to Arab countries and the world

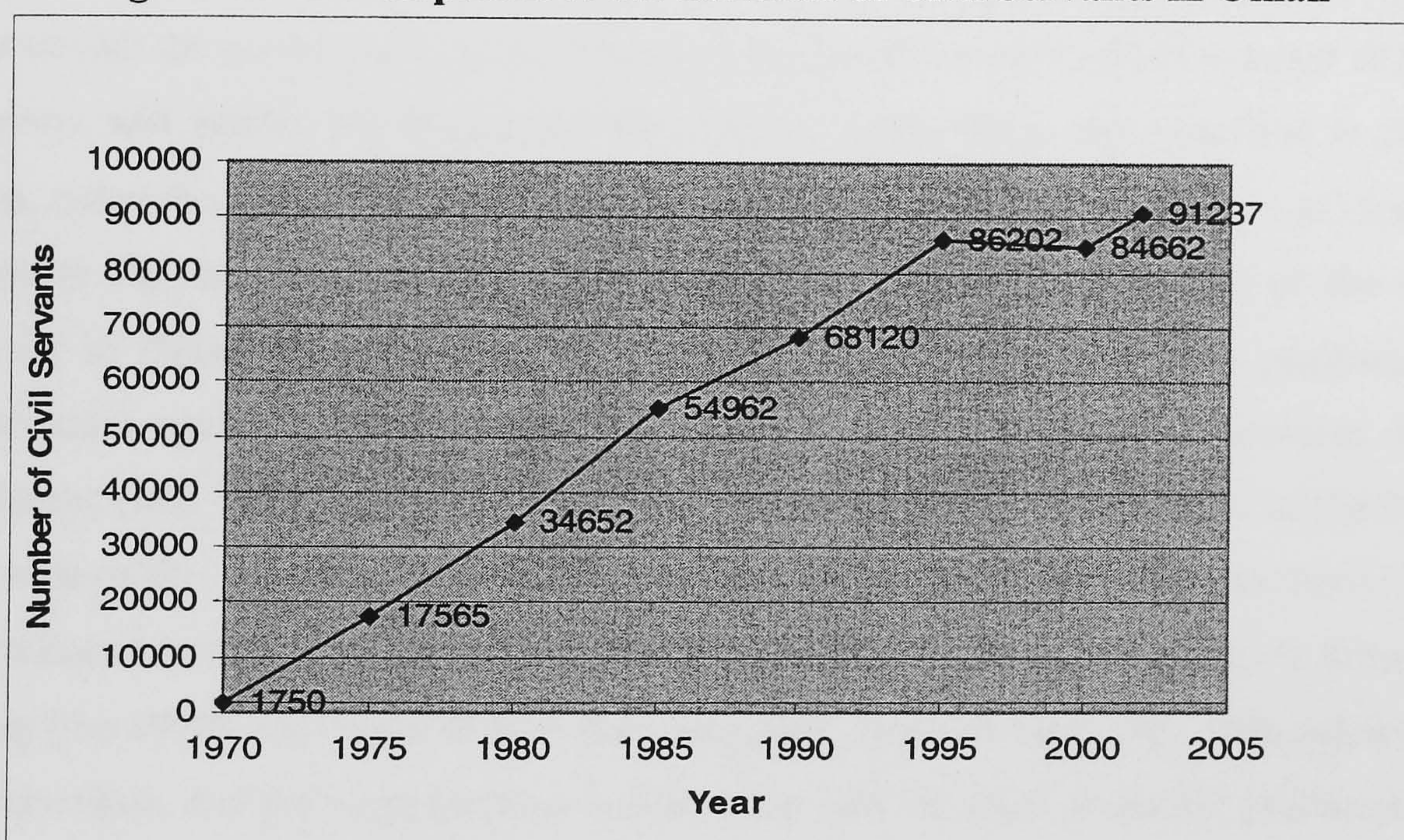


Source: UNDP (2004:86) *Human Development Report: Human Development Index*

² HDI is a report issued by UNDP annually about all countries in the world. It focuses on three measurable dimensions of human development; these are health, education, and income. The report, then, combines these three dimensions to allow a broader view of a country.

The enlargement and expansion of public services led to the formation of numerous ministries and government agencies to carry out the increasing activities. Posts filled by expatriates during the 70s and the 80s due to the late introduction of education in Oman, were filled by Omanis, enabling an increasingly competent and satisfactory approach to the provision of service.³ A growth in the number of government employees recruited was an ordinary reaction to the country's development needs. The Statistical Report of the Ministry of Civil Service (MCS 2002b) indicates that the number of civil servants before 1972 did not exceed 1,750, while by the end of 2002 this number had reached 91,237 (see Figure 4.3). As will be observed later in this study, the development of the Civil Service was not just in terms of size but also covered other HRD fields.

Figure 4.3: Development of the numbers of Civil Servants in Oman*



Source: Based on MCS (2002:30-32).

* The numbers include non-Omanis.

Therefore, the country has taken a leap forward since 1970 as a moderate developing country. Oman has sought gradually to develop its machinery to accommodate public services and this substantiates the government's claim that its policies have brought about genuine change (Peterson 2004c). Development is seen in the improvement in per-capita gross national product, infant mortality, literacy rates, and availability of services (Hoek 1998; World Bank 1995). Oil revenues no doubt had important effects, but, as mentioned, no one should ignore the role of the leadership. Kechichian (1995) argues that Oman was at a unique moment in its history when Qaboos came to power

³ The role of expatriate workforce in the Omani Civil Service is discussed in detail in Chapter Five.

and that at no time in the past has the country undergone such rapid and significant changes in all aspects of life as during Qaboos' rule. He writes:

With such accelerated growth, every aspect of the human condition, whether it is cultural, economic, or otherwise has experienced profound changes. Oman is going through a renaissance (ibid 37).

4.4.2. Government Structure and Political Culture

Oman is an absolute monarchy; the Sultan is the head of the state and the prime minister. He is assisted by the Council of Ministers which includes members of the royal family, although the role of the royal family in Oman is very limited compared to other Gulf States. Peterson (2004a) discussed the representativeness of the Omani government in the ministerial level and indicates that conscious efforts are made by the Sultan to ensure that the government, at this key level, is adequately represented in terms of tribes, regions, and gender. He emphasises that groups' proportional representation is clearly seen, either through direct appointment by the Sultan or through the creation of electoral districts for the Majlis Al-Shura (the Consultative Council). Members of the royal family in Oman do not control key ministerial positions; rather these positions are distributed among various groups of the society. Rippenburg (1998), however, has a different view. While she agrees that with exception of the absolute power of the Sultan the role of the royal family is limited, she argues that positions at the ministerial level have been limited to a small circle of elites determined early in the country's formative years (the 1970s era). Since then, Rippenburg adds, there has been very little penetration of this circle, and the same decision-makers have held the same or similar positions. She writes: "Oman's cabinet reflects the longevity of the elite." (*ibid*: 92)

When discussing the current political structure in Oman, the core of all related issues is the somewhat newly declared Constitution, or the Basic Law of the State, as officially referred to. The document was issued, in 1996 through a royal decree by Sultan Qaboos. It is the first written expression of constitutional law in Oman's history and considered by many commentators (e.g. Rippenburg 1998; Katz 2004; Peterson 2004a) as the supreme legal document that organise the political structure of the country. Among its principles, it preserves leadership in the sultan, limits succession to a particular line of the Al-Bu Said dynasty, endorses the principle of constitution, stipulates a free economy, declares all citizens equal before the law, guarantees personal freedoms, declares the independence of the judiciary, and introduces some public political participation.

The personal freedoms declared by the Basic Law are an Islam-based bill of rights that guarantees freedom of religion, tolerance, and equality of race and gender (see Articles 15-40 of Oman 1996). Rippenburg (1998:58) explains how Omanis appreciate the declaration of this historical document: “the Basic Law is regarded by Omanis as a revolutionary event and the most honoured gift presented to them by Qaboos.”

Perhaps most importantly, the Basic Law provides rules for succession; a subject that was considered a real threat to country’s future stability (Kechichian 1995; Katz 2004). Until the declaration of this document in 1996, no formal principle of succession existed in Oman, although since the 18th century, rule had passed to the oldest, freeborn son (Hoek 1998). Clear procedures were indicated on how the position of the Sultan should be filled when it becomes vacant. Article 6 states that within three days of the position becoming vacant, the Ruling Family Council shall determine who will succeed to the throne. If the Council does not agree upon a successor, the Defence Council shall confirm the appointment of the person designated by the Sultan in his letter to the Defence Council (Oman 1996: Article 6).

In terms of the executive branch of the state, the Basic Law declares that the Sultan is the Prime Minister of the government and has the supreme power over its members. He appoints and dismisses ministers and has veto power over all the council’s decisions. Article 41 of the Constitution defines the authority of the sultan:

The Sultan is the Head of State and the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. His person is inviolable and must be respected and his orders must be obeyed. The Sultan is the symbol of national unity as well as its guardian and defender (Oman 1996).

Article 42 lists the Sultan’s duties. Among these are: guiding the general policy of the state, presiding over the Council of Ministers, ratifying laws, and guaranteeing the rule of law. Deriving its power from the Sultan, the Cabinet of Ministers is the highest executive authority. Its main functions include shaping the state’s internal and foreign policies, and approving annual budget and development planes.

Oman has neither political parties nor legislature. Instead, the Basic Law provides for the establishment of the Council of Oman comprising of Majlis Al-Dawla (State Council) and Majlis Al-Shura (Consultative Council). While members of the State Council are appointed by the Sultan, members of the Consultative Council are directly elected by citizens every four years (IM 2003).

Appointed for their expertise at senior levels in various fields, State Council members should represent a wide range of views and experiences, such as those working in science, literature and culture, or as academicians. However, the Sultan can make exceptions to this rule. In conjunction with the 2003 Consultative Council election, Sultan Qaboos expanded membership in the Council of State from the original 48 members to 57, including eight women. Peterson (2004c:134) discusses the functions of this Council and indicates that this body is intended to serve as an upper-house counterpart to the elected Consultative Council, “akin to Britain’s House of Lords.” However, Peterson (2004c) argues, the council’s role remains restricted to providing advice on social and economic affairs. Many of its members were appointed as a result of their being relieved of positions elsewhere in the government.

The second Council in Oman is the Majlis Al-Shura (the Consultative Council). This Council consists of 80 members directly elected by citizens from Oman’s 59 *Wilayats* (districts). *Wilayats* that have a population of 30,000 or more can elect two members, while those who have less than that population elect one member only. The Council’s mandate is to review legislation pertaining to economic development and social services prior to its becoming law. Yet, its authority is limited to give advice to the government and has no power to reject or change any laws or policies. Further, the Council has no authority to discuss areas of foreign affairs, defence, or national security. These fields are limited to the Council of Ministers. The only significant innovation that can be mentioned about the role of this council is the fact that it is empowered to request social service ministers to appear before it to report on their ministries’ activities and answer questions; these appearances are televised live and seen by Omanis as the best means through which ministers can be evaluated (Miller 1997).

Discussing the actual role of the Consultative Council, Peterson (2004c) confirms that this Council plays a purely advisory role, as it can only review policies (not initiate legislation) and its purview is limited to social and economic matters. Peterson (2004c: 134) concludes his evaluation by noting: “It remains far from being a representative legislative body”. Miller (1997:16) interviewed Qaboos in February 1997 and asked him about the limited role of the Consultative Council. He replied:

The Majlis' [Council's] powers will expand with time, but slowly, so there are no earthquakes. We are still largely a tribal society, and it's still the government's duty to defend the country. The man in the street often doesn't want or know how to deal with foreign governments or defend the country. He trusts me to do it. That is why these areas

have been excluded from the Majlis debate. In this part of the world, giving too much power too fast can still be exploited. Elections in many countries mean having the army prevent bloodshed. Is this democracy? Are these happy countries? Do such elections give people real choices? No. They are really just power struggles. I'm against creating such situations when people aren't ready for them.

Political participation in Oman is typical of most Arab countries (e.g. Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, UAE, Libya, and Morocco). Indeed the process of opening up the political landscape by creating ineffective parliaments is a cautious experiment with the notion of political participation. As can be observed from the above comment provided by the highest political authority (the Sultan), Oman's move towards effective political participation will be slow and gradual. Omani senior government officials always repeat that the country is not intended to import Western models of democracy, but rather to develop a system that reflects the characteristics of its own society. The key question is "Who is deciding the appropriate system?" Lancaster (1995) points out that although the creation of these Councils in Oman is useful step toward public participation, the lack of authority is a major dilemma.

Current institutions that are designed to reflect public opinion in Oman indeed do not satisfy Omanis' ambitions. Omanis are looking for effective parliament such that of neighbouring Kuwait which has similar political conditions, but an active parliament. However, Omanis want the genuine change to take place peacefully. Many still trust Sultan Qaboos' evaluation and believe that he is going to bring about change soon and without direct public pressure.

In terms of the judicial system, the system traditionally has been based on the *Shariah* (the Quranic laws). The constitution places the entire court system (Civil, Magistrates, Commercial, and Sharia) under the Ministry of Justice. An independent Office of the Public Prosecutor also has been created (formerly a part of the Royal Oman Police) (IM 2002). Currently, the court system is composed of the Supreme Court, Appeal Courts, Divisional Courts, and Primary Courts (one located in each region). Within each of the courts, there are divisions to consider commercial, civil, penal, labour, taxation, general, and personal status cases (the latter under the *Shariah* laws) (Allen and Rigsbee 2000; U.S. Department of State 2004).

A court with a particular significance to this study is the Administrative Court, which was created in 1999 based on Article 67 of the Basic Law which reads:

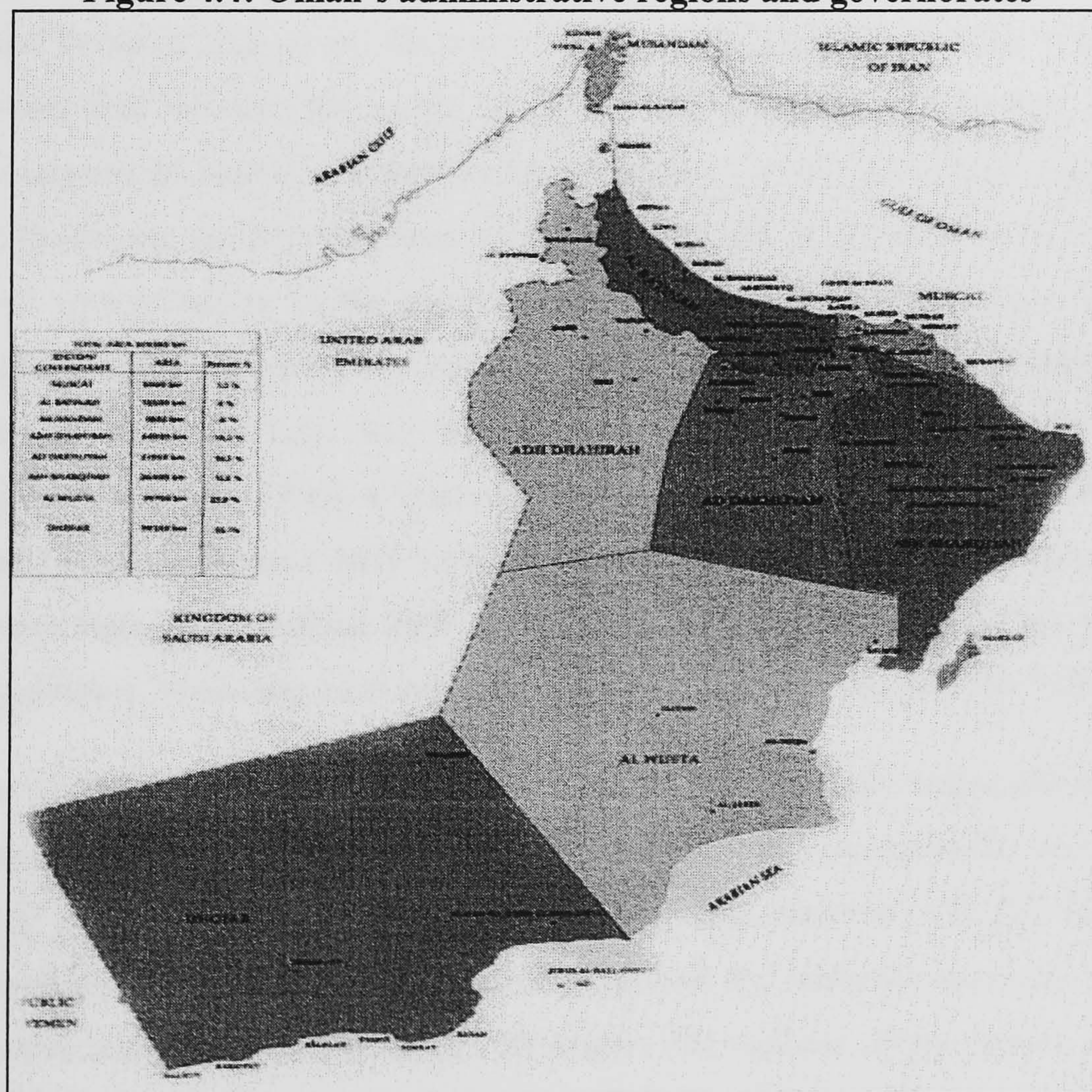
The Law shall adjudicate in administrative disputes through a Special Administrative Court, whose organisation and mode of procedure shall be specified in Law.

This court functions under the authority of the Royal Court and it is granted authority to review complaints against the misuse of public office, including personnel policy and practice in government institutions. During the year 2003, the court ruled against several ministerial decisions brought by public employees.⁴ The U.S. Department of State Annual Report (2004), which reviews the legal systems around the world, indicates that this court has been increasingly active in Oman in implementing justice and checks against public agencies violations. The role of the Administrative Court will be discussed further in Ch. 6, when we examine the implementation of EEO policy.

4.4.3. Administrative Divisions

Oman is divided into five administrative regions (Batinah, A'Dakhliya, A'Sharqiya, A'Dhahira, and Al-Wusta) and three governorates (Muscat, Dhofar, and Mousandam).

Figure 4.4: Oman's administrative regions and governorates



Source: MI (2002) [On-line] <http://www.omanet.com/english/geo/geog.asp> 27/11/03

⁴ Interview with E.H. Dr. T. Al-Hosni, the Deputy Chief of the Administrative Court, 18 June 2004.

Each of the above five regions and governorates is further divided into smaller administrative divisions called *Wilayats* (districts). There are 59 *Wilayats* in Oman, each administered by a government representative called *Wali* (Governor). In terms of population, Muscat is the most populated (686,000 representing 28%) followed by Al-Batinah (686,000; 28%), then Al-Sharqiya (316,000; 13%) (see Table 4.3).

Table 4.3: The distribution of area and population in Oman

Governorates/Regions	Area (sq km)	% of Area	Population (000)	%
Muscat Governorate	3,900	1.2	686	28
Al-Batinah	12,500	4.0	686	28
Musandam Governorate	1,800	0.6	35	1
Al-Dhahirah	4,400	14.2	222	9
Al-Dhakhilya	31,900	10.3	280	11
Al-Sharqiya	36,400	11.8	316	13
Al-Wusta	79,700	25.8	21	1
Dhofar Governorate	99,300	32.1	232	9
Total	309,500	100%	2,478	100%

Source: Based on MNE (2002:53).

Oman is a unitary state where all power rests with the central government, and may be delegated or taken back at the discretion of the centre (Rippenburg 1998:114). While family and tribe are each led by Sheikhs, the Walis represent the central government and are considered neutral arbitrator between Sheikhs. No female has been appointed to this in Oman and the post has been traditionally viewed as a males' post. Acting as foremost representatives of the government, Walis perform administrative and legal roles, and coordinating local and national affairs. The Wali's defined duties include maintaining local services, and providing budgetary information to the centre. According to Hourani (1990), a Wali must be a good listener and able to work closely with local tribe leaders on a daily basis. He is rarely a native of the Wilayah he governs and comes from a professional staff of administrators, being selected for his problem-solving abilities. Mediating conflicts between citizens takes up much of the Wali's time.

In spite of the apparent regional divisions, local government lack independence to run the simplest facilities. The administrative structure in Oman superimposes the umbrella of central government, but on a traditional tribal system. Hassan (1990:82) claims that local government in Oman is "weak, poorly organised and lacks the autonomy to make an effective and genuine contribution". He argues that regional divisions lack elements of decentralised and this is due to the lack of independent decision-making bodies. According to Hassan, local divisions act only as the regional arm for the government; a

relationship he refers to as “a non-contract principal-agent relationship”. Peterson (2004c) discussed this issue, as well, and explains that the authority of the central government in Oman is directly related to the power and efficiency of the sultan himself, and accordingly, both the centre and the local divisions represent the same authority.

Discussing regional administration in Oman, Muharami (1993:152-153) confirms that the actual trend towards centralisation exists in Oman, despite the “Decentralisation for Development” slogan used by the government. He summarises some factors inhibiting the development of local government in Oman. Among these are:

1. *Tendency by central government to strip local authorities of functions and to retain functions at the centre.*
2. *Tendency to centralisation preventing an equal distribution of resources between the centre and districts.*
3. *An inadequate share of the national revenue for the development of local authorities, and, consequently, inadequate sources of revenue with which to run local services.*
4. *A lack of properly trained personnel to run local services compared to quality of personnel in the central government.*
5. *Tendency by the central government to make development politically oriented.*

Although there is no absolute way to measure the degree of centralisation or decentralisation, it is assumed that some, at least, of these factors are still operating in Oman. The Omani government in its declared development strategy acknowledges the importance of delegating authorities to local administration as a method to efficiency (see MD 1997:45), yet the decentralisation process is far from reality. Still there is no definite statutory allocation of functions between national and local administrative structures and the central government continues to perform functions which are local in character. Governorates and Wilayats head offices are run by the Ministry of the Interior, while specialised Ministries (e.g. Ministries of Education and Health) run all regional affairs through their Directorates General in each region.

4.5. Challenges of Modernization

Nowadays, Oman has moved from a poor, underdeveloped country towards a modern nation-state, based on measures of development (Lancaster 1995; Rippenburg 1998). A World Bank report, in fact, describes Oman as having “graduated” from the ranks of underdeveloped nations needing loans, to developing a state (World Bank, 1995, cited in Curtiss 1995:49). Nevertheless, commentators such as Lancaster (1995), Hooglund

(1995), and Katz (2004) express their worries that Oman faces challenges of change to accommodate the requirements of the new millennium.

Economically, the country has had over 20 years of prosperous economic development (the 70s and 80s era), however, signs are beginning to appear of serious economic difficulties in the very near future (Lancaster 1995). Oman is reaching a new phase in which the high standard of living enjoyed by citizens based on oil revenue will be difficult to maintain. Unlike Saudi Arabia or Kuwait, where oil may last for another two centuries, Oman's known oil reserves are projected to diminish by 2015 (World Bank 1995 and confirmed by Katz 2004). The World Bank warned in a strongly worded 1995 report that the government should adopt measures to live within its means, "or face possibly baneful consequences". Symptoms of distress are already beginning to appear as the country is experiencing a soaring rate of population growth (3-4%), persistent budget deficits, rising foreign debt, and an overall decline in saving and investment (Curtiss 1995; Lancaster 1995).

Politically, modernisation requires a fundamental transformation of the traditional political system. Lancaster (1995) argues that Oman remains conservative, with the Sultan governing with the support of traditional political elite, consisting of the Al Bu Said ruling family, privileged families, established merchant families, and tribal sheiks. He notes that even with the new Basic Law of 1996 (the constitution), Oman remains an absolute monarchy. Riphenburg (1998:89) adds that Sultan Qaboos and his governing elite have gathered all government institutions under their command, "leaving no other societal group to contend for state power". She argues that as the level of education and exposure to the outside world of the Omani population increase, demands are growing for a greater public participation in government activities and greater voice in the decision-making process. Riphenburg (1998:86) writes:

In modern states, a nation's legitimacy is linked to participation, citizens believing that their opinions warrant consideration in governmental policy-making. Forces for democratisation and liberalisation are gathering momentum and meaning worldwide.

Riphenburg (1998:86) argues that Oman, now, faces the challenges of change, once more (the first was during the Sultan Said's era). She notes: "Traditional institutions based on informal, personalistic, and behind-the-scenes planning and negotiation are too small and too on dependent on face-to-face interaction to cope adequately with tasks

imposed by population growth, and social mobilisation”. Kechichian (1995:52) also criticises that change on the political level in Oman has been “careful and unhurried”. Katz (2004) reports that signs of opposition due to political discontent is present in Oman, yet there is no immediate danger. However, he argues that the “democratisation” process Sultan Qaboos has begun is meaningless without an active parliament that reflects a real public participation, and he indicates that Oman is expected to face serious political instability in the future unless a genuine change is implemented.

The need for political change was also emphasised in the U.S. Department of State Report (1997). The report discussed political participation in Oman and indicated that Oman faces social, ethnic, and sectarian divisions. It argues that the dramatic growth of a professional middle class, the existence of corruption in ruling circles, and the crucial issue of succession, are important issues require government’s attention.

Rippenburg (1998:116-135) discusses the issue from another perspective. She argues that wealth allowed rulers in Gulf States, including Oman, to skip the “historic extractive process”. She explains that these states are not strong since they never developed their institutional capacity systematically. Transition into oil monarchies and the development made possible by oil, may be “fragile” as these systems have achieved smooth transition only by postponing problems. Katz (2004) agrees with this proposition. He writes:

While the political opposition in Oman is not strong now, this could change if Oman faces economic and political crises simultaneously. While Oman is arguably better off than most states in the Middle East, it also appears to have a much more limited political capacity for dealing with a severe economic crisis than many of these other countries where a state of crisis is the norm.

Hence, Oman, and the other Gulf States may find themselves “ill-equipped” to handle domestic conflict if oil revenues decrease or reserves become depleted. In the case of Oman, commentators (e.g. Cordesman 1997; Peterson 2004d; Katz 2004) agree that the time for genuine political reform has arrived. These writers share a similar concern and ask the same question, although written in different forms: can Sultan Qaboos lead the country successfully through times of austerity as he did through times of plenty?

4.5.1. The Structure of the Omani Society

The study of EEO policy in the public sector can not be undertaken with a comprehensive coverage of the characteristics of the society under investigation. According to the Omani

Constitution, Islam is the official religion of the country and its tenets are enshrined as the main resource of law, while the Arabic language is the official language (Oman 1996: Articles 2 and 3). In terms of population, it has to be noted, first, that the most recent official census was conducted in 1994. After that year (the year of the *actual* census) all population statistics used by the government are prepared by the use of the “Component Method”, where projections are made based on ingredients of demographic growth, such as death, fertility, and migration (MNE 2002). The Statistical Report of the Ministry of National Economy of the year 2002 estimated the population in Oman by mid-2001 as 2,477,687; Omanis constitute 73.7 % (1,826,124), whereas non-Omanis represent the remaining 26.2 % (651,563), making non-Omanis constitute around a quarter of the population. The report indicates that females represent 49.1% of the population and the age group of 24 years or under represents 54.9%, while those over the age of 64 comprise only 3%. The report indicates also that Oman has a birth rate of around 3.5%, per annum. This birth rate confirms that the government is expected to face difficulties in the near future due to the high birth rate and the expected decrease in oil revenues.

The Omani society is composed of different ethnicities (Arabs and non-Arabs), diverse Islamic factions (Ibadhis, Sunnis, and Shiites), and a varied class structure (Royal elites, Sheikhs, and other economic classes). This mix is attributable largely to the country’s history of maritime and the tribal migrations. Peterson (2004a:32) confirms the diversity of the Omani society when he notes:

Although the majority of Oman’s population is Arab and either Ibadi or Sunni Muslim, the country exhibits a wealth of diversity in ethnic groups and native languages

Although the diversity of the society is apparent, the government deliberately tends to ignore reporting any statistical data in terms of citizens’ ethnicity, background, or religious sects. The concerned authorities believe that raising such issues is useless and does not serve the national unity.⁵ This justification, nevertheless, is disputable. Data of the structure of the society is indeed important and considered, world-wide, essential when conducting social projects or development plans. In fact, the Statistical Year Book (MD 1997: 526) issued by the government, itself, acknowledges this fact when it states:

The importance of statistical data in particular increases each day. This is due to the gradual transformation of the international society into an information society and the dependence of decision makers and planners on this when analysing the available

⁵ Interview with H.E. Sheik Hilal Al-Maawali, the Minister of Civil Service, Muscat, 28 June 2004.

alternatives as a prelude to formulating policies and taking correct decisions. The success of these policies depends mainly on the accuracy, completeness of the available data and the promptness with which the necessary data are provided.”

4.5.2. Differences and Social Equality

The available data on the composition of the society vary between sources and mainly can be found in publications made by western writers who showed interest on Oman (e.g. Risso 1986; Allen 1987; Riphenburg 1998; Peterson 2004a and 2004b). These writers acknowledge the shortage of data relevant to social groups and indicate that their findings are based on estimates and their own personal research and observations.

To see the diversity of the Omani society, the researcher categorises differences into three manageable categories; these are religious factions, origin, and class status.

Religious factions: Although Ibadhi precepts have had a far-reaching influence on the life and the underlying philosophical foundation of the entire Oman, a significant number of Omanis are Sunni, not Ibadhi. According to Riphenburg (1998:61), while Ibadhis make up about 45-50% of the population and their sect is the dominant sect in Oman, Sunnis constitute 50-55% of the citizen population with adherents ranging from A'Sharqiya, A'Dhahira to the Baluchis (non-Arab Muslims) of the Al-Batinah Coast. The vast majority of the population of Dhofar, in the south, is Sunni as well. The Shiites form the third-largest religious sect group in the country, with an estimated of 5%, concentrated in the Al-Batinah and the capital area, where the Liwatiyah form a significant community. Peterson (2004a:32) listed almost similar rates to that of Riphenburg (1998): 45% Ibadhis, 50% Sunnis and 5% Shiites.

The main ideological differences between these three Islamic sects were summarised by Risso (1986:23-35) as follows:

- Sunnis; comprised the majority of Muslims in the Islamic world; they accepted the continuity of the leadership through subsequent dynasties. Their political thought, on the whole, accepts the arbitration incident in the early days of Islam between the fourth Caliph, Ali, and his main challenger, the Umayyad governor of Damascus; accordingly, Sunnis accept the Umayyad dynasties.
- Shiites; are the second largest group in the Islamic world. Shiites believe that the fourth Caliph, Ali was designated by the Prophet to succeed him and that he

passed on to him and to his descendents esoteric knowledge enabling that family to lead the community as infallible Imams or Caliphs. They reject the result of the arbitration incident and, accordingly, the Umayyad dynasties

- Ibadhis; are the smallest group. They adopted the idea that the Imam possessed no such esoteric knowledge and should be freely elected from the Muslim community; the Imam should not be restricted to the Prophet's clan. They believe that the leader should be chosen first by the religious scholars and the leading tribal figures, and then presented to the community at large for acceptance. If the Imam fails in his responsibility, he should be replaced immediately. Unlike Sunnis and Shiites, Ibadhis believe that Caliph Ali should not have accepted the arbitration incident, since he was the elected Imam.

Although differences exist among these three sects, the Omani Constitution proclaims that Islam is political foundation of the state without ascribing superiority to any particular sect. Open discussion of political and religious issues does not take place in Omani local newspapers or the broadcast media and the Sultan in his national speeches carefully avoids religious issues, except to mention *turathuna* (our heritage) and to pray to God "to guide us for the glory and prosperity of our countrymen". Islam also makes up part of the school curriculum at all levels; but any mention of sectarian differences is carefully avoided. Eickelman (1989:9) discusses relations between Omanis in terms of their Islamic sects. He writes:

In many parts of the country, Sunni, Shi'i, and Ibadhi communities intermingled, but relations are more those of proximity than of enduring interaction. Members of each community had a general awareness of the differing religious practices of the others, but do not systematically organise their own beliefs and those of other sects into coherent systems. Ibadhi, Sunni, and Shi'i doctrines and practices are not overtly thought of as systems that could be compared and contrasted. Increased mobility, urbanisation, modern styles of learning and communication, and greater contact with the outside world have led to a cognisance of sectarian differences.

Origin: The majority of the population are ethnically Arabs, representing 75% of the total (Rippenburg 1998:8). Arab tribes in Oman trace their ancestry to the Al-Azd tribe led by Malik bin Fahm (200 AD). The confederation of Al-Azd tribes still feel proud and secure when identified by their Al-Azd tribal origins. Kechichian (1995:23) tries to simplify how Arab Omanis look to the Al-Azd dynasty when he notes, "It is much like modern France, which looks to the Capetian era in identifying its origins".

Kelly (1980:107) gives an in-depth description of the origins of the Arab tribes in Oman. She notes that as a general rule, although with some exceptions, the tribes of Yemeni origin are Ibadhi by religious conviction, while those of Nizari derivation are Sunni. She explains that in the civil wars of the 18th century, again with exceptions and occasional changing of allegiance, most of the Yemeni tribes affiliated politically with the Hinawi aggregation, while the Nizari tribes were with the Ghafiri. Children in Oman are taught about their tribes and learn tribal traditions from an early age. In Oman, as elsewhere in the Arab states, the majority of people attach their original tribal name to their families' names instead of that of their sub-tribe or clan. Hourani (1991:72) summarises: "Origin remains the principal source of identity in Oman".

While Arabs from the Al-Azd confederation, both Nizari and Yemeni, constitute the majority of the population, Omanis from non-Arab origins are widespread in Oman. Of the numerous minorities inhabiting Oman, some trace their origins to before the Arab migrations (200 AD), while others arrived more recently, largely as a result of maritime trade during the 17th and 18th centuries. Similar to religious sects, origins in Oman are frequently mixed and difficult to determine, yet the existence of this factor is unquestionable (Peterson 2004a).

To begin with, Baluchis from Makran coast of Iran and Pakistan are concentrated in Muscat. The majority of Baluchis came to Oman as mercenaries and continued as an important part of the military until recently. Consequently, the community has been concentrated in the capital area, with some residing along the Batinah coast and another other small group in Sur, in the eastern region (Rippenburg 1998:8-9). Baluchis are Sunni and have not had much success assimilating into Omani society, yet nowadays it is hard to distinguish them from Arabs.

Ex-slaves are a legacy of Oman's slave trade and East African colonies. Zanzibari Omanis are a derivative of that same legacy. The incorporation of Omanis of African descent into Omani society has often been held back by the language barrier, as they frequently speak Swahili (Allen 1987; Peterson 2004b)

The existence of Omanis of Indian descent in Muscat is indicative of the historical commercial ties with Indian subcontinent. Several immigrant Indian communities reside in Oman, mainly in Muscat, Matrah, and the towns of the Batinah. Until 1970, Omani

commerce and trade was conducted by Hindu Banians, most of whom were from the Bhattia caste from Kutch. Hindus settled in Oman by the 16th century and by the 19th century, where they were employed as importers and exporters, agents for local merchants, government contractors, and bankers. Socially, they have maintained their characteristic dress and customs. In the past, Hindu merchants of the coast have sometimes encountered hostility by Arabs due to religion deference (Hinduism) and jealousy over the relatively well-off financial position in a poor and stagnant economy. Their prosperous financial situation has not been eroded even with the changes in 1970 (Riphenburg 1998; Peterson 2004b).

The Liwadiyah constitute a second group of resident Indians in Oman. During the 19th century, the Liwadiyah Indians were Khojas, Ismaaili Shiites; however, they split from the Agha Khan during the 1860s and the majority converted to Ithna-'ashari Shiite Islam. The group, while active in commerce and known for its wealth and education, was historically closed, residing in a walled section of Matrah known as Sur Liwadiyah, to which all outsiders were refused access. Since 1970, Liwadiyah have sought to incorporate into Omani society, and the majority have taken up Arabic language and dress (Al-Siyabi 1994; Peterson 2004b).

A number of smaller ethnic groups can be found, as well. The Bayasira, a group with a wide distribution, may personify the original inhabitants of Oman. While they have organised into tribes, they have never been received by the Arab tribes and persist as second-class citizens. A comparable group is the Zatutis, who are regarded as non-Arabs but of unknown origin. From one viewpoint, they are northern Arabian gypsies (Al-Siyabi 1994); while another sees them as having African origins (Peterson 2004a). Historically, Zatutis work in carpentry and metalwork in large towns.

Therefore, origin and tribal heritage are important pillars of Oman's social and political structure, and historically, Oman has been intensely tribal in composition. As mentioned, the main non-tribal elements are the Indians, Baluchis, Persians, and others who form part of the multiform communities in Muscat area. Peterson (2004b) discusses the tribal system and argues that political allegiance to a territorial unit, such as is implicit in the Europe, was until recently unknown to Arabs. A person's loyalty was personal, to the tribe, the sheikh, or a leader of greater consequence. Tribal identity is still a significant cultural and locally influential political factor that nobody can ignore.

Class structure: until recent years a social-class distinction, as it is known in the West did not exist in Oman. This is well observed by Allen (1987) and Peterson (2004b) who indicate that the Omani society is not defined rigidly on the basis of wealth, but on many other factors such as the individual's family affiliation, education, and position in government. Muharami (1993) investigated the class structure in Oman by distinguishing the situation before and after 1970. He categorised the society before oil wealth into three classes: upper, middle and lower. The upper class included members of the Royal family, the elites from Arab tribes known for their power and historical achievements (*Sheikhs*), and members of traditional religious families who used to serve as judges (*Qadhis*). Those who had temporal power had to be major families in Arab tribes and always had power in politics, command of arms, wealth, and possession of land. Others with religious power acquired their authority from their ancestors and their personal qualification.

The middle class, according to Muharami (1993:58), consisted of Arab townspeople who are associated with the major tribes, traders, businessmen, and merchants from different origins (Arabs and non-Arabs) However, he indicated that only Arab tribes could intermarry with elite families, and to a limited extent. The lower class group included *Baysirs* (the descendants of slaves), *Baydars* (descendants of farmers) and *Zatuts* (origin-less). Members of the lower class could not intermarry with the upper or the middle classes (Peterson 2004a).

Soon, the distribution of oil wealth after 1970 resulted in the creation of a powerful financial oligarchy. Muharami (1993:60) explains that by and large, the class structure is steadily approaching a sharper socio-economic stratification in which the society is divided into three distinctive clusters. The first largely consists of the components of the power structure, namely, the Royal family, followed by a small group of wealthy families and high-ranking officials. The second category is a middle class which combines both bureaucrats and the growing small business class. In this category, the common denominator is the identification with the new bureaucratic development. Members of this category share similar standards of living and a common source of income which depends on government apparatus and activities. Compared with the upper class, the size of the middle class is large, yet both combined represent a small fraction of the entire society, whose masses present the third category. Muharami

(1993:85) argues that the class structure that emerged after the oil-economy has subdivided the area's social stratification in Oman into the following:

1. *Upper classes include:*
 - a. *Ruling Family*
 - b. *Secondary Elites, comprising:*
 1. *Economic elite (established merchants, bankers, industrialists)*
 2. *Senior government officials*
 3. *Senior Army and Police officers*
 4. *Senior Ulama (religious sheikhs)*
2. *Middle classes include:*
 - a. *Professionals (doctors, engineers, architects, teachers)*
 - b. *Mid-level government employees and officers*
 - c. *Small merchants, company managers and executives*
 - d. *Religious establishment*
3. *Lower classes include*
 - a. *Badu (Bedwins , Nomads)*
 - b. *Junior civil servants*
 - c. *Urban 'proletariat' composed of;*
 1. *Long-resident 'immigrants'*
 2. *Origin-less groups (e.g. Baysirs, Zatuts, Baydars, and Ex-slaves)*

Thus, the new economic conditions have provided the basis for new social mobility along social groups in Oman. However, as it may eventually lead to changes in the traditional closed-ended social structure, it has already opened the way for a new stratification system in which an advantaged group is in the process of formation. The implication for the function of the bureaucracy, if this differentiation is true, and probably it is, could be very serious. That is, if personal consideration is regarded as a respected social fact, many people may tend to take advantage of their status in order to plead for favourable bureaucratic decisions on issues of special interest.

Peterson (2004a:50:51) discusses the stratification of the Omani society today and indicates that Oman continues as an Arab, Ibadi/Sunni tribal country, despite the existence of the many smaller ethnic groups. Members of non-Arab and non-Ibadi-Sunni groups are officially incorporated into the majority, yet, "it is undeniable that a certain measure of discrimination still exists within Omani society". Peterson (2004a) explains that Baluchis, for instance, are frequently disdained because of their poor Arabic, Liwadiyah are still regarded as "foreigners" because of their Indian origin, and Zanzibaris are still regarded in a similar light for reasons of their recent arrival in Oman. In relation to the public bureaucracy, and particularly to employment policies, Peterson (2004a) argues that although it is undeniable that one of the results of the rapid process

of socioeconomic development in Oman was the emergence of the merit recruitment principles, regardless of background, ethnic and social groupings still play a significant role to weaken the objectives of merit employment. He writes:

Ethnic, and especially tribal, affiliation continues to play an important role in social interaction and employment. For example, a ministry headed by a Dhofaris [a person from southern Oman] will tend to have a preponderance of Dhofaris in key positions... This is not to say that social standing, tribal or regional leadership, or family and marriage connections no longer count- but that they are employed more to tweak the system [the merit system], rather than to determine its operation (Peterson 2004a:51).

Other writers, however, are less pessimistic (e.g. Agwani 1987; Kechichian 1995). They argue that the emergence of new and totally mixed neighbourhoods in Muscat and in the major Omani cities has done much to break down suspicions and traditional ethnic and class distinction. Agwani (1987), for instance, argues that despite the apparent heterogeneity of the Omani society, there are fundamental characteristics that bring together all groups, regardless of their differences. The characteristics listed by Agwani (1987) can be summarised in the following three points:

- 1) *Islam; since all Omanis are Muslims*
- 2) *The Arabic language; being the tongue of the Qur'an.*
- 3) *The centrality of the family; since both tradition and Islam regard the family institution as a central element in the social life.*

In addition to above points, Rippenburg (1998:35) mentions another important factor that unites Omanis: “their common entry into the modern world under the leadership of Sultan Qaboos”. Rippenburg (1998) explains that Omanis have a great sense of gratitude toward Sultan Qaboos, who radically improved their standard of living and made their country emerge from a backward nation to modern state. She notes that Omanis today are proud of their country, which has acquired all of the attributes of a progressive, up-to-date state in the space of approximately 35 years.

Although certain segments of Omani society have undergone some observed changes in their outlook as a result of wealth and economic development, it is clear that the Social Value System, discussed in Ch.2, continues to dominate and compel the administrative system to meet, or even adapt, its demands. Divisions based on class, origin, and religious sects undoubtedly still exist in Oman. Hence, the assessment or any proposed reform to develop personnel policies in the public sector should not ignore this reality.

A superficial observer might be over impressed by the modern features of Oman (e.g. regulatory system, western-style economy, political stability, oil resources, and national

unity), and could be led to expect that public bureaucracy functions in similar manner. However, in reality and as we have seen in the foregoing discussion, the bureaucracy still functions in a traditional way, identical to Riggs' "Sala Model". The Infrastructural development achieved has not changed much of the tribal attitude and the society continues to be affected by empty class structure. It seems obvious that Oman has not yet passed the "Maladjustment" period required for transformation to a modern society, discussed by Ogburn (1993). The society remains traditional and the material change achieved cannot be viewed as a conscious transformation, but rather as an obvious response to the economic wealth and the requirements of a changing atmosphere.

4.6 Summary and Conclusion

The chapter was designed to be in conformity with the study's argument that it is impossible to understand any bureaucratic phenomenon or propose reform without comprehending the contexts of the public bureaucracy. The aim was to help the reader to understand the environment of the public bureaucracy in Oman in order to comprehend, at a later stage, why the researcher adopted a particular EEO approach and proposed specific personnel procedures to reflect merit values when public servants are recruited and selected to various posts in the Omani civil service. An attempt was made to introduce Oman by providing a general profile about the country and its people. Particular attention was drawn to the environmental variables that affect the functions of the public bureaucracy. The variables examined were Oman's physical geography, history, economy, political structure, and the social stratification of the society.

After explaining Oman's geographic location, and how its being naturally isolated from the rest of the Arab world played a critical role in shaping the country's administrative experience by allowing Omanis to manage their affairs far better than their counterparts in the region in both the past and present, the history of Oman has been briefly sketched. The political diversity that existed prior to the establishment of Oman as a moderate developing country was outlined. Within this context, particular attention was given to the religious orientation of the country being an Ibadhi state. We explained that adherence to Ibadhism accounts in part for Oman's distinctive character from other Arab states, as this Islamic doctrine played a key role in shaping the country's polity and culture. We pointed out that the choice of ruler by communal consensus and the

moderate conservatism of Islam were two major features of Ibadhism that made the Omani experience in the past unique in the Arab world.

The preceding discussions also provided evidence how Oman was at standstill until 1970 when new leadership came to power. We explained how the entire country during Sultan Said's era suffered from poverty and stagnation of the economy. There were no schools, and consequently, the massive majority of the population was illiterate. Further, the entire machinery of government during rule of Sultan Said was merely an extension of his person and no government in the normal sense existed. We explained that it is difficult to understand the current administrative system without comprehending the circumstances based on which the current government was found. During that pre-centralisation period, the mode of the entire system was the maintenance of law and order. Later, when a system of centralised administration was created after 1970 (as we will see next chapter) and began to play a significant role in the distribution of political and economic benefits, a gradual change emerged, taking the form of a competition for bureaucratic positions and services.

Then, evidence was provided on how the country since 1970 was transformed from a medieval state to a modern country. We explained that Oman was at a unique moment in its history when the current ruler Sultan Qaboos came to power. Qaboos became a remarkable man who was able to lead the country to take a leap forward as a moderate developing country. Fuelled by oil income, the new Sultan initiated a wave of domestic programmes and the development was seen in the improvement in per-capita gross national product, infant mortality, literacy rates, and availability of services.

The chapter, then, discussed the political and economic conditions of the contemporary Oman. The structure of the current political and judicial systems was outlined followed by an explanation of the country's administrative divisions and means of control. The economic resources, as well as the goal of political change, have been discussed. In this context, we explained that Oman is now facing serious economic and political challenges. The economic challenge it faces is that its population is increasing while its oil reserves are declining. The political challenge is the extreme concentration of authority in the hands of the government and the lack of meaningful political participation. We explained that the lack of a participatory political system has resulted in an institutional vacuum in which the public bureaucracy enjoys a politically-

unsanctioned role in the formulation and the implementation of policies, including HRM policies. Such authority allows the governing elite to gather key government posts under their command, leaving other societal groups with limited employment or promotion opportunities.

The certain fact that Oman's oil reserve is limited should force the government, now more than any time in the past, to re-think its employment and personnel management policies in the public sector. The best and the most qualified personnel should be allowed to occupy public posts, particularly those of a decision making capacity, in order to manage and direct the limited resources that country has in most professional way. Arbitrary recruitment indeed will not serve development, nor will it reflect the EEO values declared by the 1996 Basic Law. The discussion in the next chapter about institutions and laws responsible for personnel management in the public sector will trace this issue in more detail.

Chapter Five

Institutions and Laws Responsible for Public Personnel Management in Oman

5.1. Introduction

Since the creation of a modern state in 1970, the Omani civil service has gone through a variety of structural and functional changes to meet different development needs. Along with these changes, institutions and laws responsible for personnel affairs were subject to occasional modification. The changes have evolved through stages and have done so largely as a function of the growth in the bureaucracy. Researchers who conducted similar studies in the region (e.g. Wardy 1996; Maawali 2000; Junaibi 2001) emphasise that it is necessary before examining any bureaucratic activity to comprehend the actual function of institutions and laws relevant to the activity under investigation. The researcher agrees with this assumption, and this chapter is designed for this purpose.

Institutions and laws of the civil service have an essential role in all personnel policies and practices, including those relevant to recruiting and selecting public servants. As emphasised by Mosher (1982) and Watts (2000), this role is important not only within the civil service's framework, but also in the overall functions of the government. Oman is no exception. Since its renaissance in 1970, considerable attention has been paid to public agencies responsible for formulating and implementing personnel regulations. During a time period of 35 years, four civil service agencies were created and three civil service laws were issued; each has its achievements and deficiencies that directly or indirectly affect recruitment policies. In the following discussion, an attempt will be made to outline these changes and examine their affect on the recruitment activity.

Further, as indicated in Chapter One, data about personnel institutions and laws in Oman is widely spread between government publications and unofficial sources, and only very little is available in English. We indicated that one of this study's objectives is to fill an existing gap in the literature by providing a reliable source about these data. This will be constructive for the purpose of this study and for the use of future studies. An attempt was made to separate the development of laws from that of the agencies responsible for their implementation. Data not available through primary sources was

obtained through some of the interviews conducted with senior officials from the MCS during the course of this study research. These officials witnessed developments and, in some cases, were directly involved in decision making. Interviews were indeed valuable in providing insights into the events under investigation.

As we proceed, and in order to help the reader to comprehend some of the major issues that will be discussed in Chapter Six, the focus is on contemporary issues in the Omani civil service. Two specific topics are covered within this context: the employment policy in Oman, and gender equal employment opportunity in public office. These two issues are not examined in detail, but with a selective focus on areas of relevance.

5.2. The Civil Service Before 1970

The process of organising public employees' affairs is a relatively recent phenomenon in Oman. Prior to 1970, civil service activities reflected the backward nature of the political system during Sultan Said's era (1932-1970), which led to poverty, illiteracy, civil wars, and total isolation. Oman lacked the fundamental features of a civil service; in fact, commentators (e.g. Hassan 1990; Muharami 1993; Shaiban 1998) question whether there was a personnel system, in the first place. Hassan (1990), for instance, argues that this fact resulted in a total absence of effective government machinery that could manage development. Essential personnel functions like recruitment, training and advancement were based on traditional methods lacking organisational effectiveness. Government publications (e.g. MSC 1990; DC 1993; MNE 1998) confirm that prior to 1970 there were no organised institutions and laws to regulate employees' affairs.

Skeet (1974) explains that the absence of an organised civil service in Oman was an ultimate result of the Sultan Said's reluctance to develop government in general. He indicates that the government's role at that period was limited to the maintenance of the status quo. Rippenburg (1998:48) agrees with this view, and notes that the whole era was marked by "primitive administrative standards...the state was mainly preoccupied with the preservation of Sultan's political power."

All that existed was an elite system around the Sultan. In the capital, Muscat, the government consisted of a few officials appointed directly by the Sultan. Risso (1986) describes the situation. She notes that in Muscat during that period, Sultan Said's employees' tasks were the preservation of law and order, the collection of *Ashour*

(revenues), and resolution of day-to-day disputes between citizens. As she explains, the Sultan, himself, was the governor of Muscat, while the rest of Oman was administered by *Walis* (local governors) linked with him by radio to receive his orders.

Matrah, the second city in the capital, was governed by the Chief of *Walis*, or what can be considered in today's terms the Minister of Interior. In addition to this function, the governor of Matrah acted as the personal representative of the Sultan and was in charge of education, which was confined to three schools; two in the capital region and one in the southern province of Oman, Salalah (Risso 1986).

The provincial administration was even simpler than the central apparatus. Major towns were governed by *Walis* from the Al-Bu Sa'id family (the ruling family), whose posts customarily became hereditary (Darlow and Richard 1976). Districts under loyal tribal control were left under the autonomous control of tribal Sheikhs, as the Sultan commonly used to honour important tribal allies by appointing their Sheikhs to these posts (a tradition that still exists in today's system). In small towns, there were only *Qadhis* (Judges) whose duty was to deal with day-to-day to judicial matters. Hourani (1995:4) explains that provincial administration during that period involved limited techniques or bureaucratic routines and people depended primarily on personal contacts to manage their daily affairs, rather than on adherence to formal rules. Therefore, the government for them was no more than a "symbolic authority".

Walis were the Sultan's main source of control outside the capital area. They were appointed to act in the Sultan's name within certain jurisdictions as the chief of the military, police, judicial, and financial officials. Darlow and Richard (1976) explain that each Wali was assisted by a *Qadhi* (Judge) and the Wali's power was sustained by a small group of "loosely-organised" *Askars* (protectors). Landen (1967), a British official who witnessed that era, describes the role of Walis during that period:

The administration of Walis has continued as before and has in no way sunk from the high water mark of corruption, weakness and incompetence which it had previously reached. No attempt is made by the Sultan to control them and no account is ever demanded of their expenditure or their stewardship. They but add to the Sultan's unpopularity and weaken his prestige (cited in Muharami 1993:82).

In terms of rules that govern public personnel, Sultan Said's government had no written laws or formal instructions. Hammoudi (1993) summarises that the Sultan's personal decisions were the only source of law and written personnel regulations did not exist.

This explains the absence of any coherent civil service institution to supervise personnel affairs. The only government department involved was the *Khazina* (Treasury). This department acted as the central office for personnel affairs and its role involved keeping records and registering expenditure on salaries (Hammoudi 1993:34).

Before he was overthrown in 1970, Sultan Said's employees totalled 1,750. This number included those working in *Nadharat Al-Dhakhilya* (the Department of the Interior), the Governor of the Capital's Office, Walis, Judges and Administrative Clerks (MCS 2002). Heads of public agencies (e.g. Ministers or Directors) were empowered to appoint directly the employees needed in their departments. The selection processes did not depend on any adherence to formal requirements, but rather on personal views. According to Muharami (1993), selection was based mainly on two bases: the extent of loyalty to the employer, and the family orientation of the candidate.

We can conclude that before 1970, the structure of the civil service and all aspects of the public bureaucracy were of medieval simplicity. No government in a modern sense existed and only simple traditional aspects of an administrative structure were in operation, basically, due to the Sultan's reluctance to delegate authority. The day-to-day impact of this type of governance on the average Omani was terrifying; many left the country searching for jobs in the neighbouring Gulf States. They had no prospects beyond manual labour, since most of them were illiterate. The words of a representative from the British Embassy in Beirut after touring Oman in the late 60s say it all:

In twenty years' experience of most of the countries in Middle East, I had never seen a people so poverty-stricken or so debilitated with disease capable of treatment or cure as in the villages of Oman. There is often not a single healthy inhabitant in sight; a situation that reflects the degree of backwardness of the country and its rulers (Boustead 1971:219 cited in Muharami 1993:90).

5.3. The Civil Service After 1970

After the renaissance in 1970, the processes of establishing organised government began in Oman. The bureaucracy went through a variety of structural and functional changes. The change of political leadership and the increasing oil revenue encouraged the government to adopt new development plans to improve the living conditions of the people after decades of backwardness. There was an urgent need to increase administrative tasks to meet the demands of development and, as a result, the bureaucracy gradually expanded, and with it, the government civil service.

The 1970s marked a turning point in development of the Omani civil service (Hassan 1990; Shaiban 1998). This was when personnel affairs bodies and laws were first introduced to organise the functions of the civil service. Allawati (1990:22) evaluates the administrative development during the 1970s. He indicates that the first reform was dictated by “the state of emergency which was the obvious respond to the urgent needs.” He explains that a series of legal and institutional reforms were launched, and although some were “unsystematic”, they were seen as urgent answers to demanding issues emerging in the new era.

Kechichian (1995:37-39) has a different view. He argues that following the change of leadership, the adopted strategies were “logical”. Taking into consideration the fact that the bureaucracy started from “nothing”, the administrative system attempted to lay the foundation for rapid development. He explains that efforts were concentrated on the identification of areas of the most urgent need and the provision of the infrastructure necessary for the public. Within this context, a report issued by the Development Council (MD 1997:8) that evaluates the achievements of that stage indicates that the government’s fundamental objective was: “to increase the efficiency of the state’s administrative capability to meet development plans”. It indicates that development strategy during that period and for the next twenty five years (1970-1995) was dedicated towards enabling the country to develop integrated public departments. This was accompanied by the enactment of a group of laws to regulate the activities of the state.

5.3.1. Personnel Institutions¹

It was not until 1973 that the first specialised civil service agency was established. The Civil Service Department was established, attached to the Sultan’s Diwan (later the Royal Court). With a handful of employees, the department was formally put in charge of monitoring personnel affairs, including the function of approving new appointments (MCS 1990). Hassan (1990:45) evaluates the role of this department and points out that, although it was expected to lay down the foundation of a professional civil service, including key personnel affairs such as systematic recruitment, planned training and position classification, the department’s main function was, basically, keeping a data file for government employees. He argues that this role was far less than expectations.

¹ Appendix 9 contains a chronology of the Omani Civil Service. The list was designed by the research to assist the reader to comprehend the major events occurred in relation to personnel laws and institutions.

He attributes this deficiency to the absence of a coherent civil service law upon which the department could build rules; “The Department lacked the features of an agency operating within a system of public personnel law” (Hassan 1990:46).

Muharami (1993) supports Hassan’s (1990) argument, and adds that the absence of an appropriate administrative environment in Oman prior to 1975 was among the main limitations. Muharami (1993:87) indicates that Oman was not in a position to embark on major reform at that time, due to the lack of expertise: “There was a shortage of Omani officials who could be responsible for formulating reform. This was an obvious result of the late introduction of educational facilities in the country.”

The noticeable expansion of the bureaucracy after 1975 necessitated reform. The Omani government had come to realise that there was a significant need for administrative reform and the reform should regulate not only the civil service, but more essentially, the political appearance of the state.² Risso (1986:167) explains that Oman’s oil wealth increased public spending and encouraged the government to adopt major development plans, which, subsequently, led to gradual bureaucratic expansion. A report issued by the Development Council in 1976, indicates that the country’s Gross National Product (GNP) rose from 103.6 million OR in 1970 to 556.2 million in 1974 (an increase of 446.5%), and expenditure on services rose during that same period from 13.7 million OR to 197.2 million, a fourteen-fold increase in a three-year period (DC 1976:3-5).³

Hassan (1990:106) highlights the rapid changes the bureaucracy witnessed during that period. He indicates that between 1972 and 1975, the Omani cabinet was reshuffled eleven times, as the number of ministerial departments grew from 8 in 1972 to 23 in 1975 and a number of specialised bodies were set up during that period; among them were the National Defence Council, the Interim Planning Council, and the Central Bank of Oman. Such structural and functional change necessitated reform; he writes:

The Omani administration has grown not only in size but its parts have assumed different definite structures and functions. The administrative machinery has grown from a simple structure represented by a small number of government agencies that deal with many functions at a time to a more complex structure with specific functions; such changes required order and regulation in the civil service system.

² Interview with A. Al-Abri, the Under-Secretary of the MCS, Muscat, 17 April 2003.

³ At present (2005), each .73 OR (Omani Rail) equals one U.K.£.

Another important factor that contributed to the dramatic expansion of the workforce was the increasing numbers of non-Omanis who joined the civil service during the early years of development. Looney (1992) discusses foreign labour in Oman and indicates that the Omani government was aware that efficient administrative machinery at that stage required people with experience and skills to manage and execute development policies and such qualities were not available among Omanis. This created a major constraint and was it necessary to rely on foreign labour, particularly from neighbouring Arab countries such as Egypt and Jordan and non-Arab like India and Pakistan (World Bank 1995). As a result, the numbers of expatriates in the civil service workforce increased dramatically in the early years of development. As can be seen from the below table, the numbers of non-Omanis in public workforce rose from 120 in 1970 to 13,027 in 1980, an increase from 6.9% to 37.6%.

Table 5.1: The increase of the numbers of Omanis and expatriates in the Civil Service during the early years of development (1970 -1980)

Year	Omani	Non-Omani	Total	% Omani
1970	1,630	120	1,750	93.1
1971	2,857	255	3,112	91.8
1972	4,765	553	5,318	89.6
1973	7,403	1,670	9,073	81.6
1974	9,035	3,000	12,035	75.1
1975	12,900	4,665	17,565	73.4
1976	15,668	6,643	22,311	70.2
1977	16,259	7,782	24,041	67.6
1978	16,054	9,192	25,246	63.6
1979	18,002	10,692	28,694	62.7
1980	21,625	13,027	34,652	62.4

Source: Based on DC (1981:12-16).

Although the flow of the expatriate workforce into the country introduced new work methods and influenced the attitudes of Omanis towards modernisation, the dramatic increase in their numbers later became problem (World Bank 1995; Maawali 2000). By 1992 about 60% of total Omani workforce (public and private) were non-Omanis and while the civil service was successful in maintaining a balance (only 20% by 2002), the number of foreigners in the private sector continues to increase (Al-Lamki 1998). Today, it is estimated that 85% of the private sector workforce are still non-Omanis (MND 2002:493). Riphenburg (1998: 64) describes the ratio of expatriates in the private sector as “national problem”. She notes, “The government would have to face this problem very soon, given the increasing numbers of Omanis looking for jobs.”

The Omani government realised the need to improve its civil service to keep pace with the new realities. Efforts were concentrated on how to improve the working methods of public institutions. One major step towards this objective was to upgrade the agency responsible for the civil service to become an independent central authority. The aim was to absorb the dramatic expansion and to organise more efficiently personnel affairs in all public agencies (MCS 1990).

The issuing of the 1975 Civil Service Law (henceforth referred to as CSL) translated objectives into action. The 1975 CSL established two bureaucratic bodies described in as “the Administrative Development Agencies responsible for the Civil Service” (Oman 1975:5, articles 2). These two bodies were: 1) the Civil Service Council, and 2) the Bureau of Employees’ Affairs (later the Ministry of Civil Service). Ayubi (1995:13) defines the role of these agencies. He points out that these agencies were to be in charge of all administrative development and were the national central agencies responsible public personnel management and employment strategy. Their function also included the role of developing the civil service, in both its legal and organisational aspects.

5.3.1.1. The Civil Service Council (1975-present)

In the following, we will explore the role and functions of three civil service institutions responsible of the formulation and implementation of personnel policies in Oman. The first is the Civil Service Council (henceforth referred to as CSC). Royal Decree no. 28 of 1975 established the CSC. This Council is the highest personnel institution in the Omani Civil Service. It assumes wide responsibilities for the development of the system and upon it rests the burden of promoting and improving the civil service system. The law emphasizes that the council has the duty of monitoring matters relating to the planning, organisation and supervision of the civil service in a manner that up-grades its productivity (Oman 1980). The 1980 Civil Service Law laid down the responsibilities of the CSC; however these responsibilities were modified in 1988 based on Article 2 of the Royal Decree No. 18/88 to be as follows:

- 1. Establishing the general policies of civil service in the light of development requirements, and passing them on to the Council of Ministers for ratification.*
- 2. Ratifying the proposed laws and regulations of the civil service as well as its programmes, and unified salary scales submitted by the Ministry of Civil Service.*
- 3. Carrying out the modification of the Executive Regulations of the Law.*
- 4. Ratifying development plans and job reforms put forward by the Ministry of Civil Service.*

5. *Ratifying the appointment of the Special Scale personnel governed by Civil Service Law and determining their levels, grades, and salaries.*
6. *Ratifying the grant of the extras stipulated in Article 57 of the Executive Regulations of Civil Service Law in accordance with the procedures and conditions therein.*
7. *Raising the minimum level of pensions and granting exceptions pensions in accordance with individual cases stipulated in the Law of Pensions and Post-Service Rewards.*
8. *Investigating the complaints of employees and writing reports thereon.*
9. *Preparing annual reports to be put before the Council of Ministers on the condition of the administrative apparatus in the state in the light of the laws and regulations of the civil service, with any proposed modifications.*

As can be seen from the above responsibilities, the law has given the CSC the upper hand in formulating and implementing general policies and procedures required for executing rules and regulations, including recruitment policy. However, as indicated in Article 4 of the 1980 CSL, rules issued by the Council required the approval of Council of Ministers. This limitation was changed in 1996 in accordance with Royal Decree no. 71/96, which provided the CSC with more autonomy. Since this delegation of authority, the Council's decisions are executed more quickly and the Council has become, technically and financially, the supreme central authority that design, modernizes, and executes all civil service policies and regulations. To do this effectively, the council had to include in its membership high level officials. Table 5.2 below illustrates the membership of the Council as defined in the mentioned royal decree.

Table 5.2: The membership of the Civil Service Council

President	The Minister of the Royal Court
Deputy President	The Minister of Civil Service
Member	The Minister of Education
Member	The Minister of Social Affairs
Member	The Minister of Labour
Member	The Minister of Legal Affairs
Member	The Secretary to Cabinet

Source: Based on Oman (1980:4) and other relevant CS Law modification rules.

The above structure shows that the Council's membership consists of ministers who are heavily involved with the workforce planning and utilization. The very fact that the CSC is headed by the Minister of the Royal Court who reports directly to the Sultan, highlights its great significance. Until 2002, the CSC had its own general secretariat. The Secretariat's duties were mostly administrative; it received cases, prepared Council agendas, kept minutes, and maintained records of decisions. If cases required a legal opinion, the Secretariat referred them to the Legal Department in the MCS to provide

recommendations before presenting them to the Council. The Council's Secretariat, however, was abolished in 2002, due to its limited role, and all of its duties were transferred to the Legal Department in the MCS. Now, the Council meets 4-5 times a year according to the plan sanctioned by its members every year and it could meet at any time upon the invitation of its President (MCS 1990).

When asked about obstacles the CSC face, the Director of the Legal Department in the MCS indicated that because there is no delegation of authority to public agencies to enable them to solve their employees' immediate situations, the Council consumes most of its time dealing with simple legal problems left behind by the Civil Service Law.⁴ He explained that the Council find itself in the position of having to abolish one rule and create another or to answer questions resulting from the vagueness of the rules laid down by the Law. The official suggested that the Council's central authority requires a reassessment. Government agencies should be given more authority to deal with their immediate day-to-day problems, in order to allow the Council to focus its attention on its actual role of planning and developing the civil service to be effective and efficient.

5.3.1.2. The Bureau of Employees' Affairs (1975-1988)

Efforts were made to strengthen the structure of the public agency directly responsible for the civil service. Article 9 of the 1975 CS Law fulfilled this objective when the Department of Civil Service (1973-1975) was replaced by the Bureau of Employees' Affairs (henceforth referred to as BEA). The Law made the BEA an independent public agency attached directly to the CSC (its predecessor was attached to the Royal Court) and headed by a Director General appointed through Royal Decree (his predecessor was appointed through Ministerial Decision). This change formally instituted the basis for a professional institution organised in accordance with principles laid down by the law. Article 10 of the CS Law states the functions of the newly-established agency:

1. *To suggest rules, laws, and regulations for the civil service.*
2. *To suggest procedures and guidelines concerning salary scales, bonuses and allowances, in co-ordination with the Finance Ministry.*
3. *To follow-up laws and regulations and ensure its proper implementation.*
4. *To study and analyse employees' complaints, and give opinions.*
5. *To formulate administrative training plans for public employees to improve their efficiency and follow up their execution.*

⁴ Interview with S. Adaim, the Director of the Legal Department, MCS, Muscat, 18 April 2003.

6. *To establish and keep files and records of public employees.*
7. *To implement salary regulations before and after-service compensation.*
8. *To distribute graduates of universities and training institutions among the public agencies according to specialization and agencies' requirements.*

As can be seen from the above duties, the BEA became in charge of improving working methods and was empowered to suggest laws and regulations. In addition, Article 11 of the Civil Service Law gave the Bureau the authority to review and approve ministerial orders related to personnel affairs issued by government agencies under the jurisdiction of the law. The BEA was also authorised to request data, documents or fields from those agencies that would help to perform its functions properly; such authority was not available before 1975 (MSC 1990). Because of the expansion in its functions, the staff of the BEA increased from a handful of employees in 1975, to 140 by the year 1988, and to 237 by the year 2003, when it was up-graded to ministry level (MSC 2003b).

One of the major problems the BEA faced during the 80s was the fact that many Omanis had joined the civil service at a time when recruitment did not place emphasis on education (Shaiban 1998). That was due to the fact that employment to public office was seen as a form of social assistance. In line with this argument, government kept recruiting more nationals to positions that were already over-staffed (Recabi 2001). Alastai (2002) explains that out of the total 12,900 Omani civil servants recruited by the year 1975, about 12400 (representing 95%) hardly had an education better than elementary school and/or basic typing and writing skills. Alastai notes that employees' qualifications were not technically sufficient for the positions they were allowed to occupy, but "government allowed such phenomenon based on the assumption that public employment is a way of distributing wealth to citizens". Riphenburg (1998:142) discusses this issue and warns of the dangers the Omani government might face if public employment continues to be seen as a way of distributing wealth; she writes:

By guaranteeing positions in the public sector for Omani nationals, the government unintentionally engendered the notion that it was the universal benefactor for its citizens. This idea may be difficult to change and may become a source of political instability, if the government proves unable to fulfil its responsibilities should an economic decline and subsequent financial problems occur.

Omanis recruited to the public service prior to the 1980s became a burden later, as the promotional system allows them to occupy top administrative posts based on seniority, not skills and the ability to do the job. Nowadays, many professionals who

hold university degrees and have sufficient skills find themselves trapped in work, much of which is a routine work that does not allow creativeness and decision making. They come to the service with high aspiration for improvement and change, but soon discover there are limits to their role in effecting changes. A considerable number of top posts are occupied by older bureaucrats recruited since the 80s who have a conservative attitude and tend to keep things static by avoiding the challenge of change, and consequently, the challenge of younger graduates.⁵

Al-Wahibi indicates that the generation gap produces and promotes a conflict situation between older bureaucrats promoted to key posts based on seniority and young educated Omanis.⁶ He explains that this situation works against the effective utilization of the younger graduates in posts of higher responsibility, and observes that a proposed law would have to put more emphasis on a post classification that leads to efficiency rather than seniority. As we will see in Chapter Seven when we will analyse our survey, this view is supported by the majority of educated Omani civil servants who considered promotion based on seniority as an obstacle to promote the efficiency of the system.

5.3.1.3. The Ministry of Civil Service (1988-Present)

As already mentioned, government activities were expanding dramatically and with these, the state bureaucracy. Since the creation of the BEA in 1975, the number of civil servants had grown from 17,565 to 63,073 in 1988, an increase of 359% (MSC 2003:31) (see Figure 4.3 in p.140). Once again, the government realised the need to improve the role and the authority of the public agency responsible for the civil service. Based on a recommendation of the President of the CS Council, Royal Decree no. 17 was issued on 21 February 1988, upgrading the status of the BEA to the level of a ministry, named the Ministry of Civil Service (MCS). For the first time, the head of the public agency responsible for the civil service became a cabinet member, allowing the agency to be part of the executive branch of the government and more responsive to the government's overall policies and plans (Hassan 1990; Shaiban 1998).

Although the functions of the newly-established Ministry were not very different from those assigned to the BEA, the new Ministry was empowered with additional legislative and organisational functions. Its role was no longer confined to the supervision of the

⁵ Interview with H.E. Hamad Al-Ghafri, the MCS (6 July 2004).

⁶ Interview with K. Al-Wahibi, the Director General of the Directorate of Civil Service, 16/4 2003.

proper implementation of rules, but was extended to participation in the planning and the formulation of these rules. The MCS became empowered to monitor implementation and to suggest changes in the law, if required. The aim was to promote its role as a house of expertise in various fields of public administration and personnel management.

Apart from the duties assigned to the BEA, the above royal decree assigned extra tasks to the newly-created Ministry, these can be summarised as follows:

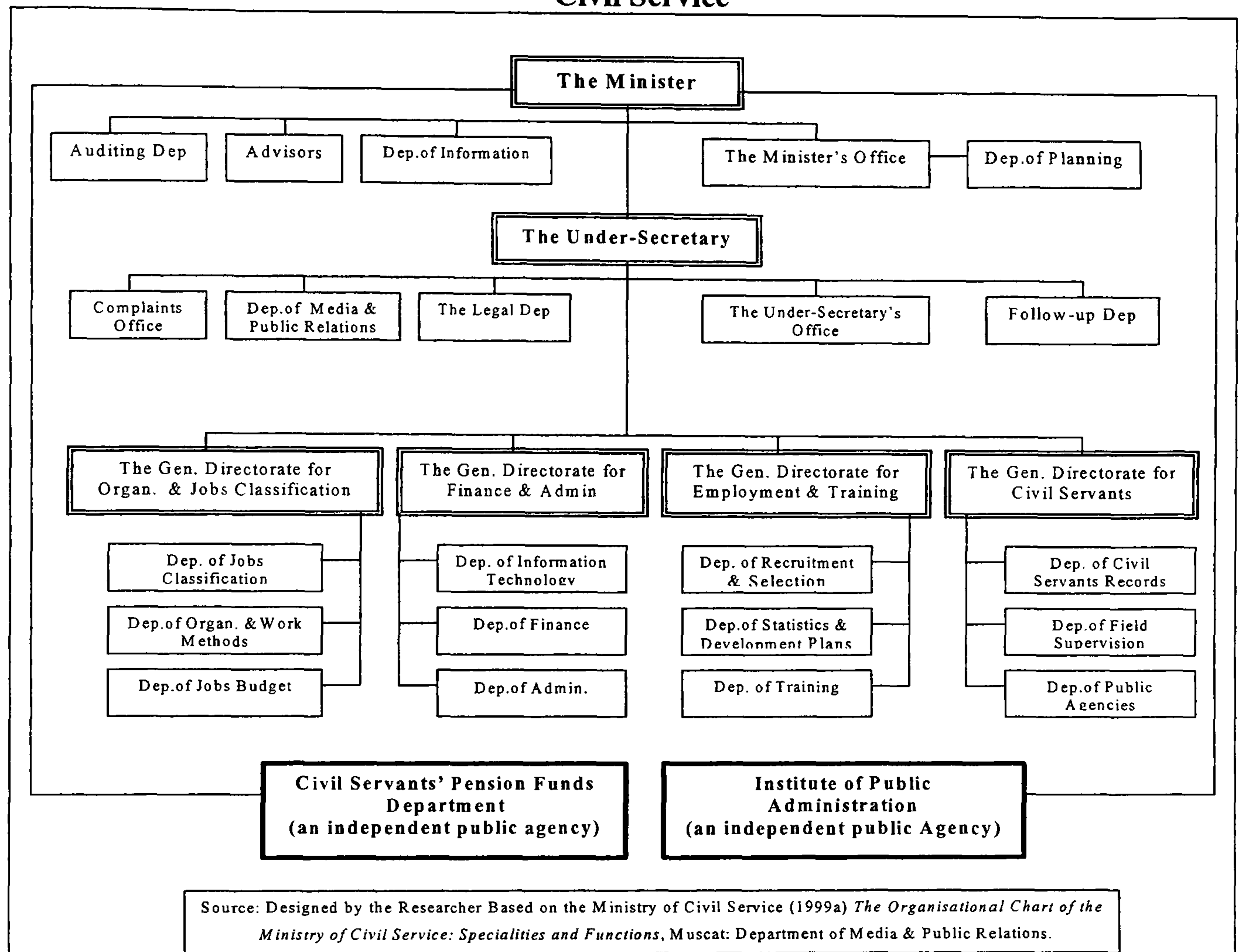
1. *Formulating and implementing personnel policies after putting them before the CSC.*
2. *Planning and following up training programmes for all government's agencies under the jurisdiction of the Civil Service Law.*
3. *Providing technical assistant and advice to the government apparatus in personnel affairs (e.g. job classification, organisational structure).*
4. *Implementing the superannuation and pension laws and regulation.*
5. *Identifying qualification requirements for job applicants.*
6. *Conducting studies and research to analyse the functions of the civil service and giving opinions to improve efficiency and performance (MCS 1999a:12-15).*

When asked about the new duties, the Minister of Civil Service focused on the role of assisting other public agencies to promote efficiency.⁷ He indicated that administrative assistance to agencies under the jurisdiction of the Civil Service Law has become the core function of the ministry. The ministry now pays great attention to the quality of public servants recruited and promoted. The Minister explained that this necessitates the presence of qualified personnel in the MCS, itself, and the ministry has achieved noticeable progress in qualifying its employees to play this role effectively. He added that the role of assisting public agencies is not currently confined to public agencies under the jurisdiction of the CS Law, but also to other branches of the system, such as the Armed Forces and the Police, which increasingly ask for the Ministry's expertise.

The Ministry of Civil service is an organisation of numerous departments (Figure 5.1 below presents the organisational chart of the MSC). The Ministry is presided over by a Minister who reports directly to the Cabinet. The Minister is responsible for the development of the civil service and is required to submit an annual report to the CS Council indicating problems the system faces and methods to overcoming them. In turn, concerned departments in the MCS submit regular reports to the Minister about problems they encounter and methods of overcoming them.

⁷ Interview with H.E Sheik Abdulaziz Al-Azizi, the Minister of Civil Service (1996-2004), 10/04/2003.

Figure 5.1: The Organisational Chart of the Ministry of Civil Service



The Minister of Civil Service is assisted by an Under-Secretary, who is appointed to this post through a royal decree by the Sultan, and two advisors; one for administrative affairs and the second for legal affairs. Apart from the departments that are attached directly to the Minister, such as the Minister's Office, Department of Information, and the Auditing Department, all divisions are under the supervision of the Under-Secretary. Some departments are also directly attached to the Under-Secretary's office, such as the Legal Department and the Department of Media and Public Relations.

The Department of Information plays an essential role as an organisational division responsible for coordination between intelligence authorities and all public agencies. Any change that occurs in all civil service fields, such as promotions, transfers or the end of the service, must be reported to this department. The Department is responsible for keeping up-dated data of the workforce and to provide the Minister with an annual report of all changes. It is also expected to assist the Minister in assessing the changes and propose actions, if required.

The Legal Department is another important organisational division in the MCS. In fact, this department is considered the core of most of the ministry's functions, as it plays the role of the final reversionary authority before legal decisions are issued. It is also responsible for interpreting the CS Law, supervising its accurate implementation and providing legal opinion on matters referred to it by the CS Council and other divisions in the MCS. The Department is also required to conduct investigations into alleged administrative violations reported to it by concerned authorities, and to present its legal opinion. The most critical role of this department is its duty of presenting matters to the CS Council, to interpret its decisions, and disseminate these decisions, if necessary, to all concerned public agencies that are subject to the CS Law.

Royal Decree 98/89 issued on 2/12/1998 approved the higher organisational divisions of the MCS (the General Directorate level), while the Ministerial Order no 99/48 issued on 9/6/1999, organises the lower organisational divisions (Department level and below). Based on these two regulations, the MCS consists of four general directorates. These are the Directorate for Organisation and Jobs Classification, the Directorate for Employment and Training, the Directorate of the Civil Service, and the Directorate for Finance Administration. These four directorates are each further sub-divided into 3-4 specialized departments and offices.

Accordingly, while the CS Council serves as a legislative body and responsible for planning the civil service, the MCS serves as executive and supervisory body entrusted with implementation, execution and control of regulations issued by the Council. The MCS is also authorised to submit suggestions. It may, for instance, suggest cancelling rules and regulations or modifying others in the light of changing circumstances and development in the personnel field. This last function is particularly important to this study when it discusses reform to make the system more responsive to merit recruitment principles in both policy and practice. Hence, any change to develop and modify personnel procedures is the duty of the MCS.

5.3.2. Personnel Laws

As mentioned earlier, before 1970 there was no regulatory system to define how personnel affairs institutions should function. The government was aware that rapid and sustainable development necessitates enacting personnel laws that make the process of

hiring and firing conform to pre-set rules and regulations. It was aware that sustainable development requires legislative reforms, that is, basic framework laws that can be amplified by subsequent regulation; what Hill and Hupe (2002:22) referred to as “the rule of law”:

Everything must be done according to the law, which when applied to the powers of government means that every act which affects the legal rights, duties or liberties of any person must be shown to have a strictly legal pedigree.

To overcome the problem of the absence of a written civil service law prior to 1970, Muharami (1993) indicates, government institutions adopted regulations from other Arab countries via their nationals who were working in Oman as experts, particularly Egyptians and Jordanians. Some of these rules were adopted with minor adjustments to suit the Omani work environment, however, as we will observe, were not practical.

The first step in legalising the system and organising personnel affairs was the issue of a Booklet of Guidance no BB/2 in 1972. This Booklet was issued by the General Directorate of Financial Affairs and its main objective was to regulate personnel wages, incentives and grades. Muharami (1993:167) notes that this Booklet “brought some order into the confusion inherited from Sultan Said’s era”. However, as indicated by the Director of the Legal Department in the MCS, the absence of specialised agency to supervise the accurate implementation of rules slowed the process of compliance and caused many deficiencies during that stage that were difficult to correct later.⁸

The codification of government began in the 1975, when Royal Decree 3/1975 was issued, setting up a Special Committee to study and suggest reforms to organise the state’s administrative structure and institutions. After six months, the Committee submitted two draft laws aiming to regulate the political appearance of the state and regulate the civil service. Both proposed laws were sanctioned and were modified over time to meet each stage’s requirement (BEA 1985:13, Oman 1990:65).

Of critical importance to institutional development was the introduction of *Qanun Tanthim Aljihaz Aledary* (the Law for the Organisation of State Administration), which was issued in accordance to the Royal Decree 26/1975. This law regulated the state administration, laid down the mechanism for the annual budget and the five-year development plans, and set out the terms of operation to government institutions. It

⁸ Interview with Said Adaim, Director of the Legal Department, MCS, Muscat 18 April 2003.

remained the basis of Omani government and the most influential law decreed until the Basic Law was declared in 1996 (Rippenburg 1998). The most significant issue about the 1975 Law is the fact that it established the structure of government. For instance, this law specified, in general terms, the authority of the sultan, the responsibilities of ministers and the range of their delegated powers, the role of the Council of Ministers, special councils, and other government bodies, including the Diwan of Legislation (later the Ministry of Legal Affairs).

5.3.2.1. The 1975 Civil Service Law

The rules of the Booklet of Guidance no BB/2, along with other orders issued by the government, continued to regulate personnel affairs until 1975, when the first Civil Service Law was issued. The CSL was issued on 28 June 1975 in accordance with Royal Decree no. 27. Although it was replaced soon by a similar law in 1980, the 1975 law is considered the cornerstone of all personnel regulations in Oman and it became the first legal text to organise the public sector, in general. According to one MCS publication, this law: “represents a turning point in the history of the civil service as it laid down the basic criteria for regulating personnel affairs” (MCS 2001a:11).

The Law of 1975 had 17 chapters, 175 articles and 5 explanatory appendixes regulating the relationship between government and its employees. The law covered recruitment requirements, the rights and responsibilities of employees, salary scales, promotion, discharge, and discipline. Muharami (1993:169) summarises four key effects of this law on the processes of enhancing civil service operations. These are:

1. *It decreased the numbers of supervising posts: for example, the law terminated the post of Assistant Under-Secretary, Assistant Manger, and Assistant Section Manager.*
2. *It opened the door for promotion to posts with salaries equal to the rank of Directorate Manager. This was intended to stabilise the structure of the organisation without any actual need to create more units.*
3. *It set minimum standards for educational qualification and experience for recruitment and/or promotion.*
4. *It defined the regulations for recruitment and promotion.*

Further, the law put forward a clear conception of public employment; it indicated that all applicants for permanent jobs must:

1. *Be of Omani nationality except, where necessary.*
2. *Be at least 16 years of age.*
3. *Prove medically fit.*
4. *Hold the required educational qualification for the post.*

5. *Have had no criminal convictions for at least five years prior to appointment.*
6. *Pass competitive examinations (Oman 1975a:9, article 11).*

The 1975 CSL also paid considerable attention to issues that were not regulated before. For instance, the law specified a three-month probationary period for the newly-appointed employee and indicated that during this term, the civil servant would have to prove competency and acceptability of performance; otherwise “the concerned authority shall have the right to discharge without granting any of the rights enjoyed by confirmed employees” (Oman 1975a:13, Article 18). Article 84, also, specified the retirement age. It indicated that the retirement age is fixed at 60 years, but can be extended for another five years if approved by the CSC. However, the law excluded political appointees (e.g. Ministers) from this rule, as from many other rules and regulations listed. Most its articles ended with the statement: “the ruling of this article does not apply to those appointed by royal decrees”.

Another important improvement introduced by the law of 1975 was the establishment of basic standards for recruitment. This step was seen by Omani employees as a significant innovation towards the implementation of the merit principles (Shaiban 1998). Articles 29-34 of the law indicated the minimum qualifications required for occupying grades, imposed a requirement of competitive tests in collaboration with the central civil service agency, required a advertising of vacancies, and considered the evaluation reports, along with seniority, as the determinants of promotion to higher posts (Hassan 1990).

These articles introduced some order to the recruitment procedures; however, the actual application revealed that the objectives were not fulfilled. Various Omani writers (e.g. Hassan 1990; Allawati 1990; Ansi 1994) argue that the law of 1975 did not lay down a systematic or rational basis to achieve the recruitment objectives stated above. Al-Musharfy, an Omani official who witnessed the execution of the 1975 CSL, supports this argument.⁹ He was asked about the 1975 CSL. He indicated that the actual practice revealed the absence of merit procedures. He attributed this to two main reasons: first, the lack of clarity or consistency of the related articles in the law; and second, the absence of responsibility and sincerity by government officials who execute regulations. Al-Musharfy explained that favouritism and nepotism were the actual driving force, rather than the performance, skills and qualification as listed in the law. He said:

⁹ Interview with Salem Al- Musharfy, the first Director General of the Bureau of Employees' Affairs (1975-1982) and the current Minister's Advisor for Administrative Affairs, MCS, 20 April 2003.

The 70s period was no exception. Inefficient recruitment was one the major problem the Bureau [the BEA] faced and was handicapped to deal with. At the time, the entire administrative system was purely based on personal contacts. Accordingly, it was not surprising to find a certain amount of influence being exercised in favour of relatives. It was taken for granted that an individual will use his position to benefit his relatives. Legislators should acknowledge this social fact when regulating personnel procedures.

Al-Musharfy also emphasised that the civil service agency responsible for monitoring the implementation of the law had no real authority to intervene when public agencies recruit or promote employees and, hence, there was a need for change: “a genuine change that would lead to the standardisation of procedures”. Al-Musharfy added that the application of merit recruitment requires practical legal structure, but more essentially, sincerity on the part of those who interpret the law; such consciousness, he concluded, “was missing”.

5.3.2.2. The 1980 Civil Service Law

By 1980, the government had come to realise the need to replace the 1975 CSL to keep up with the course of administrative development. A new Civil Service Law was issued in 1980 in accordance with Royal Decree no. 8, and accordingly, superseded the 1975 CSL. The 1980 CSL avoided some of the inadequacies of the previous law and introduced new developments for both personnel regulations, and the agencies that supervise these regulations, enabling the system to perform more efficiently.

Although its application reveals some deficiencies, the 1980 CSL, undoubtedly, represented another major development in the history of the modern Omani Civil Service. One of its positive features is that it has invested the civil service agencies with law-making authority to reinforce their responsibilities and to perform their duties efficiently. According to Hassan (1990), the legislative authorities noticed that the previous law suffered from excessively ambiguously worded articles which, consequently, led to endless bureaucratic procedures. These authorities decided that it would be better to establish a more flexible Executive Regulation that could respond quickly to changes and could easily be modified. It was intended that the law would declare general principles in order to preserve maximum amount of stability, leaving the details to the Executive Regulation which would be issued by the Civil Service Council (see Oman 1980:4, Article 4). Shaiban (1998:23) provides more details. She indicates that changes in the law require the approval of the Sultan, the issuer of the law, whereas changes in the Executive Regulation can be made via the CS Council, which is empowered to make modification. Changes via the CSC are, indeed, easier and faster.

She notes, “The actual practice of the 1980 Civil Service Law, given the existence of the Executive Regulation, proved efficient and simple compared to pervious practice.”

The CSL of 1980 consists of 13 chapters, 85 articles and two graded job scales. It deals in its first three chapters with the responsibilities and functions of the Civil Service Council and the Ministry of Civil Service. This Law outlines the general rules of the civil service and itemises essential principles. Its Executive Regulation (henceforth referred to as ER) was issued four years later in accordance with the Royal Decree no. 52/84 and it consists of 11 chapters, 219 articles and 14 explanatory Appendixes. The ER addresses, in details, jobs, recruitment, selection, training, work hours, vacations, obligations and prohibitions, promotion, salaries and increments, transfer, evaluation reports, and employees’ committees. The ER presented the Omani personnel system with a number of positive characteristics, such as better salaries and allowances, clarity on training regulations, and more emphasis on educational requirement for specialised posts. Ansi (1994) observes that these developments were a great step towards attracting more qualified and experienced personnel to join or remain in the civil service.

Of major significance to this thesis, the CSL of 1980 CSL introduced several provisions regarding restrictions on the behaviours of civil servants; among them:

1. *The employee is banned from abusing authority, by taking tips, accepting gifts and disclosing confidential information related to the job.*
2. *The public employee must have good moral conduct, inside and outside work, and with bosses and colleagues.*
3. *The combination of two jobs is forbidden, except in the case of common interest, where the country is in need of the employee’s work.*
4. *All employees are responsible for their actions and for implementing their duties in a good manner, within the boundaries of their specialism (Oman 1975a:10, Articles 44 and 45).*

These provisions were useful to put some limits on unethical conduct, but can not be considered as classifying employees’ duties. Although the law of 1980 marked the first recognition of the importance of position classification, this system has not been put into practice until now. The law defines no grades or scales in relation to position and person specification and, instead, it simply lists financial grades, their salaries, and the education qualification required to fill them (see Tables 6.2 p.202). As will be seen in Chapter Six, the current system views the employee as the core, rather than the position s/he occupies. Al-Wahibi confirmed this when he indicated that the system lacks some key elements of personnel management, such a professional position classification

system, which is crucial to effective recruitment and promotion procedures.¹⁰ He explained that even if procedures are done in accordance with rules of law, the law itself has deficiencies. For instance, the system relies on seniority as the main criterion for promotion and this has created an inflationary problem in top positions:

In general, the government service during the 80s appeared to be over-staffed for the amount of work performed. Except for a few positions in ministries' head offices, the work was exercised by poorly educated and inadequately trained individuals who had little productive work to perform, operated under weak supervision and had no interest in training. Efficiency should be the first criterion, seniority should be second in line; all these years the latter has been given undue consideration, relegating merit.

Finally, it cannot be ignored that the 1980 CSL introduced a significant change in the civil service system, allowing authorities to follow an organised personnel system. However, during the last 25 years (since 1980), many problems have begun to arise that had not been foreseen. Among these is the absence of systematic recruitment measures. As will be observed in the following chapter, the system still falls short of being based on the concept of equal pay for equal work or the concept of merit when recruiting and selecting public servants. The government, as we will see in the next section, is aware of the need to issue a new law that could avoid the shortcomings of the 1980 CS Law.

5.3.2.3. The 2004 Proposed Civil Service Law

The Omani government expects that this proposed law to be in effect by January 2006 (Al-Maawali 2004). In late December 2004, after twelve years of effort, Sultan Qaboos issued Royal Decree no. 120/2004, which empowers the CS Council to issue a new Executive Regulation within a one year period to put an attached proposed CS law into practice. Article one of this decree indicates that provisions of the proposed law shall be effective when the Executive Regulation is issued along with new the job classification system on approval of the Council of Ministers, while the second article says that until the Executive Regulation is issued, the regulation of the 1980 CS Law shall be effective.

Although the issue of Royal Decree will speed the processes of implementation, one year is not expected to be a sufficient time period for the CS Council to issue the required Executive Regulation. The experience of the 1980 Law is a good example. The order of the law was issued in February 1980 and it took approximately four years (June 1984) before the CS Council was able to issue the Executive Regulation. Hence, time and effort are required before this proposed law can be put into effect.

¹⁰ Interview with Khalfan Al-Wahibi, the DG of the Directorate of Civil Service, MCS, 16 April 2003.

The proposed law contained 157 articles and two appendixes. The appendixes deal with the new salary scales and balance the current salary grades with the new grades. Instead of the 28 grade levels listed in the 1980 CS Law (see Table 6.1 p.197) the salary table of the 2004 proposed law consist of 19 grade levels (Oman 2004:38-39). Of a direct relevance to this thesis, the promotion and appointment system in the proposed law are different from that organised by the rules of the 1984 Executive Regulation, as they are to a higher job, not to a higher grade. In other words, promotion in the new system will be to posts, rather than to grades. If this regulation is correctly implemented, for the first time in the civil service history there will be a shift from the grade based system to the post system. This will significantly help to reflect a merit-based personnel system if the policy is accompanied with accurate procedures similar to those identified in Chapter Two based on Parry's (1994) model (this will be discussed in Chapters Six and Seven).

In a press release to *Oman Daily Newspaper* after the issue of the royal decree, Shaikh Hilal Al-Maawali, the Minister of Civil Service, stressed the importance of the proposed 2004 CS Law (Al-Maawali 2004). According to him, the proposed law aims at socio-economic development in view of the increase in the number of civil service employees as well as the increase in the number of graduates applying to government posts:

During the last 10 years attempts had been made to improve the 1980 Civil Service Law to keep up with the course of development. The proposed law attempts to eliminate the shortcomings. It comes in a stage where the government units subjected to the civil service law witnessed many developments as well as the socio-economic and cultural changes, which led to increase of employees in the civil service (Al-Maawali 2004:1).

The Minister also raised the issue of the importance to improve the working conditions of government employees to make the public service more attractive to quality personnel. He indicated that the private sector became highly competitive, offering better pay and benefits. Realising this, the government decided in this proposed law to improve benefits and compensations to civil servants.

This orientation was clearly reflected in the proposed law. For instance, the new rule amended the long sick leave. Employees applying for a second six months sick leave will get their salary and full allowances instead of half salary. Annual leave was also improved. The proposed law increases the annual leave of employees at grades 6-8 to 38 days instead of 36 days and the other lower grades to 28 days instead of 24 days. The rule also includes payment of a gratuity of one month's basic salary for each year of

service, to a maximum of 10 months basic salary for grades A to 6, while for grades 7 to 14, the employee gets 12 months basic salary. Some benefits were also listed for females civil servants. For instance the proposed law increases the maternity leave to 50 days instead of 45 days with full salary (Oman 2004:11-23).

Although the above changes will positively contribute to improving the work conditions in the public service, the proposed law did not touch key personnel management issues. The researcher reviewed all articles and noticed that no genuine change was introduced in relation to selection methods. Similar to the 1980 CS Law, this proposed law gives ministers and heads of government agencies total control of the promotional policy. As we will see in Chapter Seven, this authority was viewed by our survey questionnaire participants as the source of favouritism and nepotism, either when public posts are filled or when services and benefits are distributed among citizens. Previously we explained that to attract and retain qualified personnel in a bureaucratic setting such as that of Oman, a rational and a legally-based personnel system should be put into practice; a system similar to that proposed by Max Weber decades ago (see pp. 38-40).

5.4. Contemporary Employment issues

As mentioned earlier, part of the MCS's function is to carry on and prepare reports pertaining to civil service development which are submitted to the CSC and the Cabinet. These reports provide valuable statistical data on the characteristics of the workforce and the obstacles that face the civil service system. The aim of the remaining section of this chapter is to review critically the most recent reports. This is supplemented by data obtained through some interviews conducted with practitioners and senior officials to provide depth to the analysis. Within this context, focus is drawn to two issues of direct relevance to this thesis: 1) employment policy, and 2) women's EEO issues.

5.4.1. Employment Policy

The Omani civil service is merely 35 years old. The system has witnessed a dramatic expansion throughout the years, leading to dramatic changes in both the quality and quantity of its personnel. The MCS most recent Annual Report (MCS 2004) indicates that by the end of 2003 there were 95158 employees in the service, distributed between 38 public agencies. The health and educational sectors are considered the largest. The report indicates that 66% of the total workforce (62754 out 95158) works in these two

sectors, and, accordingly, they are considered the biggest employers. In the year 2003, for instance, the Ministries of Health and Education employed 4750 Omanis civil servant out of the total 5899 employed that year, representing 80.5% (MCS 2004:18).

The size of the workforce, 95158 employees, is considered inefficient given the duties of the public sector, the general employment policy, size of the population, and effort of downsizing (IRI 2003). It is large by Omani standards, particularly if compared with the 1750 employees that represented the workforce in 1970 (see Table 5.1, p. 167).

The rapid expansion has led to continued increase of staff employed throughout the years. The expansion is remarkable to the extent that some international organisations (e.g. World Bank 1995 and UNDP 1998) criticised the public sector for being overstaffed. The Minister of Civil Service, however, has a different view.¹¹ When he was asked about such criticism, he indicated that the expansion was necessary in the past due to socio-economic requirements that necessitated recruitment on a large scale. Now, the Minister added, the government pays considerable attention to its employment policy in both sectors, and recruitment in the public sector is limited to actual needs:

Along with the development requirements, public employment in the past was seen as a form of social and economic assistance. Nowadays the government has relieved itself of such commitment. Now employment in government is constricted and Omanis are aware that it is limited to desperate needs. The system now requires mostly highly-specialised employees in specific areas.

The Minister's stand is clear; however, a report issued by International Republican Institute (2003) confirms that government hiring continues at a rapid pace, undermining efforts of downsizing. A closer look at the issue reveals that employment policy in Oman is more complicated than efforts of downsizing and is directly connected to the unemployment problem the country faces. The question is how the government can deal with the increasing numbers of Omanis searching for jobs if the public sector intends to limit or freeze hiring. The statistics reveal that Oman has witnessed dramatic population growth without strategic plan to meet employment requirement. The population growth is considered among the world highest. A report issued by UNDP classifies Oman, just after Gaza Strip, as the world's highest place in terms of population growth (Oman at 4.9 per annum) (UNDP 2004). Further, 55% of the population are under the age of 20, according to the latest population census (MNE 2002:47). Table 5.2 illustrates the

¹¹ Interview with H.E. Sheik Hilal Al-Maawali, the Minister of Civil Service, Muscat, 28 June 2004.

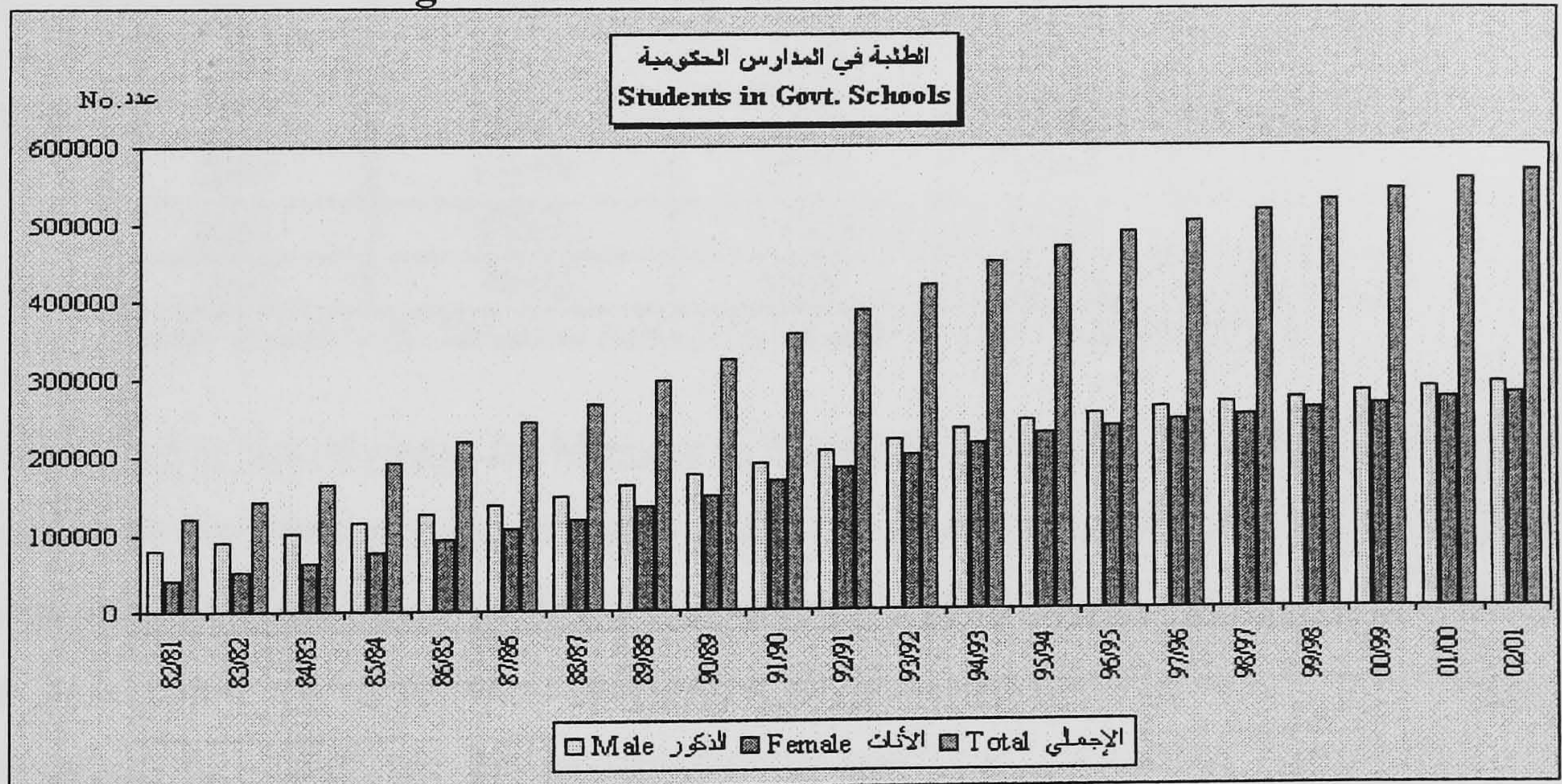
distribution of population by age groups while Figure 5.2 shows the dramatic increase of students in public schools over two decades. The report also indicates that there is a lack of awareness among Omanis of the consequences of the population growth and, thus, rates are expected to continue increasing in the future (MNE 2002:459).

Table 5.3: The population in Oman by Age Groups in 2001

Age group	Numerical Distribution	Percentage Distribution
0-9	510522	27.0%
10-19	504387	27.7%
20-29	364687	21.0%
30-49	279234	15.2%
50-69	132462	7.3%
70+	34832	1.8%
Total	1,826,124	100%

Source: Based on MNE (2002:47)

Figure 5.2: The development of the numbers of students in government schools from 1980-2002



Source: MNE (2002:467)

Accordingly, tens of thousands of Omani university graduates and young people leaving school, especially those with non-technical specialisations, are expected to enter the labour market each year and it becomes more difficult to incorporate these citizens, since government hiring will be limited. The government is expected to have a clear strategy on how it is going to deal with this problem. When he was asked about government's plans to absorb the increasing numbers of Omanis expected to enter the labour market in the coming years, the Minister of Civil Service stressed that the

government continues its efforts to qualify the private sector to play this role and citizens are expected to cooperate to give success to these efforts:

The private sector is expected to play a major role in the coming years to absorb Omanis seeking for jobs. Currently about 83.3% of posts in the private sector are occupied by expatriates. Employers in the private sector should give Omanis priority by supporting the "Omanisation Policy".¹² During the last two decades the civil service open many job opportunities through the implementation of this policy.

The Minister supported his argument of the success achieved in the public sector to implement the Omanisation policy by indicating that Omanis compared to expatriates in the public service by the end of the year 2003 made up 83.1% (79099 out of 95158). The rates had declined over the years, for instance, the Minister explained, the numbers of expatriates declined from 35.4% in 1990 to 16.9% in 2003, and out of the 5899 Omanis employed in 2003, about 870 were replacements for expatriates (see Table 5.4).

Table 5.4: Percentages of Omanis and Expatriates in the Civil Service (1970-2003)

Year	Omanis	Expatriates	Total	Omanis%
1970	1630	120	1750	93.1%
1980	21625	13027	34652	62.4%
1990	44024	24096	68120	64.6%
2000	63934	20728	84662	75.5%
2001	73766	17471	91237	80.9%
2003	79099	16059	95158	83.1%

Source: Based on the Statistical Annual Report until 31/12/2003 (MCS 2004:13).

With regard to future plans, the Minister indicated that currently, 88% of expatriates in the civil service occupy posts in health and educational sectors and efforts are directed towards qualifying Omanis to replace expatriates in these sectors. For implementation, the government has established a number of postsecondary institutes and colleges throughout the country to train and educate Omanis with appropriate skills for jobs in education and health care. For instance, in 2004 the nine teachers colleges enrolled 5000 students, 2430 men and 2600 women, in a four-year programme of preparation to become teachers, while the nine nursing schools accepted 1200 students in a three year health care programme. Accordingly, the Minister noted: "Recruitment of expatriates is not permitted in health and educational institutions unless specific qualifications and skills are required and are not available among Omanis". The Minister emphasised that

¹² Omanisation is the process by which the government attempts to secure increased participation of Omanis in the workforce. Through this policy the government aims at the utilization of Omani labour through the implementation of education, training and recruitment programmes to replace expatriates.

the Omanisation policy in the public service is carried out with proficiency so performance to deliver services is not affected: “Omanisation, after all, does not mean disregarding efficiency, but a match between various needs and obligations.”

Even with a successful Omanisation policy in the public sector, this prospect is reason for concern in the private sector. Achieving similar success is, indeed, subject to different circumstances. The issue of applying successful policies from the public sector to the private sector, and vice versa, opens a long-standing debate over difficulties associated with policy transfer. Common (2004:36) discusses policy learning and transfer and emphasises that although the practice of looking to solutions based on the experience of one of the two sectors is well established, there are still important contextual differences. Among these is the environment within which each functions. While the private sector is controlled by the highly competitive business environment, the public sector is more affected by the political environment through institutional mechanisms (e.g. strategies and explicit models). MacAlister (2001) (cited in Common 2004:42) discussing the UK’s experience notes that although the UK’s Public-Private Partnership initiative is receiving international attention, it is “wrong to say the model can just be transplanted elsewhere”.

Hence, differences between the two sectors cannot be ignored, and what can easily be applied to the civil service in Oman may not be appropriate in the private sector. The Minister’s argument that the private sector should follow the footsteps of the civil service to implement Omanisation is questionable. For instance, government may tolerate high costs to employ Omanis in pursuit of long-term objectives, yet such losses are not acceptable in the private sector, where profitability is a requirement.

Nowadays Oman faces a number of challenges in its efforts to develop skilful, educated, and efficient human resources that could lead to a successful Omanisation policy in the private sector. The 2002 Statistical Report (MNE 2002:109-117) indicates that 83.5% of occupations in that sector (529,998 out of the total 634,528) are occupied by expatriates; one third of them are employed in principal and auxiliary engineering occupations, and another third in the services sector. Al-Lamki (1998: 377) evaluated the Omanisation policy in the private sector in Oman and lists a number of reasons for the low participation rate of Omanis. Among these are: 1) the education, skills and training demanded are not available or are not sufficient among Omanis compared to expatriates, 2) wages, promotions, working hours, and job security in the public sector are much

better, hence, citizens are willing to wait for years to get employed in government, and 3) efforts made by government agencies responsible for implementing Omanisation in the private sector lack co-ordination, particularly in education and training. Al-Lamki (1998: 377) emphasises that the consequence is the prevalence of a belief that Omani workers are less skilled, trained, educated and committed than their foreign counterparts.

Omanis, especially if well educated, have high expectation and look primarily to the public sector as a prestigious occupation when compared to the private sector. Until now, many Omanis have typically not been prepared to accept jobs that expatriates are willing to do. Further, the private sector is not encouraged to employ Omanis since Omanis expect high salaries, and are not competitive when compared to expatriates.

Sajwani (1996) argues that the only sound long-term means of ensuring that Omanis take a greater role in the private sector is to design a sound human resource development (HRD) policy. He explains that the private sector will continue to rely on expatriates since HRD (education and training of the population to produce an effective workforce) in Oman will take a much longer time and effort than economic growth. Looney (1992) and Fonts (2004) who carefully evaluated employment policy in Oman are convinced that there is good scope in the long term to reduce the reliance on expatriates, but only if the Omani government can develop human resource planning (HRP) effectively.

Within this context, Thomson (2002) emphasises that HRP is one of the key activities of HRM as it addresses how appropriately qualified people may fill jobs at the right time. He indicates that national or sectoral planning supports government policy-making and it starts by considering staffing levels in relation to strategic goals. O'Doherty (2001) adds that a strategic framework for HRP establishes the links between strategic objectives and numbers of posts required (demand) and strategic options to ensure that projected vacancies are filled by appropriately qualified people (supply) (the framework of stages for HRP is provided in Appendix 13). In Oman, although the responsibility of securing better job opportunities is executed through coordination of various public authorities, the Ministry of Civil Service is, indeed, the most responsible. This institution, as a central government agency responsible for employment planning, is expected to identify the number and kinds of employees the labour market requires through practical HRP policies.

Al-Oraimy has important views on this matter.¹³ He indicates that there is now a surplus of graduates, either because of the shortage of government posts or because their fields of study are no longer seen as necessary. He suggests that there should be linkage between higher education and manpower planning policies in a long-term plan. To overcome the specialisation issue, Al-Oraimy believes that the concerned government agencies should assist graduates of the fields of study required before they select their area of specialisation. He advises that employers in the private sector must be involved with government in assessing the type of education and vocational training required.

Accordingly, the testing ground of the success of HRP in Oman would be the level of Omanisation in the private sector. Successful policies require efficient HRP that would encourage both employers and job seekers to participate. Otherwise, Oman may face a serious unemployment problem that could have the capacity to threaten country's stability. This was clearly emphasised by many commentators (e.g. Rippenburg 1998; Peterson 2004c; Katz 2004). Katz (2004:69), in fact, argues that even with successful Omanisation policy in the private sector, Oman cannot solve the unemployment issue given the population growth, low petroleum reserves, and the limited non-oil economy.

5.4.2. Gender Employment Equality

Equal opportunity for women is another persistent issue in the contemporary Omani civil service. The 2003 Annual Report of the MCS indicates that women represent 34% of the total workforce (35114 out of 95158). Although this rate may be seen as low if compared to the overall gender population rate (49.1% according to MNE, 2002: 47), it can be said that women's participation in workforce is satisfying, particularly during the last decade. For example, while women represented only 6.3% of the total workforce in 1980, this rate reached 10% by 1990 and the biggest improvement was in the last thirteen (1990 to 2003) when that rate jumped to 34.4% (see Table 5).

Table 5.5: Participation of Omani women in the Civil Service during the period 1980-2003

Year	Men	Women	Total	% of Women
1980	20261	1364	21625	6.3
1990	39584	4440	44024	10.0
2000	45293	18641	63934	29.1
2003	51886	27213	79099	34.4

Source: Based on DC (1993:37), MCS (1999b:23), MCS (2001:15), and MCS (2004: 12, 13, and 17).

¹³ Interview with Dr. Said Al-Oraimy, Vice-Dean of the Faculty of Engineering, SQU, Muscat, 27 July 2004

In fact, the year 2003 witnessed a dramatic change, as for the first time in the history of the Omani civil service women recruited exceeded men. Out of the 5899 civil servants recruited that year, 3208 were females, representing 54.3% (MCS 2004:12-17). However it seems that improvement in terms of quantity was not matched by quality improvement. As we will observe, many obstacles still face women in filling key and managerial posts.

The incentive for improvement in women's participation in the public bureaucracy, in particular, and in the public life, in general, was successful in Oman primarily because the change comes from the top through the initiatives of Sultan Qaboos, rather than from the bottom. Rippenburg (1998) clearly observed this fact when she critically evaluated the gender relations in Oman. She emphasises that the effectiveness of improving females role in Oman was unique in the Gulf States because the ruler and the ruling elite were in favour of the change, and, accordingly, gender issues have been accommodated and absorbed into the traditional social patterns easily. Since the early 70s, Sultan Qaboos stressed that one of the objectives of his government is to secure equality to all components of the society (MI, Speeches of H.M. 1991) and this was translated during his rule in various aspects. The Basic Law, for instance, is a good reflection:

All citizens are equal before the law, sharing the same rights and duties. There is no distinction between them because of their gender, origin, colour, language, religion, sect, or social status" (Oman 1996: Article 17).

However, some commentators think there is still a tendency in Oman to give priority to men when filling key and managerial posts, even if women have the same, or even better, qualifications (e.g. Khoury and Moghadam 1995; Al-Lamki 2000; McElwee and Al-Riyami 2003). Khoury and Moghadam (1995), for instance, argue that despite their achievements, women have limited access to senior posts in the public service.

The researcher examined the above assumption by comparing the distribution of males and females in the year 2004 based on their payment grades and posts. It was found that the assumption is true to a large extent. The rates revealed that women are far less represented in senior and managerial posts. As can be seen in the table below (Table 5.6), out of the 62 grades designated for the Deputy Ministers posts, only 4 are occupied by women and only 18.7% (1107 out of 5903) of the grades of the First Group designated for managerial posts are filled by females. It was found that most female civil servants occupy standard occupations in the Second Group grades (teaching and nursing posts), which are lower paid (for detail, see the salary scale in Table 6.1, p.197).

Table 5.6: Bias towards men in senior grades and posts in the Omani Civil Service (2004)

Grade Level	Type of grades	Number of occupants	men	women	% of Women
The Special Grade (Deputy Minister Level)	Senior	62	58	4	6.4
The Special Schedule (Special skilled grades posts, e.g. Doctors, Engineers, Experts)	Senior	1796	1455	431	23.9
The First Group of General S. (Executive and managerial posts)	Senior	5903	4796	1107	18.7
The Second Group of General S. (Educational entry level post)	Ordinary	67626	36706	30920	45.7*
The Third Group of General S. (Services occupations)	Ordinary	19771	17029	2742	13.8

Source: Based on: MCS (2004:42).

* These grades are mostly designated to teachers, nurses and ordinary administrative assistance posts.

Generally, worldwide women tend to be employed in the lower grades of the echelon. For instance, Norway which has the highest number of women in senior civil service posts in the OECD, the figure is only 15% (Peters 2001). Newell (1995:140) discusses the reasons behind such low representation and attributes mainly to stereotypes about women in the workplace. She indicates that the idea that women are less concerned with advancement is precisely the attitude typically held by those in positions of power who select and promote; “Think manager equals think male.”

In Oman, Al-Lamki (2000) argues women are typically assumed to be less ambitious and less career-oriented. This stereotype reflects the tradition that an individual woman is unlikely to get selected to key posts. She argues that a woman of childbearing age may not be seen as a potential candidate for a managerial post and her candidacy may be rejected quickly, due to fears that she will have a child at some later stage, which would mean extra maternity costs and absence from work. She indicates that this real reason, of course, will be camouflaged with a number of acceptable alternative explanations.

Rippenburg (1998) refers obstacles to allow women to fill key posts in Oman to social and traditional reasons. She indicates that while the Omani government, similar to most Arab and Muslim governments, affirms that it is a champion of women’s rights and claims to support their advancement in all spheres equal to men, there is clear evidence that women are not equally treated when managerial or senior posts are to be filled. She argues that while women’s education and training is generally similar to men’s, women in both sectors in Oman face discrimination due to traditions and culture. The States’

Report issued by the U.S. supports Rippenburg's argument. This report is issued annually and evaluates equality issues worldwide; this is what it says about Oman:

Some educated women have attained positions of authority in government, business, and the media. In the bureaucracy, the country's largest employer of women, many educated women face job discrimination because prospective employers fear they might resign to marry or raise families. Several women employees in the Government have complained that they have been denied promotion in favour of less capable men (U.S. Department of State, 2004).

McElwee and Al-Riyami (2003) observe that the low participation of women in key posts in Oman is due to the fact that female employment in such posts is regarded as "traditionally unaccepted". They argue that although there have been some change in social views and attitudes towards women's role (e.g. can vote, own property, and so on), gender differences exist and are enshrined in the Qur'an and in the *Shari'a* (the Islamic Law). They explain that woman's role is seen in the family as a wife and mother and employers, including those in the public sector, still feel that women's promotion to key posts will interfere with work productivity. McElwee and Al-Riyami (2003:2) add that this phenomenon also exists in the private sector. They discuss the issue in relation to the Omanisation policy and write:

Although the Omani Government has introduced measures to restrain foreign labour in order to accommodate more Omanis into the labour force, it could be argued that paying too little attention to the participation of national women in the labour force has undermined this policy. Women as a resource are highly under-utilised due to interactions of cultural, economic and educational forces that influence choices of career, career progression and labour marketability.

With a gender population ratio of nearly 50/50, the percentage of female employees in Oman (private and public) is still unbalanced, particularly in key posts, as we illustrated in Table 5.6 above. The low representation is attributed to lack of opportunities rather than lack of interest from the part of women. However, Oman is still among the more progressive of the monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula in introducing women into the development process. By the year 2005, women in Oman have the right to vote and the right to be elected to both *Majlis* (parliaments). Four women already occupy ministerial posts. In the private sector, women play a key role as both owners and employees.

5.5. Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has given an account of the development of public personnel institutions and laws responsible for recruiting and promoting public servants in Oman before and after the renaissance of the modern state in 1970. The state has emerged and developed

over that same period. This has been marked by the growth of development activities in all fields and led to the establishment of a large professional public sector; growing in size and in the quality of those who run it. The government acknowledges the demands for professionalism and, accordingly, specialised personnel institutions were created and became increasingly active and several personnel laws were enacted to regulate the functions of these institutions.

The chapter discussed the achievements and deficiencies of three personnel institutions and three personnel laws, including the proposed Civil Service Law. Attention was drawn to the implications of these developments for recruitment policy. It was observed that a major factor that contributed to the inefficiency of recruitment in the public service was the unsystematic modifications of rules and the varying regulations. This situation resulted in a state of confusion and lack of unified procedures. Ultimately, subjective interpretation became the driving force that strengthened the personalised orientation of the system and allowed the exercise of favouritism and nepotism when public servants are recruited or promoted to public posts. As explained previously, the public bureaucracy in Oman exists in a social context where public servants have the obligation to serve the interests of their social units first. Some of our interviewees argued that if the public personnel system in Oman lacks clear-cut procedures, bias becomes not only commonplace, but a socially accepted behaviour (see pp. 178-179).

The function of the Civil Service Council (CSC) as the supreme public personnel body entrusted with legislative and executive powers, was examined. The discussion revealed that planning and development of personnel policies have almost been excluded from this Council's agenda. Instead of delegating authority to public agencies to solve their day-to-day problems in order to focus on its main role, the CSC consumes most of its time dealing with simple legal problems left behind by the vague articles of the Civil Service Law. On the other hand, the central public personnel agency (the MCS) which is empowered to implement the council's policies faces other major deficiencies. This institution has not succeeded to implement systematic recruitment measures to secure merit procedures, or equal opportunity values, as demanded by the declared regulations. The creation of an independent public personnel agency in 1989 indeed represented a key step in centralising procedures and maintaining control. However, it was observed that the efforts of this institution were far short of securing merit and EEO principles.

With regard to laws, the absence of merit procedures was attributed to the lack of clarity and consistency of the related regulation. Successive personnel laws have suffered from excessively ambiguously worded rules that lead to endless and meaningless procedures. Although the 1980 CSL marked the first recognition of merit as the base of filling public posts, in reality this system has not been put into practice until now. The current law defines no grades or scales in relation to position and person specification and, instead, it lists financial grades, their salaries, and the qualification required to fill them. As will be seen in further detail in the next chapter, this simplicity cannot secure merit.

Oman, like other developing countries, faces major challenges to maintain an effective public workforce to keep pace with the rapid expansion. In the last section we discussed some of the major challenges. Among the most pressing is the lack of HRP strategy to absorb the increasing numbers of Omanis expected to enter the labour market. Reducing reliance on expatriates in the private sector requires efficient planning. However, it was observed that a sound human resource policy is still lacking, and linkage between education, manpower, and market demands is still an unsolved issue. We explained that successful Omanisation policy requires new organisational methods to be adopted, particularly coordination between concerned public agencies. Another major obstacle is the limited access offered to women to occupy key posts. Evidence was provided on how women are not equally treated (see Table 5.6). Females in Oman are still assumed to be less ambitious and less career-oriented and employers, in both sectors, feel that their promotion to key posts will interfere with work productivity. This must be changed and the workforce should benefit from this essential human resource asset.

Although public personnel institutions and laws in Oman have significantly changed and developed over the past 35 years, it was observed that there has been a general absence of change driven by ideology or theory. That is, most of the reforms in the past seem to have the feature of being limited in scope and ambition to deal with the real problems. The system is characterized by overstaffing, lack of systematic HRP policies, including training and career development, and, above all, lack of efficient recruitment that can reflect the merit and EEO principles declared by the country's regulations.

In general, confusion, uncertainty and the absence of meaningful procedures are the characteristics of the current institutions and laws. In the next chapter, the emphasis will be on the current recruitment and selection in both policy and practice.

Chapter Six

Recruitment and Selection in Oman: Policy and Practice

6.1. Introduction

The preceding chapter described institutions and laws responsible for public personnel management in Oman. The chapter highlighted some pressing issues of direct relevance, namely, the characteristics of the workforce, the employment policy, obstacles women face to have equal access to key posts and the effectiveness of the Omanisation policy. In this chapter, the focus is on recruitment and selection policy and practice. An analytical description of these two personnel activities is provided. The aim is to introduce the reader to the procedures followed when the system recruits and selects its employees to all grades and post levels, and the extent to which these procedures reflect the merit and equality objectives declared by the law. As a tool of analysis, the model of identified in Chapter Two is used to expose areas of recruitment and selection that fail to conform to “best practice”. By doing so, weaknesses can be exposed.

Before discussing recruitment and selection, the chapter starts by furnishing the reader with the structure of the grades and payment scales adopted, followed by a descriptive analysis of the position classification system used. As mentioned, it is difficult, if not impossible, to evaluate recruitment policy and procedures without comprehending these key issues and how they interlock with other personnel functions. At the end, attention is drawn to the legal implications of current practice. This will include a discussion about the effectiveness of the current decentralised system of control and consistency of the current recruitment and selection practices with the merit principles declared and demanded by the constitution.

6.2. The Structure of Grades and Payment Scales

Theoretically, all matters relating to public personnel regulations are now governed by the rules of the 1980 Civil Service Law and its Executive Regulation of 1984. According to these rules, civil servants are classified into two payment scales; the General Schedule, and the Special Schedule. Employees appointed to these two

schedules are considered “permanent career civil servants and are subject to all rules and regulations of the law” (Oman 1980:8, Article 14).

The General Schedule is the main schedule in the hierarchy where the grades of the massive majority of employees are located. The MCS (2004:42) (statistics until 31/12/2003) shows that 98% of employees hold grades in this schedule (83362 out of 95158), while the remaining 2% (1796 out of 95158) occupy the Special Schedule.

As illustrated in Table 6.1 below, the Special Schedule comes at the top of the hierarchy. It consists of five grades designed for employees who occupy posts requiring special skills (e.g. medical doctors, lecturers, experts, and so on). Occupants of these grades usually hold higher academic degrees (e.g. PhDs, Masters) and have special experience and training. With the exception of Special Grade (a Deputy Minister grade) in the General Schedule, grades of the Special Schedule are the highest paid in the Omani civil service system. The MCS (2004:43) indicates that there are 1796 employees in this schedule, 1514 of whom are non-Omanis (88.6%). Within this context, it has to be mentioned that the low participation of Omanis in this schedule is due mainly to the fact that this schedule was originally designed for non-Omanis who joined during the early stage of development. It was found necessary, at that stage, to create a separate payment scale to attract non-Omanis with special skills and qualifications. After 2001, however, due to the improvement educational attainments and work experiences of Omanis, the CS Council decided to open this schedule to Omanis (MCS 2002c). Since then, the numbers of Omani in the Special Schedule have increased dramatically, and are expected to exceed those of non-Omanis within the next 5-10 years.¹

Next to the grades of the Special Schedule comes the General Schedule which consists of 23 grades; one separate grade on the top called the Special Grade, and 22 grades divided horizontally into three grade groups. The Special Grade is the highest in the ladder, while grade 3/8 is the lowest. Special Grade is a Deputy Minister grade filled only through royal decrees. The First Group consists of six grades designated for senior civil servants and managerial posts, the Second consists of eight grades designed for entry-level posts of those who join the service with academic degrees, while the Third consists of eight grades and is devoted to service occupations (Drivers, Gardeners, etc). A new Bachelor degree holder, for instance, would start at grade 2/2 (grade 2 of the

¹ Interview with Sajida Al-Allawati, the Minister’s Advisor for Legal Affairs, MCS, 14 July 2004

Second Group) receiving 275 OR a month. S/he will move vertically in that grade by receiving a yearly incremental 15 OR until s/he reaches the maximum basic salary of the grade s/he occupies or is promoted to the next grade (2/1).

Table 6.1: Structure of grades and payment scales of Civil Servants in Omani Rials*

Grades Schedule	Grades group	Grade	Basic Salary	Fixed Allowances**	Monthly Salary	Yearly Increment
The Special Schedule	None	A	1658	727	2385	50
		B	1271	687	1958	40
		C	981	617	1598	30
		D	787	607	1384	20
		E	605	577	1182	15
The General Schedule	The Special Grade		1500	650 + gov.car	2150	--
	The First Group	1/1	800	680	1480	40
		1/2	545	497	1042	15
		1/3	494	497	991	15
		1/4	448	377	825	12
		1/5	412	395	807	12
		1/6	376	385	761	12
	The Second Group	2/1	327	385	712	10
		2/2	279	227	506	7
		2/3	218	227	445	7
		2/4	214	116	330	5
		2/5	187	94	281	5
		2/6	161	82	243	5
		2/7	134	70	204	5
		2/8	115	70	185	4
	The Third Group	3/1	187	63	250	6
		3/2	165	63	228	6
		3/3	143	63	206	6
		3/4	120	63	183	4
		3/5	102	63	165	4
		3/6	92	63	155	3
3/7		79	63	142	3	
3/8		64	63	127	3	

Source: Based on Oman (1980:25, 26) and Oman (1984:71,77-78 and 120).

* At present each .73 Omani Rial equals one U.K£.

** These are Housing, Water, Electricity, Telephone, and Transport allowances.

According to article 30 of the CS Law, the appointed employee is eligible for a salary starting at the minimum level of the grade and eligible for an annual increment in January each year if s/he fulfils certain conditions. These are to be rated “acceptable” in the annual performance report and to be under the maximum range of the grade being occupied. Articles 35 of the law and 56 of the ER authorise ministers in public agencies to give more than one increment if an employee: 1) receives an “excellent” rating in the

performance report, 2) has spent no less than one year in service, and, 3) sufficient funds are available in the allocated budget.²

Civil servants are eligible for various allowances; some are fixed, while others are occupational. Articles 58 and 59 of the ER organise the fixed allowances. As listed in Table 6.1 above, these consist of accommodation, electricity, water, and transportation allowances. These allowances are equal to approximately 40-50% of the total monthly salary, depending on employees' grades (for details, see Oman 1984:71, 77, 84 and 120). The law also lists a number of occupational allowances and compensations. Article 53 of the ER organises overtime allowances, article 60 lists training and study allowances, Article 61 regulates amounts allowable for official missions inside and outside Oman, and Article 62 discusses danger allowances (e.g. X-ray sections, electricity posts, germ and scientific laboratories). Various appendices are attached to the ER indicating amounts of allowances and procedures to obtain them (Oman 1984:85-145).

It is generally agreed that to have an effective workforce, attention should be given to salaries, allowances, and compensation. Many scholars have described these as having a direct effect on employees' efficiency and moral conduct (e.g. Cayer 1986; Armstrong 1999; Claydon 2001). Cayer 1986, for instance, explains that if the public service is to attract and retain highly qualified employees, attention must be drawn to the pay policy, which should be flexible to meet the competition for recruiting skilled and talented personnel and to retain those in service. Armstrong (1999) adds that payment policies need to be developed, improved, and modified to keep pace with challenges of inflationary pressures and accelerating economic and social changes.

Unlike in the UK, the improvement in oil prices during the 1970s encouraged the Omani government to increase salaries and wages several times. The first was in 1974 when salaries were increased by 15%, the second followed in the year 1975 when they were increased further by 10%, the third was in 1979 which gave another 10%, while the last increment was in 1980 by 10% (a total of 45% in a six-year period). Annual increments, allowances, and other compensatory wages were increased, as well.

However, the payment system has been static since 1980 and salaries have never been changed or modified, despite inflationary pressures. The payment system has become an obstacle to creating a more appropriate work environment and is causing negative

² Interview with Said Adaim, the Director of the Legal Department, MCS, 5 August, 2004

circumstances. First, newly qualified applicants hesitate to join the service if conditions are compared to the private sector where salaries for qualified and talented applicants are competitive. The civil service ends up hiring incompetent citizens who have no option except the public service. Second, and according to Al-Yahmadi *et al.* (2002), the low pay system has a direct negative impact on the efficiency of the work of the existing employees and their morale. This can be seen in employee turnover rates during the period from 1996-1998, when more than 12,000 employees left the service benefiting from the early retirement system (see Figure 4.3, p. 140). The issue of turnover due to low salaries was mentioned in several reports issued by international organisations invited to evaluate the system (e.g. World Bank 1995:96, UNDP 2004:23). Apart from other obstacles, these reports confirm that qualified staff are shifting to the private sector due to “unsatisfactory salaries and compensations.”

It is obvious that the current pay system requires major modification to cope with new challenges. A close review of Table 6.1 reveals that there is a huge gap between salaries, mainly between the First and the Third grade groups. The same gap can be seen in the annual increments. While grade 1/1 receives 40 OR annual increment, grades in group Three receive only 3 OR (equal to 4 U.K £). Hence, the actual increase benefits the top grades, but for lower grades, makes hardly any difference.

When asked about government plans in relation to the pay system in the public service, Al-Allawati responded that this issue is among the Ministry’s priorities.³ She indicated that the MCS is convinced that salaries must be improved and this concern has already been raised to the Council of Ministers. However, she added, the matter is not entirely the concern of the MCS; rather a group of ministries are involved. The Ministry of Finance, for instance, is hesitant because of financial resources, while the Ministry of Labour objects based on the argument that salary improvements in the public sector will deter the Omanisation policy in the private sector. The latter believes that a huge gap in salaries already exists in entry level jobs in favour of the public sector and any improvement will undermine efforts to encourage young Omanis to join the private sector. She concluded, “Nothing is foreseeable to stabilised salaries in the near future.”

Further, all allowances are paid only to personnel on the job. There are many circumstances in which these allowances are denied, such as when on vacation and sick

³ Interview with Sajida Al-Allawati, the Minister’s Advisor for Legal Affairs, MCS, 14 July 2004

leave. Most essential, allowances are not included in the pension system; whether these are fixed or occupational. Currently fixed allowances make up 50% of the total salary earned (see Table 6.1). The pension system in Oman is calculated based on the basic salary only. Therefore, employees' income when they retire drops dramatically because the maximum that can be received is 80% of the basic, not the total. For instance, if an employee retires when last occupying grade 1/6 and receiving a monthly salary of 761 OR, s/he ends up after 20 years of service with no more than 300 OR (40% of the total salary). Many Omani writers discussed this issue (e.g. Al-Siabi 1998; Maawali 2000; Al-Ameri and Al-Farsi 2004) and emphasised that the government must solve this problem while the size of the workforce is manageable to secure the required funding. When the Director General of the Civil Servants' Pension Funds was asked about the reason for not calculating retirement pension based on the total salary, he elaborated: ⁴

From a legal point of view, all allowances [fixed or occupational] are considered a courtesy for particular duties or extra efforts made by employees during the service. Hence, these allowances are not part of the basic salary. According to the Pension Funds Law what is not part of the basic salary is not part of the retirement salary.

An expert from the Institute of Public Administration in Muscat discussed the impact of the current pay system on professional personnel (e.g. medical doctors, lecturers, etc).⁵ She indicated that a number of scattered regulations have been issued since 1980 to compensate certain occupations and for the special skills and efforts involved in their occupations, and it is for these that allowances, compensation, and salary differentials are paid. The expert emphasised that since these allowances, in theory at least, are granted in recognition of professional and technical ability, they should be included in the basic salary and reflected in the retirement system. She stresses that employees should be entitled to these allowances permanently and under all circumstances; "Such measures would certainly serve the basic principle of equal pay declared in the law. However, and as usual, the actual practice is different from the declared principles."

6.3. Position Classification

As mentioned earlier, it is impossible to apply the concept of the right employee for the right position and the policy of equal pay for equal work without an effective system for classification of positions. This system is the cornerstone of managing public personnel

⁴ Interview with Ahmed Al-Muhrazi, the Director General of the Pension Funds, 5 August 2004.

⁵ Interview with Abdullah Al-Azizi, the Director of Personnel Department, IPA, 15 August 2004.

affairs and is the essential foundation for all processes leading to effective recruitment and selection, appraisal, training and career development (Armstrong 1999, Claydon 2001). Torrington *et al.* (2002), for instance, emphasise that organisations will inevitably be adversely affected unless the importance and principles of post classification are understood and skilfully applied in practice.

Position classification under the Omani civil service regulations is organised through article 14 of the CS Law (Oman 1980:8) and Articles 7 and 8 of the ER (Oman 1984:63-68). These articles, together, led to the formation of Appendix 4A of the ER, which defines educational attainments and experiences required to occupy all grades of the ladder. Article 14 of the CS Law (Oman 1980:8) indicates:

Jobs are either permanent or temporary. Each Unit of the State's Administrative System has to create a schedule for permanent jobs, including job descriptions, titles, duties, responsibilities, functions, and authorities, occupying conditions, and level in one of the grades or classes laid down in the schedules attached to this law. Job schedule should be approved by the Head of the agency and jobs must be created within the job structure scope and funds in the general budget.

Although the above article appears to describe a decentralised system of position classification, the following articles of the ER reveal that the system uses a centralised approach. In practice, government agencies are responsible for classifying their posts, but subject to the approval of the Directorate of Organisation and Job Classification in the MCS. Article 7 of the ER (Oman 1984:4) asks each public agency to formulate its own permanent job scales based on the specific measures put by the MCS; measures should include:

Post's title: should be short and can specify the work led to conditions and difficulties.

Post's general description: should contain; 1) its level in the organisational chart, 2) its general duties, 3) the required supervision over the post from others, and 4) the post's supervision over others.

Post's person specifications: should include the minimum educational qualification required, years of experience and required skills.

Post's obligation: by categorising the post with posts of similar nature and by distinguishing between permanent and seasonal duties.

Post's grade: by evaluating the grade of the post within the scales attached in the CSL.

Of paramount importance, the above regulations lead to Appendix 4A of the ER which lists educational qualifications and work experiences required to occupy all grades of the hierarchy (Oman, 1984:63-68). Table 6.2 below summarises these requirements. In this table, the symbol (*) indicates the educational degree a new civil servant would

require to have in order to occupy a given grade, while the number above them relates to years of work required to occupy the next higher grade with that same educational qualification. For instance, a person with a High School Certificate is immediately appointed in grade 4/2 (grade 4 of the Second Group of the General Schedule). With two years experience, the person can be appointed in grade 3/2, and with four years experience s/he can occupy grade 2/2. The same rubric applies for other grades.

Table 6.2: Educational qualifications and work experience required to occupy grades in the Omani Civil Service hierarchy

Schedule	Grades group	Grade	PhD Degree	Master Degree	BA/BSc Degree	2 Years Diploma	High School	Basic Educa.
The Special Schedule	None	A	12	14	16	Not allowed		
		B	10	12	14	=	=	
		C	8	10	12	=	=	
		D	6	8	10	=	=	
		E	*	6	8	=	=	
The General Schedule	The Special Grade		Deputy Minister grade. Appointment is made though royal degree. No particular qualification or experiences required					
	The First Group	1/1	Occupied only though the approval Civil Service Council					
		2/1	4	10	12	14	16	20
		3/1	2	8	10	12	14	18
		4/1	*	6	8	10	12	16
		5/1		4	6	8	10	14
		5/1		2	4	6	8	12
	The Second Group	1/2		*	2	4	6	10
		2/2			*	2	4	8
		3/2				*	2	6
		4/2					*	4
		5/2						*+6
		6/2						*+4
		7/2						*+2
	8/2						*	
	The Third Group	1/3	20 years of work experience relevant to the post					
		2/3		16	=	=	=	
		3/3		12	=	=	=	
		4/3		8	=	=	=	
		5/3		6	=	=	=	
		6/3		4	=	=	=	
		7/3		2	=	=	=	
		8/3	Physical ability to perform the post					

Source: Based on Appendix 4A of the ER (Oman, 1984:63-68).

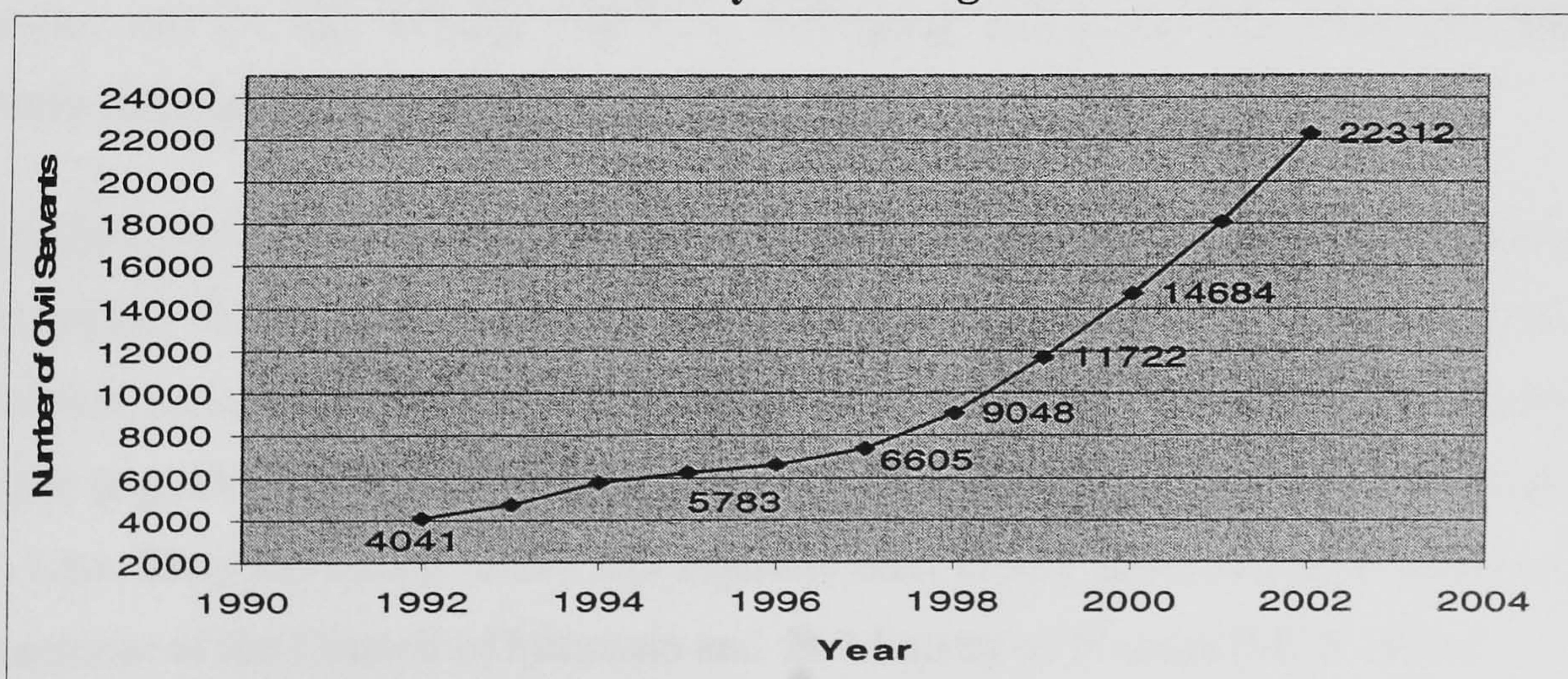
Article 8 of the ER (Oman 1984:4), on the other hand, regulates procedures to be followed to modify, create or abrogate posts; the article states:

Jobs schedules mentioned in article 7 may be modified if there is a need to create new jobs, abrogate existing jobs, or redefine functions and duties, whether by additional or diminution, and reevaluate them in coordination with the Ministry of Civil Service.

Although the law lists academic qualifications as requirements to fill grades, the actual practice reveals that these are not as straightforwardly implemented as they appear. Academic qualifications are applied only for new appointments, but not to those who are already in the service. The law allows an employee in the service to occupy a grade for which s/he does not have the basic academic qualifications through grade-to-grade promotion (to be discussed later) which normally occurs every four years. For instance, the minimum academic qualification required to occupy grade 2/2 is a Bachelor Degree. However, an employee who was appointed at the start of his/her career at grade 4/2 with a High School Certificate can occupy grade 2/2 after 4-8 years of service through two grade-to-grade promotions. Hence, academic qualifications are linked only to the initial recruitment, while seniority (years in the service) later becomes the foundation for occupation of higher grades and promotions.

At the top of the General Schedule comes the Special Grade. Appointment to this grade is through royal decree and its occupants are political appointees (e.g. Undersecretaries, Ambassadors). Appendix 4/A of the ER excludes occupants of this grade from its rules (education and experiences). As with political appointees elsewhere, the selection criterion is left to the head of the government. In Oman, it is left to the Sultan's personal evaluation. In the past, due to the late introduction of education, it was not surprising to see people appointed to this Grade with an educational background of less than or equal to secondary school (Hassan 1990). Nowadays, however, selection criteria have changed in favour of the more educated Omanis, whose numbers has increased dramatically, particularly during the last 15 years (see Figure 6.1).

Figure 6.1: The development of the numbers of Omani Civil Servants with University and Post-graduate education



Source: Based on MCS (2003: 30-32).

The significant progress of educational facilities in Oman and the financial resources that have become available to send students and employees abroad has increased the numbers of Omanis with university and post-graduate education. This led to more weight being put on academic attainments in the civil service system. As can be seen in the above figure, the numbers of Omani civil servants who held university education during the period from 1993 to 2002 (a ten-year period) jumped from 4041 in 1993 to 22313 in 2002 (almost six times). Within this context, it has to be mentioned that the vast majority of these Omanis obtained their degrees through government scholarships. However, access to education abroad, particularly in the U.K and the U.S, is not as easy as it used to be, due to current limited resources. As we will observe in Chapter Seven, many civil servants think that no particular criterion is set for selection and relate opportunities to social influence, favouritism, and exchange of benefits.

Commentators (e.g. Hassan 1990; Peterson 2004c) argue that the new circumstances (availability of educated Omanis) helped Sultan Qaboos to become more selective when appointing officials to top government posts. Peterson (2004c:133), for instance, writes:

Oman's investment in education also began paying dividends...from a handful of PhDs in the mid-1980s, returning doctorate-holders mushroomed in the following decade. Not only did this allow many university faculty positions to be Omanized; the quality of senior-level positions was upgraded throughout the government.

Al-Ghafri, a senior official, evaluated the selection criteria to the Special Grade and argued that the principle of selection to this key grade is the Sultan's personal vision of tribal and regional balancing. He indicated that with the improvement of the quality of civil servants in terms of education, skills, and work experience, it has become easier for the Sultan now to select top officials from any given background (e.g. tribe, region, gender, and so on) without neglecting efficiency and posts' requirements; "this is clearly reflected in Sultan's latest appointments."⁶

The 2004 Statistical Report of the MCS indicates that there are 62 officials occupying the Special Grade, four of whom are women (MSC 2004:42). This number, however, does not include ministerial ranks. Ministers and holders of positions equivalent or higher (e.g. Deputy Prime Ministers, Sultan's Personal Advisors) are not subject to the CS Law. They have other codes that organise their affairs under the supervision of the Secretariat of the Council of Ministers and the Ministry of Finance (MCS 1999a).

⁶ Interview with H.E. Hammad Al-Ghafri, the Ministry's Advisor, MSC, 6 July 2004

A closer review of Table 6.2 above (p. 202) and the related CSL articles reveals that the position classification system in the public service has many shortcomings that prevent it from being effective. While the law emphasises the importance of this system in various chapters and articles, there is no systematic pattern put into practice that would enable the objectives to be achieved. The current rules only declare general principles of position classification without clear procedures for implementation. The rules listed may be accepted as guidelines, but cannot be considered a scientific personnel function. These rules seem, rather, to be general standards that agencies should acknowledge.

Based on practical experience, Al-Ameri and Al-Farsi (2004) discuss two limitations of the current position classification system in Oman.⁷ First, they argue that the aims of the system do not receive the complete understanding and commitment of government agencies. Agencies recommend promotion of employees to higher posts without being satisfied they meet the conditions of classification. Recommendation for promotion is often based on the assumption that the employee has performed his/her present job properly and accordingly is qualified to fill the proposed new post. Second, there is a shortage of qualified and trained employees in personnel departments in public agencies to sustain a sound system of position classification and to follow up its application and evaluate its results. As a result: “a truly coherent system of job classification has not been yet implemented in the civil service” (*ibid*: 71). To overcome deficiencies, they suggest that a true commitment from all parties involved is required. Promotions must be based on the post’s requirements, not on the individual who occupies it. With regard to personnel who run the system, they stress that this can be tackled through extensive and constant training of HRM directors, inside and outside the MCS.

As indicated in our model of good practice (see Ch.2, Section 2.4.2), the function of position classification comprises two components; the job description (a statement of the duties an employee is required to do) and the person specification (characteristics that an employee must possess in order to perform the duties). These two components must be specific, concise, complete, accurate, and meaningful in order to maintain effective position classification, and accordingly, merit-based recruitment and selection (Caruth *et al.* 1989:94). In the Omani system, evidence suggests that a large number of employees are performing jobs not related to the titles and specification of jobs for

⁷ The writers of this article occupy Department Directors posts in the MCS. Said Al-Ameri is the Director of Jobs Classification, while Ahmed Al-Farsi is the Director of Jobs’ Budget Department.

which they are engaged. This conclusion was reached by other Omani researchers based on empirical evidence (e.g. see Muharami 1993:87; Maawali 2000:122).

Muharami (1993) indicates that the absence of coherent positions classification in Oman results in many difficulties in the public personnel system, leading to considerable frustration among employees at various levels. His research revealed that there was a sense of dissatisfaction among public employees because of similarity in wages, regardless of distinction of duties, responsibilities, and capabilities. He notes: “the absence of coherent job classification made many employees perform their work in total contradiction to their wages, grade, and position titles.” (*ibid*: 177).

Al-Yahmadi *et al.* (2002) examined the effectiveness of training in public institutions in Oman through a survey questionnaire conducted in 2001 with 40 public agencies. Within that context, they examined the extent to which the current posts classification system fulfils its scientific objectives. Their findings were remarkable. They found that more than 56% civil servants perform jobs outside their area of speciality; “more than half of the sample did not have a clear Career Path and Job Classification” (*ibid* 206).

It is not surprising, thus, that a kind of overlapping takes place, particularly, among line managers. As mentioned, the system allows promotion to higher grades based on length of service in the current grade (seniority). As will be seen more clearly when we discuss internal recruitment, promotion to higher grades is allowed basically when employees have completed four years in their grades, regardless of education and skills required in the grades to which they are promoted. For instance, a clerk who is appointed to grade 2/4 can be promoted to grade 2/1 (department director grade) after 12 years in service through three grade-to-grade promotions, even if s/he does not fulfil the requirements of that grade. We explained that requirements are considered only during the appointment stage. It is common, therefore, to see department directors getting the same wages as employees working under their supervision. This situation is the logical result of the CSL, which looks at the employee as the core of personnel organisation, rather than the position being occupied.

When the Director General of Organisation and Job Classification in the MCS was asked about these concerns, he indicated that the MCS now has a project under way for a new position classification system, “one more suited to developments that have been

taking place in Oman personnel administration”.⁸ The aim is to advance from a non-analytical system (of steps and ranks) to an analytical system based on identified factors. In the new system, the official added, duties and responsibilities are to be analysed using accurate quantitative measures derived from scientific methods; “Unlike the current system, the new system will be built around the requirements of the job, rather than the individual.” At the conclusion of the interview, an attempt was made to find out when this project will be implemented, but the answer, not surprisingly, was, “It is subject to approval”. Similar to many plans and projects in the MCS, the project lacks clarity for implementation. We explained in Chapter Five that this project associated with a proposed CS Law (2004 CSL), which will not be implemented before 2006.

A publication issued by the MCS provides some details about the above project. It indicates that grades and grades groups will be combined into 17 grades covering 19 occupational categories (currently 29 uncategorised grades), and all grades will be grouped into one schedule (currently two schedules). The publication states:

All posts are classified by grouping them in 17 grades of 19 specialised categories (e.g. diplomatic, educational, administrative, assistance administrative, technical, assistant technical, vocational...etc). Each category includes similar posts in the nature of work, degree of duties, responsibilities, and required qualifications. Category's description includes: 1) the category title, 2) rank in salary scale, 3) analytical description of duties, and 4) person specification required to occupy posts (MCS 2002c:45).

A specialist from the MCS, when asked when this project will be put into operation, replied, “It seems that the government is not serious to provide the required funding”.⁹ He explained that this project was put forward to the Council of Ministers in 1992 and since then it has been going back and forth between the MCS and other concerned public agencies. Apart from funding, implementation requires the issue of the new CSL and its Executive Regulations. The interviewee concluded:

Twenty four years of vague job classification system cannot be underestimated. Many negative effects were witnessed, making correction a really difficult task.

6.4. Recruitment and Selection

The role of effective recruitment and sound human resource management was discussed. In the words of the IPA Personnel Department Director in Oman:

⁸ Interview with Zaki Al-Busaidi, the Director General of the Directorate of the Organisation and Job Classification, MCS, 3 August 2004.

⁹ Interview with a Specialist from the MCS who requested to remain anonymous (July 2004)

I believe the only important personnel issue within the context of the civil service system is recruitment and selection. My assumption is that, if you have the right person in the right place, you don't have to worry about anything else. If you have the wrong person in the job, there's no management system known to man that can save you."¹⁰

As we explained previously, recruitment is the process of persuading and attracting suitably qualified candidates to compete for vacant posts, or potentially vacant posts (Parry 1994). In order to attract an adequate number of qualified candidates to apply for posts, effective and well-defined procedures are essential. These include: 1) the process of job description, 2) the analysis of recruitment sources (to determine where suitable candidates are likely to be found, e.g. inside or outside the organisation, 3) methods of announcement, and 4) contacting candidates for the selection process (Hughes 2003).

In Oman, the CS Law considers merit as the fundamental base for all recruitment and selection process. The aim is to maximize the chances of the most qualified personnel being chosen and to ensure a degree of equality among citizens where no one is excluded due to any non-job related criteria. According to the Director General of Employment and Training in the Ministry of Civil Service:

*Neutrality is intended to prevent patronage. Occupational ability, such as skills, training, educational qualifications, and experience to perform the job, is the basis for selection. Those who do not have the required ability can be fairly eliminated.*¹¹

However, as will be observed in the upcoming discussion, the actual practice is different. Prior to 1997, recruitment to all vacant posts was decentralized. Each public agency was responsible for conducting its own recruitment and selection procedures, except for university and college graduates who were the responsibility of the MCS. Individual ministries, upon the approval of the annual budget, discussed with the MCS their personnel demands and that the MCS, upon reception of the list of graduates, recruits candidates based on the agencies' requests. If the number of candidates exceeded vacant posts, concerned agencies were authorised to conduct their own selection procedures. No particular procedures were required to secure efficiency or merit and equality.

It was common when a person secures a top position in any public agency, immediately and vigorously to find jobs for as many relatives as possible, either in the same agency, or in other agencies through exchanging favours with other officials who sought similar gain. This phenomenon was discussed by various writers from inside and outside Oman.

¹⁰ Interview with Abdullah Al-Azizi, the Director of Personnel Department, IPA, 15 August 2004.

¹¹ Interview with A. Al-Balushi, the Director General of Employment and Training, MCS, 28 June 2004

Peterson (2004a:51), for instance, observes that some ministries during the 1990s could almost be defined by their family or tribal composition. He indicates that attempts at improvement have been handicapped by the continuing strong operation of cultural traits and the lack of adherence to the idea that the core design of a progressive recruitment policy is the reduction, if not the elimination, of nepotism. He writes:

One of the undeniable results of the rapid process of socioeconomic development of the past thirty years has been the emergence of a system of recruitment and advancement strongly based on merit, regardless of social and racial background. This is not to say that social standing, tribal or regional leadership, or family and marriage connections no longer count, but that they are employed more to tweak the system, rather than to determine its operation.

This fact was also observed by Omani writers such as Hassan (1990) and Muharami (1993). Muharami (1993) reports that in the early stages of development, ministers' relatives and friends were appointed to managerial posts without procedures. He notes: "Selection to key posts paid no attention to merit principles and appointments were strongly oriented to fulfilling personal interests and friendships" (*ibid*: 118). His finding was simple and clear: "The system has failed to reflect merit" (Muharami 1993:234).

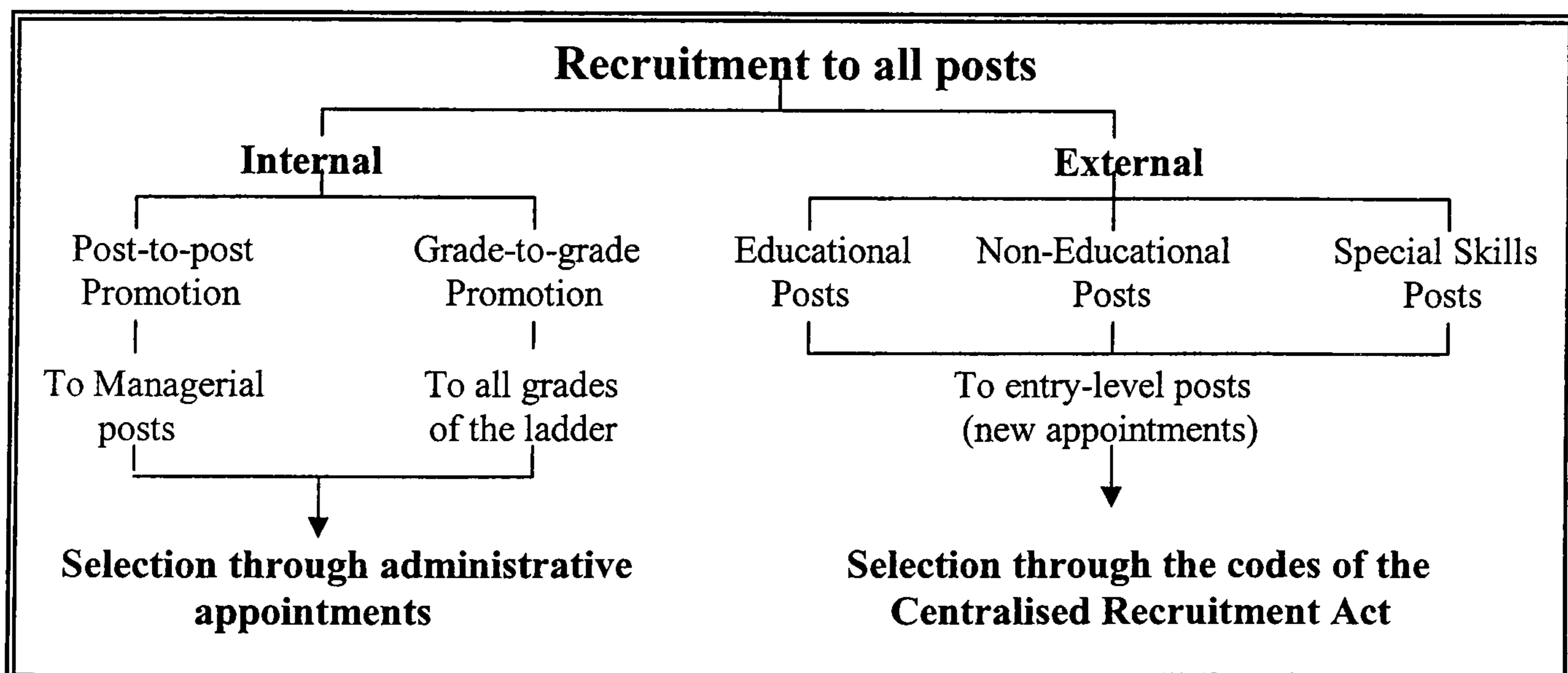
By 1997, however, the government decided to limit public agencies' authority when recruiting new employees. The Council of Ministers passed the Centralized Recruitment Act that centralised recruitment procedures to all entry-level posts in the MCS (MSC 2002c). The aim was to ensure fair treatment for all prospective candidates, but more essentially, to limit patronage, nepotism and other ascriptive criteria (Alasti 2002). Most of the officials interviewed during the course of this study were convinced that this step was the most significant step towards the actual implementation of merit principles in the Omani personnel system.¹² However, as will be shown shortly, even with this new development, external recruitment encounters major deficiencies.

Now, the MCS is responsible for implementing recruitment procedures, announcing vacancies, accepting applications, administering examinations and results for all posts filled through external recruitment. This is done by conducting national employment examinations several times a year to fulfil public agencies' demands. The procedures, however, apply to external recruitment only. Internal recruitment, which involves filling managerial posts, is still controlled by agencies according to the old patterns.

¹² Among those; H.E. Sheik A. Al-Azizi, the late Minister of the MCS, K. Al-Wahibi, the Director General of the Directorate of Civil Service.

In order to draw a clear picture about the current recruitment and selection policy and practice, an attempt was made to discuss each of the two types of recruitments followed in Oman along with their selection procedures separately. The term “recruitment” is occasionally used interchangeably with selection; however, recruitment is not an integral part of selection, but rather, selection is part of recruitment (Torrington *et al.* (1989). Therefore, selection procedures were discussed in this study along with the type of recruitment they are used for. In Oman, a distinction must be made between external and internal recruitment. The external type is connected with posts being filled by new appointees from outside the service, while the second, the internal, is linked to posts being filled by employees from inside the organisation. Different procedures are followed in each of the two types (see Figure 6.2).

Figure 6.2: Types of recruitment in the Omani Civil Service



6.4.1. External Recruitment

Currently, recruitment and selection procedures are governed by the rules of the 1997 Centralized Recruitment Act and the rules of the 1980 Civil Service Law and its Executive Regulations. Rules in these three documents replaced some of the previous personnel rules adopted since 1970 (for details, see Ch.3, Section 2.1). In essence, these rules apply to 38 public agencies representing 82% of the total public sector workforce. These agencies are the biggest job providers in Oman, hence their importance (MCS 2001, MNE 2002: 86).

Article 16 of the CS Law clarifies the general conditions required for recruitment of new appointees in the civil service as follows:

Omani nationality: a person should be an Omani citizen, but it is possible to appoint a non-Omani to a post which requires specific qualifications not available among Omanis.

Age: Eighteen years is the minimum age required for appointment and a person should be mature in order to carry out the public duties and responsibilities.

Physical fitness: a person should present a report from a certified doctor that s/he is physically and mentally fit to undertake the post.

Good conduct: a person should have good personal conduct and no one is permitted to government posts if fired from government posts for disciplinary reasons unless at least two years have passed since the date of executing the verdict and a judgment exonerating has been made.

To meet post's requirements: applicant should have the qualification, training, and skills required to fill the post.

Of paramount importance, Article 15 on Recruitment states, "Selecting of employees to fill public positions should be on the basis of merit" (Oman 1980:9). The following articles indicate that the first recruitment should be tied to educational achievements, and similarly recommend that appointment may occur either by a new appointment (external recruitment) or via promotion to a higher post of an employee who is already in the service (internal recruitment) (Oman 1980:9, Articles 16 and 17).

The Director General of Employment confirms the above two options.¹³ He indicates that agencies may satisfy their personnel needs through:

Recruiting from outside the agency; this type requires that the agency should submit a request to the MCS indicating a list of the posts needed to be filled.

Recruiting from within the agency; in this type vacant posts are filled through appointments made by the agency through a chain of transfers and promotions (will be discussed in the succeeding section about internal recruitment).

The MCS undertakes to recruit candidates from outside the service to all government agencies under the jurisdiction of the CSL as part of its function (MCS 2002c). As mentioned, this authority was given based the Centralized Recruitment Act. The process of recruitment starts immediately after the Council of Ministers approves the annual budget in January each year. Prior to this, public agencies prepare their personnel needs and after the approval of the budget they submit their requests for positions needed to be filled to the MCS. Although personnel need is decided by the start of each financial year, the recruitment procedures may occur any time during the year, mostly quarterly.

The Director of Employment Department in the MSC explained that the role of filling vacant posts is undertaken through the following four steps:

¹³ Interview with A. Al-Balushi, the Director General of Employment and Training, MCS, 28 June 2004

To search for personnel sources
To advertise the vacant posts, if required
To determine the suitable method of competition and to make reference checks
To distribute selected candidates for appointment according agencies' requirements¹⁴

As can be seen, the first and second methods are recruitment-related methods, while the remainder are selection processes. When a post is sought to be filled, the MSC begins its procedures by asking agencies about the nature of the post (post description), if not submitted with along the request. The concerned agency is expected to respond within two weeks; otherwise the MCS draws the post's description. The researcher was allowed to review some of the responses. All responses reviewed contained similar data, namely: 1) the post's title, 2) the designated grade in the ladder, 3) location of the post, and 4) the academic qualification required. As can be seen, these data fall far short of what is needed for accurate post description or job analysis in its real sense. The process of accurate job description for successful recruitment and selection was detailed when we discussed Parry's (1994) model of recruitment procedures (see Ch.2, Section 2.4.2).

When the Director of Employment was asked about this shortcoming, he replied that in most cases, the provided data satisfies MCS's requirements to conduct the procedures. If further data are required, the Department of Employment refers to the Directorate of Jobs Classification in the MSC to provide an opinion. However, this does not take account of the fact that the concerned public agency is the most qualified to provide an accurate job description based on the experience of those who supervise the post or had occupied it previously. As will be observed when we discuss selection methods, the absence of efficient job analysis results in questions asked during interviews that do not relate to or reflect the post description, but are more matters of general knowledge.

The post, then, is to be advertised in the local media. The MCS announces vacant posts in Oman's two main daily newspapers, *Oman* and *Al-Watan*. Regrettably, this method of search for personnel has become no more than routine. Based on an analysis made by the researcher of advertisements issued in the first half of the year 2004, it was found that these advertisements do not reflect sound recruitment principles. No job description is included (e.g. duties, responsibilities, salary, allowances, and so on), no details of the organisation are provided, and no account is given of why prospective applicants should be interested in the job in order to obtain a sufficient number of candidates.

¹⁴ Interview with M. Al-Kulaiby, the Director of Employment Department, MCS, 6 August 2004.

Rather than taking time to examine the options of the appropriate sources of applicants and the most productive methods to encourage them to apply, the MCS limits its search to one source only, newspapers. Based good practice merit based HRM, advertisements, instead, should be widely made through various sources (e.g. professional journals, radio, television, magazines, and posters). Successful recruitment, after all, should be accompanied by reasonable publicity to attract sufficient credible applicants. Further, the data provided in advertisements are subject to weaknesses. They do not provide adequate information about the post and why qualified citizens are encouraged to apply. Essential features, such as a well-defined job description, salary range, work conditions, and the selection process, are missing. Data about application procedures need to be included, as well. This would include the deadline and where application forms can be obtained and submitted. In summary, the actual function of recruitment is handicapped by the fact that announcement is limited to one inefficient source that does not provide clear data about the job, nor about procedures to be followed to apply for it.

After the advertisement, candidates are asked to fill in application forms. These forms are normally designed to ensure that candidates meet the post's basic requirements, namely, the personal data, such as the date and place of birth, educational and training qualifications and the employment history. After the closing date, the Employment Department in the MCS screens applications to shortlist applicants. At this first selection step, receptionists at the MCS, who are usually untrained, study applicants' details and ensure that the original certificates match their copies. These copies are to be used later for registration procedures and reference checks.

When he was asked about types of posts that are filled through external recruitment, the Director of Employment indicated that there are three types that are categorised based on the educational qualification required to fill the post. These are:

The Educational Posts
The Non-Educational posts
*The Special Skills Posts*¹⁵

The above are all entry-level posts that are subject to centralised procedures and the involvement of the MCS. Although the academic qualification is the key distinction between these three types, the nature of the post and the selection procedures followed to fill it are also factors that affect categorisation. Selection procedures used to fill each

¹⁵ Interview with M. Al-Kulaiby, the Director of Employment Department, MCS, 6 August 2004.

of these three types of posts are examined in the succeeding pages, followed by a table that summarises the selection methods and procedures followed.

6.4.1.1. Educational Posts

These posts are available at the grades of the Second Group of the General Schedule (see Table 6.2). New applicants are asked to fill in an application form that elicits personal and educational information. The form is, then, to be validated by the Employment Department in the MCS to see that the qualifications and condition requirement are met. The selection process of these posts involves written and practical examinations, as well as interviews in a later stage. Practical examinations apply only to posts which by their nature require them, for example, the technical and assistant technical, vocational and typing posts. All selection procedures, including the final selection decision, are carried out jointly by specialists from the MCS and one or two representatives from the concerned public agency.

For educational posts, recruits are drawn from universities and other educational institutions (e.g. high schools, and technical and vocational centres). Training and work experience are not required in this type of post, since applicants are mostly new graduates, but accepted if available. The first stage of the selection is the examination, which takes place usually at the Institute of Public Administration. Those who score the highest in the examinations (usually the first 20-30 candidates) will be allowed to proceed to the next selection stage, the interview. Candidates who score highest in the interview are selected based on the number of vacancies available.

6.4.1.2. Non-Educational Posts

These posts are service occupations (e.g. Gardeners, Drivers ...etc) which are available at the grades of the Third Group of the General Schedule of hierarchy. The selection process for these posts follows the same process used for educational posts, except that written examinations are not required and procedures, including the final selection decision, are determined and carried out by the MCS without the involvement of the concerned government agencies. In this type of recruitment, the final selection decision relies heavily on interview results. Interviews are usually conducted in the region where the vacant post exists.

6.4.1.3. Special Skills Posts

These posts require special talent, skills, work experience, and academic qualifications (e.g. medical doctors, engineers, university lecturers). Although they are considered as entry-level posts, applicants to this type of post come to the service with competitive skills and qualifications. Unlike the first and the second types, the numbers of posts in this type tend to exceed the number of the candidates; hence, public agencies are allowed to make direct selection as long as competition is not required and applicants are Omani nationals. These posts are available at grades of the Special Schedule and the First Group of the General Schedule, hence the highest paid (see Table 6.2). If selection procedures are required (e.g. the number applicants exceed vacant posts available), the selection processes involves interviews and examinations. In this type of recruitment, all procedures are carried out by the concerned agencies, with the intervention of the MCS.

6.4.1.4. Examination and Interviews

The Employment Department in the MCS is the authority entrusted to prepare the examinations and to conduct interviews, with the help of specialists from the Institute of Public Administration. As mentioned, the only exception is the Special Skills Posts, where the MCS plays a supervisory role and the procedures are the responsibility of the public agencies. The researcher attended some of the examinations and interviews sessions conducted during the summer of 2004.¹⁶ The observations revealed that most examinations were composed of broad questions that capture only general information. They were a mixture of multiple choice and true and false questions and were not academic in nature. Examinations concentrate on assessing the general knowledge of the candidate rather than eliciting candidate's relevant skills and specialised perceptions and experience that might be required to fill the post. Parry (1994) notes that theoretical general knowledge is an inadequate substitute for specialised knowledge and skills required to fill a particular post. In our case, however, it is apparent that examinations, as they are currently administered, cannot provide accurate and balanced assessment.

No method was used to measure the validity and the reliability of the examinations used. As we indicated in the "best practice model", validity can be measured through the content, criterion, and construct of examinations and interviews. Content validity means

¹⁶ Upon the approval of the Minister of Civil Service, the researcher was granted a permit to attend, as an observer, some examinations and interviews sessions conducted during the period 7-11/8/2004.

that the questions should be directly related to the post's duties, criterion-related validity determines whether the examination/interview used is a good predictor for assessment, while construct validity measures the basic characteristics that are judged to be essential for successful job performance (e.g. ability and flexibility). Reliability, on the other hand, measures the accuracy of the examinations over time. An examination is reliable if the same person taking it at two different times obtains the same relative scores.

In the case of Oman, the system has no criteria of such measures. During his attendance in the evaluation process, the researcher did not hear or notice any concerns brought up about the validity and the reliability of the examinations used. Each test is given in its separate context, with no common standard for relating similar tests to each other. This might be related in essence to the fact that those who conduct and administer these exams are not trained and well-qualified to design meaningful examinations. Hence, the effectiveness of the examinations used does not reflect merit and is highly questionable.

The same reasons that prevent the examinations from achieving their objectives can also be applied to interviews. Questions were broad and vague and were simply directed towards examining candidates' general knowledge. Rather than focusing on the issues that are relevant to the post, most questions concentrate on irrelevant personal matters of candidates, including appearance. Further, specialists from the MCS conduct interviews on the basis of their own understanding of the requirements for the post. Line managers and supervisors from public agencies rarely participate. In fact, their first meeting with the person selected occurs only after the candidate is officially appointed.

In best personnel management practice, post supervisors are the most qualified to create, participate, and specify the selection process. They may expect or seek unique or certain qualities that cannot be measured by externals (e.g. the MCS officials). Caruth *et al.* (1989:85) stress that line managers must be directly involved in preparing examinations and conducting interviews. Unfortunately, this principle is totally ignored in Oman.

Personnel Department Directors of some government agencies interviewed in this study emphasise that there is hardly any use of objective interviews that are effective devices for measuring specific abilities of candidates. One of the officials interviewed indicated that the selection process aims to select the "already selected." He strongly criticised the system and went further to say, "The content of tests is designed to fit the background

of particular candidates by initially formulating the requirements in a way to suit them.” If part of this is true, one can hardly say that the centralisation of selection procedures in the MCS fulfils its objective since subjectivity has not been eliminated.¹⁷

Even with the above weaknesses, examinations and interviews are avoided in many posts. Apart from the Special Skilled Posts, where direct selection is allowed, there are other recruitment methods used through which public agencies can appoint employees from external sources without merit-based procedures. Two methods can be identified within this context: 1) recruiting by exceptions, and 2) recruiting by contract. Recruiting by exceptions includes entry-level posts where a level of skills, education, training, and experience would seem to be essential. The post of Local Governor Assistant in the Minister of Interior is an example of hiring through exceptions. The civil service system gives the Minister of Interior the authority to appoint directly to this post in regional offices without any formal procedures. The Ministry of Interior governs all regional offices, where numerous vacancies exist each year.

Recruiting by contracts is the other method used to avoid the merit procedures to the entry-level posts. Article 13 of the ER provides that public agencies can create temporary posts and fill them through contractual employees. The article further indicates that these posts must be connected to a particular project, budget, and period, and should be terminated when the project is accomplished (Oman, 1984:5). However, once again, the actual practice is contradictory to regulations. Based on interviews with personnel managers in some public agencies, it appears that most of the time the MCS allows contractual employees to become permanent civil servants.¹⁸ According to these officials, recruiting by contracts gives agencies the flexibility to appoint candidates by avoiding the sophisticated recruitment routine of the MCS. In other words, recruiting by contract allows agencies to avoid the centralised procedures and, accordingly, the merit procedures. The Statistical Report indicates that 1750 employees were appointed during the year 2003 through recruiting by contracts; almost one third of the total permanent civil servants appointed that year (MCS, 2004b:16). This large number is an obvious result of the CS Law that fails to place limitations on this type of recruitment.

¹⁷ Among those officials: K. Al Balushi, the Director General of Finance and Administrative Affairs, in the Ministry of Higher Education (14 Dec 2003), and Y. Al-Khusaibi, the Director of the Department of Local Laws and Regulations in the Ministry of Legal Affairs, Hull, UK (29 Sep 2004).

¹⁸ Among those: K. Al-Balushi, the Director General of Finance and Administrative affairs, MHE, 14 Dec 2003, and A. Al-Azizi, the Director of Personnel Department, IPA, 15 August 2004.

When selected candidates are identified, the MCS notifies public agencies officially and asks for the final appointment decision to be issued by the head of the agency concerned (e.g. the Minister) in order for complete files to be furnished before they begin work. By law, new employees must serve a probationary period of three months to prove their competence (Oman, 1980:9, article 21). During this period, the employee is not allowed to be transferred or to work in another post. If s/he proves not fit, s/he can be discharged. However, the civil service does not strictly observe this provision of the law.

As can be seen, a state of confusion often results from the varying policies of external recruitment. On the one hand, the recruitment policy emphasises competence or merit as the fundamental basis for filling public posts (Oman 1980:9); on the other, many posts are directly excluded from this provision or are not filled through true merit-based procedures. Al-Azizi has a straightforward view of the current recruitment practice: “Clear procedures are lacking in current personnel system. Standardised procedures are necessary to ensure equal treatment of individuals, if merit is meant to be served.”¹⁹ Table 6.3 below summarises types of external recruitment and methods of selection followed.

Table 6.3: Summary of types of External Recruitment and selection methods

Type of Posts	Grades	Method of Selection	Experience	Training	Announcement	Exams	Interview	Implementation
Educational	Second group of Gen. Sch.	Centralised procedures	Not required	Preferable	Yes	Yes	Yes	MCS and Agency
Non Educational	Third group of Gen. Sch.	Centralised procedures	Not required	Preferable	Yes	No	Yes	MCS
Special Skills	The Private Schedule	Direct Selection	Required	Required	No	No	Yes	Agency concerned
Exceptional	All grades groups	Direct Selection	Not required	Preferable	No	No	No	Agency concerned

Source: Based on Articles 23-19 of the Civil Service Law (Oman 1980:13-14) and Articles 35-42 of the Executive Regulation (Oman 1984: 23-25).

6.4.2. Internal Recruitment (Promotion)

Recruitment through internal sources is the avenue by which key and managerial posts are filled in the Oman public personnel system. The system regards the public service as a “career service” in which the employee enters the service at the bottom of the ladder and continues until s/he resigns or retires (Recabi 2002). When discussing promotion, a

¹⁹ Interview with Abdullah Al-Azizi, the Director of Personnel Department, IPA, 15 August 2004.

distinction must be made between grade-to-grade promotion and post-to-post promotion. Each has its rules and regulations. In the following, both are discussed followed by a table that summarises policy and practice.

6.4.2.1. Grade-to-grade Promotion

This type of promotion occurs when an employee moves from one payment grade to the next payment grade in the ladder. It occurs on a group basis and does not necessarily mean that the employee is moving to a higher post. Instead, s/he receives the salary of the new payment grade while continuing in his/her current post. Further, this type of promotion is not allowed unless the employee has completed four years in the current payment grade and fulfils certain requirements, discussed below.

Articles 43-47 of the ER regulate grade-to-grade promotion (Oman 1984:13-14). Article 43 provides that a candidate can be promoted only to the grade immediately next to the current grade being occupied when the required funds are available in agency's allocated budget, while Article 44 requires that agencies should set up a Personnel Committee to evaluate candidates for promotion. Article 45 (Oman 1984:13) organises the functions of this committee. It states that the committee is to be composed of at least of three officials and its chairperson should be of no less a rank than a Director General. The article also defines the committee's responsibilities as "to look at, assess, and evaluate appointment, transfer and promotions in order to give incentives to employees up to grade 1/1 [the First grade of the First grades group of the General Schedule]."

Of paramount importance, Article 46 stresses that "...promotion should be carried out on the basis of merit" and establishes that the assessment should be based on: 1) the Performance Report, 2) Seniority, and 3) Educational Qualifications. By law, the committee's assessment should be based on the scores of these three elements combined together. Depending on the employee's grade and grade group, the scores are divided between the three elements as follows:

For the grades of the First Group: 40% for seniority, 50% for performance, and 10% for educational qualifications (executive and managerial posts).

For the grades of Second Group: 50% for seniority and 50% for performance reports (educational entry level posts).

For the grades of Third Group: 80% for seniority and 20% for performance reports (service occupations and non-educational entry level posts).

Before evaluating the above elements of grade-to-grade promotion, it is essential to start by comprehending the actual role of the Personnel Committees responsible for assessing these elements. First, these three-person committees do not have the final decision. By law, their role is limited to submitting recommendations to ministers who, in the end, choose the course of action (see Oman 1984:14, Article 47), and it is not uncommon that recommendations are turned down by ministers. Second, if recommendations are approved, they have to be sent to the MCS for checking before the final approval, and here, as well, they can be turned down.

The function of Personnel Committees was discussed with several officials from inside and outside the MCS; all agree that the committees' role is limited and not effective. Al-Balushi, for instance, indicated that members of this committee meet to approve a list prepared by the personnel department in the concerned public agency and this list, later, needs to be approved by the concerned minister.²⁰ Hence, he argued, the committee's primary role is to legitimatise "the already made decisions." He added:

The role of Personnel Committees could easily be filled by personnel departments. Their duties are not clear. This is the obvious result of the confusion that characterises the rules of the Civil Service Law.

The regulations provide that the assessment of grade-to-grade promotion should be based on performance reports, seniority, and education. Apart from these three factors, the availability of funds in each agency's budget is another key factor, although not considered as an assessment factor. Based on interviews with practitioners and researcher's close observation, the above factors are evaluated as follows:

The Performance Reports: These reports have passed through three stages; the first was from 1976-1984, the second from 1984-1988, and the third from 1988 onwards.²¹ In these three stages, procedures have developed noticeable, yet still encounter major inefficiencies. The CSL lists several rules that have to be followed. Article 48 of the ER, for instance, requires that reports should be submitted to the Personnel Committees annually, during the months of October and November, for confirmation and Committees should finish their assessments by January. Article 102 defines scores of 90 to 100 points as excellent, 65 to less than 90 as good, 50 to less than 65 as fair, and less

²⁰ Interview with K. Al-Balushi, the Chairperson of the Personnel Committee in the Ministry of Higher Education and the D.G. of the Directorate of Finance and Administrative Affairs, 14 Dec 2003.

²¹ Interview with Sajida Al-Allawati, the Minister's Advisor for Legal Affairs, MCS, 14 July 2004

than 50 as poor. Promotion is governed by the score of the grand total. Candidates who score above 50 are eligible for promotion (Oman 1984:14 and 27).

Although procedures for evaluating performance reports seem straightforward, close observation reveals certain inadequacies. First, these reports are not based on a job description since there are no clear job descriptions adopted by the system. Therefore, employees are evaluated on factors that are not sufficiently related to their jobs. Second, the system allows reports to be kept secret. This last point requires particular attention.

Al-Ameri and Al-Farsi (2004) argue that the lack of feedback causes performance reports not to be taken seriously by either supervisors or their subordinates. They indicate that although keeping reports confidential may allow evaluators to provide free opinion, experience demonstrates that the lack of feedback means that a weak performer will continue to perform his/her job poorly. Hence, the only channel through which employees know that they are performing poorly is when they are informed that their promotion is denied. Al-Ameri and Al-Farsi (2004) suggest to keep reports confidential from those whose promotion is not affected, while feedback must to be provided to employees who received an unsatisfactory rating. However, our model of good practice requires that reports should *not* be kept secret under all conditions. This is basically because restriction will defeat the major objective of assisting employees in recognizing their strengths and weaknesses in order to improve their performance.

Interviews with several practitioners reveal that it is uncommon to find a report where an employee is given below 50 points.²² These officials indicate that confidentiality leads to performance reports not being taken seriously by supervisors, who know that nothing relevant to work is expected to be gained if employees get a weak rating. Hence, in practice, all employees become eligible for promotion as long as they meet the easily obtained 50 points. As a result, employees, either qualified or unqualified, can jump to higher grades swiftly, if Personnel Committees rely on this criterion. This fact puts extra weight on the other elements of promotion,

Seniority vis-à-vis Education: Seniority is, basically, the main element of grade-to-grade promotion. Although the rules of the CS Law consider education and performance as important elements of promotion, in practice seniority is the determinant. Above, we

²² For example: A. Al-Azizi, the Director of Personnel Department, IPA, 15 August 2004; S. Adaim, the Director of the Legal Department, MCS, 5 August 2004.

explained that performance reports make no difference since all employees, regardless of their talents and skills, easily get higher than the 50 points required, while academic qualifications are practically valued only during the first appointment procedures. In practice, no real encouragement is given to ambitious employees who manage to obtain additional educational qualifications to those they started their service with.

In Oman, most public servants are largely recruited from school leavers or university graduates, rather than experienced workers transferred from other institutions (e.g. the private sector). As in other personnel systems that adopt the “Closed Career System”, civil servants pay in Oman starts at a lower level and increases year by year, and this is assumed to correlate with development of skills. So, regular pay increases and career advancement are provided on the basis of length of service. Seniority, accordingly, plays a significant role as an element of reward. This encourages senior employees to remain in the service for a lifetime in order to gain maximum benefits. However, there is an erosion of this system, with ability and performance being used as additional criteria for promotion. According to Jackson (2002: 118), more emphasis on seniority leads younger, outstanding employees to look for other alternatives by trading job security for career opportunity. Jackson’s description reflects the actual situation in Oman.

Omani commentators (e.g. Muharami 1993; Al-Yahmadi *et al.* 2002) emphasise the negative effects of such a policy. Muharami (1993:175), for instance, notes:

Although done in accordance with the regulations, the rapidly increasing number of employees promoted to top administrative grades created an inflationary problem in these grades deleting efficiency...older bureaucrats who reached top grades based on seniority was a great asset in the past; however, they have become a burden in today.

Al-Ghafri, based on a long experience in the service, provided valuable comments.²³ He indicated that seniority should not be given much weight. According to him, promoting employees to higher grades based on this factor does not serve productivity, on the one hand, and frustrates talented and skilled young employees, on the other. Further, promotion based on seniority increases the number of unqualified employees in top grades and those employees, based on the actual practice, are unable to organise, control, or supervise their posts, simply because they were not qualified to fill them from the start. According to Al-Ghafri, bureaucrats filling senior posts based on seniority rely on young graduates who were recruited as subordinates, but surpass their bosses in terms

²³ Interview with H.E. Hamad Al-Ghafri, the Ministry’s Advisor, MCS, 6 July 2004

of talent; “this has been negatively affecting productivity and efficiency all these years in the Omani personnel system.” To overcome this, Al-Ghafri advised that promotion must be based on performance only; those who lack qualification can be compensated through better annual increments.

Therefore, seniority is the dominated element in grade-to-grade promotion. As will be observed when we analyse the results of our survey questionnaire, the vast majority of participants had a firm position that other elements of are not given any weight in the Omani system. The result is a gap in educational level between those who reach top posts based on their obtained degrees and talents, and those reaching them based on length of service. Young graduates with high aspirations of improvements and change, find themselves trapped in occupations headed by unqualified senior employees.

The availability of funds: Apart from the above elements, availability of funds in the budgets of public agencies plays a critical role in deciding who gets promotion. Article 45 of the ER indicates: “Public agencies are allowed to promote employees only if funds in allocated in the specify budget allows so” (Oman, 1984:14). Accordingly, employees employed by agencies that have sufficient funds, promote regularly and on time, while others working in agencies that lack funds suffer long years of waiting. Budgets in public agencies in Oman vary considerably and, hence, this promotional factor results in injustice between civil servants in different organisations.

This phenomenon occurs regularly. Civil servants working in large ministries, where promotions require a huge budget, never get their promotions on time when compared to those working in relatively small ministries.²⁴ What makes the situation worse is the fact that the yearly increment of employees freezes when they reach the starting basic salary of the next payment grade, a situation when an employee spends more than seven years in the same payment grade. In 2002, for instance, employees from the ministries of health and education who faced such a situation had to protest for days in front of the Sultan’s palace before the Council of Ministers allocated a special budget to solve the delay of their promotions. Employees in the Private Schedule in these two ministries face the same problem, except they have the alternative of leaving the public service and easily find employment elsewhere, since these employees have special skills and

²⁴ The Ministries of Health and Education are a good example. These two ministries alone represent 66% of the total workforce (62754 out of 95185), yet their employees’ promotions are always delayed.

qualifications. As a result, large public agencies continuously lose qualified employees. To standardise the promotion policy among all public agencies, the Director of the Legal Department in the MCS suggests that the allocated budgets in all agencies can be centralised so similar standards of promotion can be applied to all civil servants.²⁵

Therefore, grade-to-grade promotion is controlled by seniority and availability of funds. Neither of these two elements can be considered a merit-based measure. Although the law lists performance and education as important factors in promotion, in practice both are secondary. The result is frustration among younger qualified civil servants due to the seniority factor, and injustice to civil servants working in large public agencies due to lack of funds in for promotion.

6.4.2.2. Post-to-post Promotion

The second internal recruitment method used by the Omani civil service to fill vacant posts is post-to-post promotion (see Figure 6.2, p.202). This type of promotion occurs any time through ministerial appointments, particularly when managerial posts are to be filled (e.g. Director Generals, Department Directors and Section Heads). As we will observe shortly, selection decisions in this type of recruitment rely heavily on the discretion of ministers to implement merit principles declared by the Civil Service Law. The reliance on ministers' personal assessment, however, is highly questionable if a merit-based personnel system is to be implemented and secured.

Unlike grade-to-grade promotion, post-to-post promotion occurs on an individual basis and not much emphasis is given to seniority, compared to other personal attributes seen and evaluated by decision makers. Here, the law does not impose particular selection procedures (e.g. announcements of vacant posts, examinations or interviews), regardless of whether candidates will be selected from inside or outside the organisation. Instead, the CS Law entrusts ministers in each public agency to decide the method they consider suitable for appointments, including the option of direct selection, or what is referred to in the law as "direct appointment" (Oman, 1980:10, Article 24). This open authority, obviously, may result in employees being selected purely based on personal judgement. If compared to the best personnel management practice illustrated by Parry (1994:9), selection based on personal views cannot be considered as more than subjective opinion.

²⁵ Interview with Said Adaim, the Director of the Legal Department, MCS, 5 August, 2004.

Before discussing post-to-post promotion, it is important to comprehend differences between this type of internal recruitment and the grade-to-grade promotion, discussed earlier. Table 6.4 below illustrates these differences.

Table 6.4: Comparison between types of Internal Recruitment

Element of Comparison	Grade-to-Grade Promotion	Post-to-Post Promotion
To whom is it relevant?	To all employees occupying all grades of the ladder, except the Special Grade and Grade 1/1	To managerial and key posts based on an individual base
How frequently it occur?	On an annual base for employees who complete 4 years in their payment grade	When new posts are created or vacant posts are to be filled
Who makes the final selection decision?	The MCS based on Personnel Affairs Committees' suggestions in each public agency	Ministers or equivalent in each public agency
What are the bases according to the Law?	The scores on performance report, seniority, and educational qualification combined together	Administrative appointments based on Merit and competence
What are the actual bases?	Seniority and availability of funds in the budget of each public agency	The personal views and assessment of ministers

Source: Based on Articles 14, 19 and 24 of the CSL (Oman 1980:8-10) and Articles 8,9,10,15,17,19 and 43-48 of the Executive Regulation (Oman 1984:4-6 and 13-14).

As can be seen, availability of funds in post-to-post promotion is not requisite. When we discussed position classification, we emphasised that designations in the Omani personnel system are not necessarily tied to payment grades. Hence, promotion based on post-to-post does not necessarily mean an employee will be occupying a higher payment grade, but rather a higher post with wider responsibilities. By law, an employee can be promoted to a higher post while occupying the same financial grade. The law excludes the post of Director General from this provision. Article 9 of the ER reads:

The title "Director General" should be given only to the employee who will carry out responsibilities of a Directorate General. The Fourth Grade of the first Group is the beginning of occupation of the grade of Director General (Oman, 1984:5).

Article 24 of the CS Law organises post-to-post promotion (see Oman 1980:10). Three methods of selection are identified, depending on the decision making authority and the post being filled. These are:

1. *A Royal decree to fill the Special Grade (a Deputy Minister Grade)*
2. *A decision by the CS Council upon a recommendation of the minister concerned to fill grade 1/1 (the First Grade of the of the General Schedule)*
3. *A ministerial decision to fill all other posts within the organisation. The law authorised ministers and heads of public agencies to decide the method of selection.*

Hence, by law, the Special Grade and Grade 1/1 are clearly eliminated from competition. These standard procedures are required when these two grades are filled; whether when filled through a royal decree or through a decision by CS Council. Hence, these two

grades are exceptional and are not subject to advertisement (Oman, 1984:6, Article 15). With regard to all other grades (1/2 and below), the law states that they are all open to competition, *but* only if ministers so decide (Oman 1984:6, Article 17). This conditional rule, as will be observed, suspends the merit principle.

Article 14 of the ER stresses: “All Omanis have the right to compete for *advertised* [researcher’s italic] public posts as long as they fulfil posts’ requirements and selection must be based on merit” (Oman 1984:6). The article provides that all citizens are equal in eligibility to compete for posts, yet previous articles put conditions for advertisement. The questions that arise are, 1) why posts are advertised? 2) under what circumstances are they eliminated from competition? The following articles may provide the answers.

Article 15 indicates: “With the exception of the Special Grade and Grade 1/1, all posts should be advertised.” However, this is almost immediately qualified by Article 17 which provides an exception. The article states: “The head of the public agency [the minister] is authorised to make exceptions and to decide if posts need to be advertised or not.” The article further indicates: “If posts are to be advertised and to be opened for competition, ministers are authorised to decide methods of selection and whether examinations or interviews are required”. Based on the analysis conducted by the researcher on advertisements in the civil service during the first half of 2004, not a single advertisement was found that aimed to fill a managerial post.

Therefore, to fill a managerial post based on the above rules and for merit to be the foundation for appointment: 1) the post should not be among the exceptional posts, 2) the minister in charge agrees to advertise the post, 3) s/he accepts open competition procedures (not direct appointment), and 4) s/he approves the outcome of the selection procedures. A system that gives ministers all this discretion cannot proclaim that recruitment is based on merit and equality of employment opportunity.

Recabi (2002:7) argues that filling managerial posts through direct appointment is an acceptable characteristic of the closed career service adopted in Oman. He explains that it is “practical” to give ministers this authority, since they are responsible for achieving their organisations’ aims and will be held responsible, as well, if they fail to do so. Al-Snaidy, a senior Omani official, is of this opinion. When he was asked about post-to-post recruitment and how current procedures can serve merit principles, he argued that

filling managerial posts from external sources through open competition is time-consuming and provided some reasons why the current policy is efficient:

Internal recruitment is seen as a way of promoting existing employees. Promotion, here, is a way of recognizing long time service. Further, one may favour recruitment from within the organisation due to the acquired knowledge and experience. Such employees would have learned over the years the functions and related complexities of the agency, which new recruits may lack. Most essential, those at the top would have had the chance to evaluate the capabilities of such candidates over a long period of time. Most likely they have seen how they behave and what could be expected in the future in terms of reaction towards certain situations.²⁶

Al-Snaidy favoured the closed career system where posts can be filled through direct appointment. He viewed direct selection by “those at the top” as a practical method. However, whether managerial posts should be filled from internal or external source is not the main concern, rather, how merit and EEO principles demanded by the CS Law can be secured to candidates, whether they are selected from internal or external sources.

In Chapter Two, we discussed the characteristics of the Open and the Closed career systems. Although each has its argument on how managerial posts should be filled, both acknowledge that all recruitment and selection procedures must be conducted through merit, regardless of whether the post is filled internally or externally. The American system, for instance, adopts the open career system, where recruitment to managerial posts does not depend on internal promotion. Instead, it necessitates opening public posts to all potential candidates, including those in the private sector, and requires all selection procedures to be based on open competition (Peters 2001; Torrington *et al.* 2002). The idea behind this is to allow fresh blood to enter the service at all posts levels, and to maximise the possibility of employing the most qualified. The American system relies heavily on examinations and interviews. The views of those at the top are valued, but based only on procedures and practical evidence.

The British public personnel system pays more attention to in-service employees. Here, the system considers promotion as an important method of motivation to encourage employees to increase efficiency and productivity (Rogers 1995). Promotion to higher posts is seen as a method to create a sense of loyalty and belonging to the organisation, and as a practical way to improve employees’ self-esteem and confidence about their future. Internal recruitment, within this context, is regarded as a method of filling posts,

²⁶ Interview with A. Al-Snaidy, the Under Secretary of Commerce (currently the Minister of Sport), Hull, U.K, 23 August 2004. The above quotation was written by the interviewee personally.

especially to managerial level. Yet, similar to the American system, the British system necessitates formal procedures to be followed to select among eligible candidates within the concerned organisation. The system does not exclude merit under all circumstances. All qualified candidates are allowed to apply and compete for higher posts (Rogers 1995).

Therefore, although the two countries have different personnel management policy, procedures and objectives, considerable attention is paid to merit and EEO issues. Posts may be filled from internal or external sources; however, this does not mean that authorities can forego procedures. In other words, if the closed career system is adopted, competition can be limited to in-service employees, but the ethics of justice and merit cannot be forgone.

In Oman, such concepts are mixed. The system tends to follow the Closed Career System in regarding promotion to higher posts as a method of motivation, yet, merit procedures are suspended. Promotion to a higher post means increase in responsibilities, as well as privileges to which all employees are entitled. Higher posts are not advertised unless the ministers decide so. Even if not advertised, there are no particular procedures required to secure open competition. Although the system proclaims merit as the basis of appointment to public posts, higher posts are filled through ministerial appointments and the system relies on their discretion to reflect merit. Under the Weberian bureaucratic principles, some posts can be filled through direct appointments. However, these must be political posts, not managerial in nature (Lawton and Rose 1994:32). As will be observed when we analyse our survey in the next chapter, most participants agreed that relying on ministers' discretion in Oman results in arbitrary appointments.

Examining personnel policy in the Oman, Alasti (2002:52) raised the issue of the need to centralise procedures to all posts; whether filled internally or externally. He indicated that the 1997 Centralized Recruitment Act was a reaction to bias and social networking attitudes. By centralising procedures in MCS, the government made an efficient step to limit nepotism and for the first time recruitment to public office become based on the possession of meritorious characteristics. A major deficiency Alasti (2002:56) saw was the exclusion of internal recruitment from the centralised procedures. He writes:

Unfortunately, the Act excluded internal recruitment from its provisions. Senior grades, such as the grades of the First Group, are excluded from the merit procedures. These grades are filled through grade-to-grade promotion by old patterns. Generally, no one can claim these posts are filled through merit as long as the absolute authority is still given to ministers.

Alasti (2002) believes that internal recruitment should be centralised, similar to external recruitment. The extent to which it is practical to centralise personnel procedures is a matter of open debate. The philosophy of personnel appraisal differs from one system to the other. Generally, the centralised pattern is preferred to the decentralised arrangement in most systems (Cayer 1986). The main assumption behind the centralised pattern is that this way the system will be more likely to ensure efficiency and fair treatment to all employees. Lin (2001) is of this view. He argues that the centralised system is most amenable to the establishment of uniform, reliable criteria to determine the competence of applicants and, hence, the reduction of unfair means during the selection process.

The British and the Saudi personnel systems, for example, retain responsibility for key posts while delegating authority in lower posts. In Britain, the Civil Service Commission is responsible for recruitment to posts equivalent to managerial level and responsibilities for lower grades are delegated to departments (Robert 1995). In Oman's neighbour, Saudi Arabia, positions at the 14th class level and above (senior executives) are filled by appointment by decisions of the Council of Ministers. Positions at 13th to 11th class levels (managerial posts) can be nominated by the ministers concerned and must then be approved by the Civil Service Bureau, while positions from 10th to 6th class levels are the responsibility of the Civil Service Bureau. The power to fill positions at 5th class and below (lowest of the ladder) is delegated, but remains subject to the approval of the CS Bureau (Hazzaa 1992; Ammaj 1993).

Compared to the above personnel systems, Oman functions in the opposite direction. The system centralises procedures in lower grades, while it delegates authority in senior grades. Delegating internal promotion to public agencies is not a deficiency in itself. The problem, instead, is the delegation of authority without maintaining the responsibility of securing equality and merit as demanded by the law. In other words, a distinction must be made between the delegation of authority and the delegation of responsibility. It is desirable to delegate authority in order to allow faster procedures, as long as the party that delegates authority is responsible for the consequence of such decision. Hence, a distinction needs to be made between 1) the need to centralise or decentralise procedures, in one hand, and 2) the need to secure equality and merit, on the other.

It can be argued that centralising procedures is not an aim by itself, but rather can be viewed as a means to reflect efficiency. The civil service central agency does not need

to centralise recruitment and selection procedures unless there is a fear that if authority is delegated policy, values, and procedures will be in risk. Hence, it is the responsibility of the central agency to select the right measures to ensure the adopted principles.

Caruth *et al.* (1989) believe that the higher the position in the organisation, the more involved and complicated the selection process is expected to be, while the lower the position, the less likely it is that the full range of steps will be used. In Oman, the opposite is true. Formal selection procedures are not required to fill managerial posts (the grades of the First group), while, critical and complicated procedures are followed to fill the entry-level posts (the Second and the Third grade groups). Employees are selected to managerial posts mainly based on ministerial decisions, regardless of competitiveness of educational qualification, work experience and skills. Al-Saidy, an Omani lawyer, summarises selection procedures to fill key posts by stating, “A few telephone calls and one fast interview with the minister in charge comprise the entire selection processes of managers in Oman.”²⁷

Therefore, post-to-post promotion encounters major deficiencies. The rules of the CSL Law that organise this type of recruitment are full of contradictions and inconsistencies. It is remarkable that legislators appear to have thought it is possible to proclaim merit while giving ministers such exclusive authority. Although Article 14 of the law declares merit as the base of filling posts, the following articles fail to confirm merit procedures as part of the legal provisions. Article 17 gives ministers the authority to forgo advertisements, Article 16 gives them the authority to conduct competition procedures or not, while Article 18 gives them the power to approve or reject the selection outcome. These open-ended rules make the public personnel system in Oman complex, as a state of confusion results from the varying rules, regulations, and policies adopted. Merit, as a principle, was mentioned only in an abstract way, with no legal provisions; e.g. step-by-step selection processes. Procedures remain vague where they need to be precise. Vagueness, unfortunately, provides an opportunity for the exercise of influence, favouritism, and political patronage.

The MCS, as the centralised agency responsible for reflecting merit values in personnel policy and practice, should not delegate authorities unless formal rules and standardise

²⁷ Interview with Dr A. Al-Saidy, an Omani Lawyer in Administrative Law, London, 12 January 2004

procedures are set to those whom authorities are delegated to. If the MCS fails to secure merit, employment principles declared by the constitution, obviously, are not met. This leads us to discuss the legal implications of the current recruitment practice.

6.5. The Legal Implications of the Current Recruitment Practice

The need for a fair and just system at the workplace is a necessity in any organisational setting. Robert (1995) and Torrington *et al.* (2002) stress that personnel policies based on fairness and efficiency are an important ingredient for healthy employee relations. In Oman, the Basic Law (the constitution) acknowledges this fact and has given the issue durable attention in its provisions. The Law contains a number of provisions that, taken as a whole, provide a basis for equality in public employment. Article 12 on *Social Principles* is the most direct. The article states:

Justice, equality and equality of opportunity between Omanis are the pillars of society, guaranteed by the State...Citizens are considered equal in taking up public employment according to the provisions of the Law (Oman 1996:7).

It certainly is good reasoning to assume that the work environment in Oman would be greatly enhanced if the practice is informed by these constitutional prescriptions. One would greatly appreciate the standpoint of the Basic Law that all citizens are equal in taking up public employment. Yet, a number of issues arise. Foremost among them is whether the existing policy and practice operate according to the dictates of the law.

As can be seen from the above article, constitutional prescriptions are usually generic in nature. The law does not emphasise particular recruitment and selection procedures to be followed to secure implementation. Abdulai (2000), discussing Ghana's constitution and personnel policies, emphasises that constitutional rules are generic in nature, and indicates that it is the responsibility of directly-related regulations to provide the details. In Oman, the CS Law and its Executive Regulations are expected to provide the details.

Article 15 of the CS Law declares: "Selection of employees to fill public positions should be on the basis of merit" (Oman 1980:9). In theory, accordingly, all persons possessing the specified qualification and experience are prospective recruits for public posts. In practice, however, this is not the case. As we demonstrated in this chapter, there are many qualified persons outside the possible area of selection due to the lack of rules that can lead to reflect merit employment in the actual procedures. Merit is

mentioned in the abstract with no provisions similar to those that exist in developed systems.²⁸ The law mentions the term “equality of opportunity”, but, fails to lay down specific procedures to secure implementation.

Procedures rely heavily on ministers’ discretion. However, reliance on administrative appointments in a work context such as that of Oman where tribal values still have strong effects on behaviour and attitude, is highly debatable (for details, see section 2 in Ch.2). In such a work environment, authority can be misused. The absence of clear-cut directives may easily allow procedures to be vague and, as a result, favouritism and nepotism can be easily practised.²⁹ Most of those who were interviewed related obstacles to secure merit to the fact that the Centralise Recruitment Act of 1997 excluded many posts from its provisions.³⁰

If current recruitment and selection procedures do not reflect merit and EEO, by law, these procedures must be changed so the principles declared by the Basic Law are reflected in the actual practice. Article 77 of the Basic Law on *Old Laws* indicates:

Everything stipulated by laws, regulations, decrees, directives and decisions in force on the date of this Basic Law becoming effective shall remain in force, provided that they do not conflict with any of its provisions’ (Oman 1996).

Similarly, Article 79 on *Supremacy of the Constitution* states;

Laws and procedures which have the force of law must conform to the provisions of the Basic Law of the State’ (Oman 1996).

The question of the supremacy of constitutions is raised by Abdulai (2000:451) when he asks, “If one element in the fundamentality of the Constitution is its paramount as a regulator, how is this secured?” In addressing this question, Abdulai (2000) takes a firm position, that a constitution would cease to be a fundamental document unless its basic principles are impressed upon the legislature, the executive, and the judiciary. In developed systems, conflicting interpretations of constitutional or administrative laws, particularly if related the protection of fundamental citizens’ rights, are dealt with

²⁸ For instance in the UK, the Northcote-Trevelyn Report in 1854 and the Fulton Committee Report in 1968 and in the USA the Pendleton Act in 1883 and the Hoover Committee Report in 1955.

²⁹ The subject of obstacles to develop personnel policies due to absence of clear-cut procedures was expressed by officials from the Ministry of Civil Service, among those; H.E. Hammad Al-Ghafri, the Ministry Advisor, 7 July 2004; Salim Al-Musharfy, the Minister’s Advisor for Administrative Affairs 7 July 2004; and Abdulhamed Al-Balushi, Director General of Employment and Training, 9 August 2004.

³⁰ Among these officials: H.E. Sheik A. Al-Azizi, the late Minister of the Civil Service, 10 April 2003; H.E. Hammad Al-Ghafri, the Ministry Advisor, the MCS, 7 July 2004.

through a higher court, whether it is a Supreme Court, as is the case in the U.S, or a Constitutional Court, as is the case in Germany. These courts are empowered to review acts of the executive and through their independence and autonomy can act as a check on the executive branch. It is their field to deal with matters that appear to be procedural and sometimes with more obviously substantive provision. Their interpretation is final and binding on all governmental authorities. In Oman, however, such issues are not settled yet, and it may take decades before clear procedures are introduced.

Al-Hosni, an Omani expert in Constitutional Law, indicates that the implication of article 67 of the Basic Law necessitates that all existing laws, government legislations, and rules that run counter to the Basic Law's letter and its spirit "be regarded as void".

³¹ Al-Hosni stresses that not only is the government obliged to rule according to the dictates of the Basic Law, but also administrative structures, public policy and behaviour of officials should be in conformity with it. He notes, "It is intended to impose some limit on the extent to which the government and public officials can exercise power and authority" Hence, constitutionalism imposes limitations and public agencies are accountable for they do not reflect its provisions in their daily practice. As explained in Chapter Four, a specialised court has been created for this duty and it has already received several allegations against public agencies (for details, see pp.144-145).

6.6. Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has shown how public servants in the Omani public personnel system are recruited and promoted. The analytical description of policies and practices leads to the conclusion that the many inconsistencies that characterise Civil Service Law result in a recruitment system that is in total contradiction with merit and EEO principles declared by the regulations. Consequently, hiring and promoting government employees become a major cause of deficiencies, not in EEO issues alone, but in the overall HRM system.

The chapter started by eliciting the structure of grades and payment scales by describing the adopted position classification system. Several obstacles were highlighted; among them: 1) the lack of flexibility of the pay system which negatively affects employees' efficiency and moral conduct. It was explained that no modifications have been introduced in the pay policy since 1980, despite inflationary pressures. 2) Allowances

³¹ Interview with H.E. Dr. T. Al-Hosni, the Deputy Chief of the Administrative Court, 18 June 2004

are paid only to personnel on the job and are not included in the pension system. This affects the retention of qualified and skilled employees. Most essential, 3) the position classification system adopted lacks efficiency. The system looks at the employee as the core of personnel organisation, rather than the position being occupied. The result is high turnover among qualified employees and frustration among others who have no alternative except to remain in service. It was observed that there is a mismatch between wages and grade, on the one hand, and responsibilities and duties, on the other (56% of employees perform jobs outside their speciality according to Al-Yahmadi *et al.* 2002). In sum, the system lacks implementation of the concept of the right person in the right job and the principle of equal pay for equal work.

Next, attention was drawn to recruitment policy and practice. A detailed analysis was provided on rules that organise these functions. Recruitment procedures were divided into external and internal methods. Regarding external recruitment, it was found that a state of confusion resulted from the varying rules (Table 6.3 summarised these rules). While the recruitment policy declares competence as the fundamental basis for filling posts, many posts are excluded from this provision. Most procedures are arbitrary and cannot be considered as merit-based procedures. Generally, filling posts through external sources lacks standardised processes that can ensure equal treatment of candidates.

We explained that guaranteeing the selection of the “already” selected is accomplished by designing the content of tests to fit the background of particular candidates by initially formulating posts’ requirements in such a way that not many people can qualify to apply. As a result, the vacancies become reserved indirectly. Further, the tests used are limited in nature and questions are broad and are simply directed towards examining the person’s general knowledge rather than the skill required to perform the post. It was observed that the tests used have no reliability or consistency as measuring devices and are given in their separate contexts with no common standard for relating them to each other. The same reasons that prevent the tests from achieving their aims can also be applied to interviews. Based on the researcher’s personal observations of some interview sessions, it appeared that interviews have no effective mechanisms to evaluate candidates’ abilities to perform the post. Questions concentrate on personal matters, including appearance, and supervisors rarely participate. In fact, it was found that the first meeting between supervisors and selected employees occurs only after the official appointment.

With all of their weaknesses, examinations and interviews are avoided in many posts. The CS Law allows appointment without selection procedures through recruitment by Exceptions and recruitment by Contracts. Numerous vacancies are filled each year through these types of recruitment (approximately 35%). The actual practice reveals that external recruitment has major obstacles that prevent it from being a merit-based system.

For internal recruitment, the law also considers performance as the basis of promotion. The analysis, however, revealed that procedures followed in both grade-to-grade and post-to-post promotions give no real weight to merit requirements. While Seniority and Availability of Funds are the basis for promotion to higher grades, Ministers' Discretion is the key for promotion to higher posts, including managerial posts. It was explained that putting so much weight on seniority results in an educational gap between those who reach top grades based on their obtained degrees and talents, and those reaching them based on length of service. The Availability of Funds factor also has its obstacles. Civil servants who are employed by small ministries get promoted regularly and on time, while others working in large ministries (e.g. health and education) where promotion requires huge funds, suffer long years of waiting. In Oman, budgets vary considerably and, hence, promotion based on this factor results in injustice. It is remarkable that legislators appear to have thought it is possible to proclaim merit while the promotional system encounters such deficiencies, and while giving ministers such exclusive authority. It can be said that the analysis in this chapter confirms that Omani public servants are evaluated currently on factors that are not sufficiently related to their jobs. The law declares merit, but its rules fail to secure merit in actual practice.

To operate efficiently, a system of position classification is of the utmost importance. This system has to be seen as prior for success in the recruitment activity. The precise definition of posts makes it possible to determine duties, and, accordingly, recruitment requirements. All steps need be accurate, meaningful and complete to maintain effective procedures that can lead to a personnel system that reflects merit and secure EEO aims.

In the next chapter, recruitment and selection in Oman will be assessed through other research methods. The views of practitioners and experts will be assessed through an administered questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. Employing an empirical study is expected to give confidence in the obtained findings in this chapter and to provide clearer picture of the actual practice.

Chapter Seven

Analysis and Discussion of the Results of the Empirical Study

7.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the results of a questionnaire administered to 250 Omani civil servants during the spring and summer of 2004 and the results of semi-structured interviews conducted with 16 senior officials before and during that period. As detailed in the Methodology chapter, the rationale behind the combination of different research methods is to give the analysis depth and strength and to allow the researcher to have confidence in the obtained results (triangulation of results).

The chapter is organised into two parts, each dealing with one of the above data sets. The first deals with quantitative data and provides parameters by which recruitment and selection policies in Oman were assessed based on the survey responses. After presenting the response rate, Section 7.2 discusses the distribution of the sample based on its demographic characteristics. The following three sections are designed to test the research hypotheses (see p.95-96). Section 7.3 evaluates recruitment and selection in the Omani Civil Service and is organised in four parts: the first examines compliance with merit procedures, the second evaluates factors that influence internal recruitment, the third assesses the extent of representation within the workforce, while the last measures the extent of satisfaction with current policies when managerial posts are filled.

Section 7.4 discusses the external variables that adversely affect the objectives of recruitment and selection. The section is organised into two parts; the first examines role of social norms on the daily functions of the public bureaucracy, while the second assesses methods to overcome the negative effects. The last section of Part One, Section 7.5, measures attitudes in relation to challenges to development of the system. Here, participants are consulted about procedures to be followed if a new merit-based recruitment system is adopted in Oman. The focus is on three particular issues; namely: the scope of advertisement, the authority in charge of procedures, and the authority responsible for approving the final decision. The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was used to analyse data obtained from the questionnaire and most hypotheses

were tested by either the chi-square test (χ^2) or through comparison of the mean scores and standard deviation of the relevant variables.

Part Two evaluates qualitative data obtained from the interviews and the open-ended questions in the survey. In general, the issues discussed are similar to those discussed in Part One, except the evaluation here focuses on the common themes (factors) that participants mentioned most often in the relevant transcripts. Three themes were examined in this context, namely: 1) factors that influence promotion, 2) effects of the environmental variables that adversely affect the objectives of merit recruitment, and 3) procedures that can be followed to make the system more responsive to merit principles.

Part One: the Questionnaire

7.2. General Information about the Sample

The questionnaire was distributed to nine public agencies under the jurisdiction of the Civil Service Law based on non-probability sampling, or a convenience sample (Punch 1998:105). As explained before, by adopting this technique, the study takes advantage of an accessible situation which happens to fit its purpose based on the availability of subjects. Although the selected agencies represent a quarter of the total 38 agencies under the jurisdiction of the law, employees working in these agencies represent 85% of the workforce. In other words, the participating agencies are the largest in terms of the number of employees. Further, the specialisms of these agencies are most relevant to study's context. The response rate is presented in Table 7.1 below. Out of the 320 questionnaires distributed, 288 (90%) were returned and 250 (78%) accepted as valid. The accepted number matches the sampling criteria detailed in Table 3.1 (p.106).

Table 7.1: The rates of distributed, returned and accepted questionnaires

Public agencies*	Sample of Civil Servants Managers and Experts		
	Distributed	Returned	Accepted
Ministry of Civil Service	60	56	52
Ministry of Education	40	38	37
Ministry of Health	40	40	32
Ministry of Interior	40	33	30
Ministry of Justice	30	26	21
Ministry of Higher Education	30	27	27
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	30	21	18
Office of the Governor of Dhofar	30	30	26
Institute of public administration	20	17	17
Total	320	288	250
Percentage	100%	90%	78.1%

* Distribution quota of the sample depended on duties, level of responsibility and the size of the organisation.

7.2.1: Distribution by Gender and Occupational Group

The total size of the sample was 250 participants, of whom 204 (81.6%) were males and 46 (18.4%) were females. The bias towards males reflects the low participation rate of women in the workforce detailed earlier in Chapter 5. Although serious efforts have been made since the early years of development to expand women’s opportunities, particularly in senior posts, there is still an imbalance between the two sexes and this was clearly reflected in the study sample as shown in Table 7.2 below.

Table 7.2: Distribution of participants by gender and occupational group (N= 250)

			Gender		Total
			Male	Female	
Occupational group	Experts	Count	39	11	50
		%	78.0	22.0	100.0%
	Managers	Count	56	4	60
		%	93.3	6.7	100.0%
	Civil Servants	Count	109	31	140
		%	77.9	22.1	100.0%
Total		Count	204	46	250
		%	81.6	18.4	100.0%

A closer look at the gender distribution of the sample by occupational groups (Experts, Managers and Civil Servants) reveals that the least participation of women was reported in managerial and experts posts (6.7% and 22%, respectively). Only 28.7 % of female participants occupied key posts, while the majority occupied ordinary posts. A cross-tabulation between gender and occupational groups confirms this result. The result of the Chi-square test revealed a significant difference between males and females in key posts (Chi-square= 7.239; d.f. = 2; p< 027).

If the reported rates are compared to the general share of females in the civil service, the bias can be seen more clearly. The Annual Report of the Ministry of Civil Service (MSC 2004:5) indicates that females represent 33% of the workforce (about one third). Intentionally or unintentionally, the report mixes all grade levels and, consequently, females’ low participation in key posts is not seen. Our rates, however, clearly reveal the imbalance rates, giving the fact that women represent 49.1 % of the population (MNE 2002:47). As mentioned before, this low representation of females is due to many reasons, but mainly to traditional practices that restrict women’s advancement. While significant steps have been made in the liberation of women, many obstacles still

stand in their way to equality with men. Females still do not have EEO to key posts and are still employed in lower grades of the hierarchy. Hence, the sample composition of this study does not correspond with the statistics provided by the MCS.

7.2.2: Distribution by Age

Participants' average age was 36.4 years; the oldest was 56 and the youngest was 25 years. As shown in Table 7.3 below, the largest age group was the middle category (31-45) which represented 63.2% of the total sample. The other age groups (30 or younger and 46 and above) represented the remaining portion (20% and 16.8% respectively).

A Chi-square test revealed a highly significant difference between age and occupation of participants (Chi-square= 33.043; d.f.= 4; $p < 000$). The variation can be explained on the ground that Experts and Managers require long work experience compared to the Civil Servants group. This fact was reflected in the results, making the age of the first two slightly higher than the latter (Civil Servants).

**Table 7.3: Distribution of participants
by age group (N= 250)**

Age Groups	Frequency	Percent
30 or younger	50	20.0
31-45	158	63.2
46 or older	42	16.8
Total	250	100.0

It can also be observed from the above table that the majority of the sample is in the middle age group. This can be attributed to the fact that the sample participants are mainly senior employees with long period in the service. Most Omani civil servants join the service at an average age of 22 years (MCS 2003:12) and would have to have 5-10 years work experience before they can occupy the grades of the First Group (the sample frame). The results obtained are consistent with the age structure reported by MCS's Annual Statistical Report (MCS 2004:15). The report indicates that the average age of the occupants of the First Grade Group is between 35 and 40 years.

An important observation from Table 7.3 above is the fact that most grades are occupied by young employees. Occupants of these grades are expected to remain for a long time in the service since the retirement age in Oman is 60 (see Oman 2004 Article 140, p. 42). This eventually means that fewer job opportunities are expected to occur in the future as

a result of retirement. By the same token, fewer job opportunities are expected to occur as a result of the Omanisation Strategy, given the fact that most expatriates have been replaced by Omanis during the last two decades.¹ This means that the civil service is not expected to contribute much in solving the unemployment problem the country faces, bearing in mind that less success was achieved in the private sector where expatriates dominate the labour market (89.3% according to the MNE 2004). As explained earlier, the private sector needs skilled and talented employees while most Omani job seekers are secondary school graduates without sufficient training and education. The obvious result is a serious unemployment crisis expected in the very near future (see Katz 2004 and Peterson 2004c). Therefore, the government is left with two options: 1) to qualify citizens to replace expatriates in the private sector or 2) face serious consequences.

7.2.3: Distribution by Educational Qualification

The educational attainment of the sample was grouped into four levels according to the Omani categorisation system. The results reveal that most participants have high educational qualifications (by Omani standards). If we combine participants' third and the fourth categories, we can see that 176 (70.4%) have either university or postgraduate education, while 74 participants (29.6%) have diplomas or secondary school education (see Table 7.4). A Chi-square test between participants' groups and their educational attainment revealed a significant difference in favour of those with good education (Chi-square= 13.828; d.f. = 6; p< 032).

Table 7.4: Distribution of participants by educational attainment (N= 250)

Educational qualifications	Frequency	Percent
Secondary or below	47	18.8
Diploma (below Bachelor)	27	10.8
University Degree	118	47.2
Postgraduate (Master, PhD)	58	23.2
Total	250	100.0

Although the educational attainments themselves may not give a true insight into the skills of those who hold them, the results provide evidence that the Omani civil service has achieved significant progress in attracting and retaining qualified employees. When we discussed Person Specification in Chapter Two, we explained that the quality of

¹ Omanisation is a programme adopted by the government to replace expatriates by Omanis. According to the latest MCS report (MCS 2003:12), the percentage of expatriates in the workforce dropped from 35.4% in 1990 to 16.9% by 2003 and most of the expatriates remaining occupy highly skilled occupations.

education represents one of the most important factors that determine the quality of those who occupy posts. In the past and due to the late introduction of educational facilities in Oman, occupants of the grades of the First Group (the sample frame) used to have an educational background of secondary school or less (Hassan 1990). However, the results provide that employees with higher education attainments have improved dramatically (for details, see Figure 6.1, p. 203). The results obtained by this study are consistent with the data provided in the MCS's annual report about the workforce educational structure (MCS 2004:10), and, hence, confirm the achieved improvement.

Two important impacts can be traced from the result displayed in Table 7.4 above. First, the system should place more emphasis on academic attainments before employees are recruited or promoted to key level grades, since a significant number of employees with good education are available to select from. Second, having 29.6% of the sample with secondary school education or lower in key grades, such as those of the First group, raises concerns about the importance of implementing an accurate position classification system, with an extra focus on education.

7.3. Recruitment and Selection Procedures

This section is organised into four sub-sections and aims to test the first set of research hypotheses (see p. 95-96). The first evaluates compliance to merit procedures based on participants' experience when first appointed to the service (external recruitment), the second assesses factors that influence post-to-post promotion (internal recruitment), the third measures the extent of representation of the workforce, and the last evaluates the extent of satisfaction with current policies followed to fill managerial posts.

7.3.1: External Recruitment (Entry level Posts)

Hypothesis 1A: *There is no significant difference between the numbers of participants who went through competency-based recruitment procedures when they were recruited to their first post in the civil service and those who did not go through these procedures.*

To test the above hypothesis, it is necessary, first, to restate briefly the key recruitment and selection procedures that distinguish competency-based procedures from others. As stated by many authors (e.g. Parry 1994; Torrington *et al.* 2002; Taylor 2002), accurate competency procedures rely mainly on: 1) an accurate job analysis, 2) transparency in

the recruitment stage, and 3) efficiency and fairness in the selection stage. Part two of the questionnaire (see Appendix 6, Ques. 12) contained a measure of procedures based on the above three factors. The objective is to see the extent to which the Omani system follows and respects the merit procedures demanded by rules and regulations.

Participants were asked to respond to three questions related the subject. The first item examines the amount of knowledge made available about the post sought to be filled (the job analysis), the second evaluates the use of advertisement (transparency), while the third measures the selection method used (efficiency). A True/Not True format was used in the first item while a multiple choice format was used in the other two.

Job analysis: As indicated, job analysis plays an important role in the recruitment processes. Its effectiveness can be measured in different ways, among which is the extent of knowledge both employers and potential candidates have about the post. Two elements must be considered within this context: 1) the Job Description (responsibilities and duties) and 2) the Person Specification (skills, experience and qualifications needed to carry out duties) (Taylor 2002). To find out if effective job analysis was used, participants were asked to respond to three True/not True statements with a neutral mid-point (Not Sure). Table 7.5 below presents the results.

Table 7.5: Attitudes toward the use of job analysis based on participants' appointment experience

Statements	Job Analysis , How much did you know about the job before applying?				
		True	Not True	Not Sure	Total
Clear job analysis was provided (job description and person specification)	Count	77	152	21	250
	%	30.8	60.8	8.4	100%
After I was recruited, I found out that the post has no job description	Count	171	39	40	250
	%	68.4	15.6	16.0	100%
My educational attainment was the basis of my appointment, regardless of requirements	Count	207	39	4	250
	%	82.8	15.6	1.6	100%

As can be seen from the above table, 60.8% of participants reported that no clear job analysis was provided, and a slightly higher proportion (68.4%) reported that after they were appointed they found that the post had no description from the outset. The highest score was obtained in response to the third statement: "My educational attainment was the base of my appointment, regardless of requirements". More than three quarters of participants (82.8%) indicated that their education was the basis of assigning their grades and designations.

If these responses are analysed together, it can be said that the Omani civil service does not pay the required attention to job analysis during recruitment. The system relies heavily on educational attainment to assign grades and, accordingly, assign duties and responsibilities. The over reliance on education contradicts with the basic objectives of job analysis mentioned in the Omani Civil Service Law. As mentioned, education alone cannot give a true insight into the quality of those who hold them or neither reflects the actual requirements of the post. Other person specifications (e.g. skills and experience) are essential, if duties are to be performed effectively (Thomason 1980:39).

Further, we explained in Chapter Two that job analysis is not only essential to provide employers with a basis for employees' performance review and development, but even more critical to provide them with guidelines for objective assessment during all the recruitment and selection processes (Mullins 2005:806). The obtained results, however, show clear deficiencies in the use of job analysis in the Omani system.

Advertisement: Next, participants were asked if the post they were appointed to was advertised. The question was based on a multiple-choice format where four options were provided; two of these options represent compliance to merit procedures (options 1 and 3), while the other two (2 and 4) represent the opposite (see Table 7.6 below). The results show that 86 (34%) of participants reported that they applied to their first post directly, while 80 (32%) indicated that they applied via a relative/friend who either worked in the agency or knew someone who worked there. If the responses from these two options are added, the outcome is two thirds of the sample (65%) applied through non-merit procedures. Only 18 (7.2%) of the sample reported that the post was advertised, and a slightly higher proportion (26.4%) specified that they were transferred through official means to the agency where they were appointed (e.g. by the MCS).

Table 7.6: Attitudes toward the use of advertisement based on participants' appointment experience

Statements	Count	%
<u>On the Advertisement: how did you apply for the job?</u>		
1) It was advertised in public media (e.g. newspapers)	18	7.2
2) Directly; agency's specialty corresponds with my education	86	34.4
3) Transferred by the Ministry of Civil Service	66	26.4
4) Told to apply by a relative/friend who works in the agency or knows someone who works there	80	32.0
Total	250	100.0

Writers such as Thomason (1980) and Parry (1994) emphasise the importance of advertisement when adopting a competency-based recruitment system. They explain that informing everyone who might be interested to apply when a vacancy exists is not just essential in terms of attracting sufficient credible applicants, but more essentially is a pre-requisite within the equal opportunity context. In Oman, rules of the Civil Service Law acknowledge this basic principle. Article 17, for instance, states that all public posts filled through external source must be advertised (Oman 1980:6). However, once again, declared rules are one thing and practice is another. The results show that only 33.6% of participants obtained their jobs via transparent means (advertisement or official transfer), while the majority (66.4%) applied either directly (exceptions) or through relatives/friends (backing and support).

However, it is essential to clarify one issue before we reach this conclusion. In our sample, 126 participants (50.4%) joined the service before 1997 when the Central Recruitment Act was issued. As explained previously, this Act was the first practical step taken by the government to enforce the merit-based procedures when public posts are filled from external sources. It might be argued that the system should not be held responsible for faulty procedures before 1997. However, the Civil Service Law, the supreme personnel document, was issued in 1980 and its provisions clearly demand that all public posts must be made available to all qualified citizens. The change that occurred after 1997 was that a centralised agency became responsible for the procedures.

To see if the implementation of the Central Recruitment Act of 1997 has an effect in proving the means of filling public posts, a Chi-square test was performed to compare the responses of those appointed before and after 1997. The result shows a statistically significant difference (Chi-square= 15.657;d.f.=9;p< 043). The result revealed that those who were appointed after 1997 reported more compliance to the competency procedures compared to those appointed before 1997. Out of the 84 participants who selected options 1 and 3 (compliance with merit), 62 (73.8%) were appointed 10 years or less. This means that the rules of the Act have improved merit recruitment procedures.

Selection method: The last scale used to examine compliance to merit procedures was the selection method. Participants were asked to respond to a multiple-choice format question where four options related to selection methods used were provided. Only the first option can be considered as a merit-based procedure (option 1). Although the other

three options (2, 3 and 4) are differently stated, they all represent non-compliance to merit. As can be seen in Table 7.7 below, only 69 (27.6%) of participants reported that they went through merit-based selection procedures, while the remaining 181(72.4%), just under three quarters, reported that the selection processes occurred via other means (either no competition was required or a relative/friend intervened to ease procedures).

Table 7.7: Attitudes toward the selection procedures Followed based on participants' first appointment experience

Statements	Count	%
On the Selection procedures: How you were selected for the job?		
1) Through merit-based computation procedures	69	27.6
2) Merit procedures took place and relative/friend helped	24	9.6
3) No competition was required	112	44.8
4) No competition was required because relative/friend help	45	18.0
Total	250	100.0

The results are indeed very disappointing for a system that declares merit as the base of filling public posts. As we can see from the above table, 112 (44.8%) participants selected the third option: “No competition was required.” Selecting this option simply means that no interviews or examinations were held during the selection stage. Even if the number of the available posts exceeded the number of applicants, what was followed does not justify the discounting of selection processes and assessment.

To test the relevant null hypothesis, the results obtained from the above three scales (job analysis, advertisement, and selection method scales) were examined jointly. As shown in Table 7.8 below, the rates clearly reveal a significant difference in the numbers of participants whose selection complied to merit procedures and those that did not, in all three categories. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, as the majority did not go through competency-based procedures when they were first appointed to the service.

Table 7.8: The rates of participants who complied with merit recruitment procedures oppose to those who did not

Competency procedures	Numbers and % of Participants		χ^2	P
	Compliance	Non-compliance		
Job analysis (valid responds = 229)	77 (33.6 %)	152 (66.4%)	12.296	.015
Advertisement (valid responds = 250)	84 (33.6%)	166 (66.4%)	15.565	.004
Selection method (valid responds = 250)	69 (27.6%)	181 (82.4%)	5.493	.020

7.3.2: Internal Recruitment (Promotion)

In Chapter Six, we explained that there are two types of recruitment used in the Omani system to fill public posts; external and internal. The external type is used when posts are filled by new employees from outside the service, while the internal is used when posts are filled by employees who are already in service. In the preceding section we examined the deficiencies encountering the first type. In this section, the focus will be on internal recruitment. Particular attention is given to factors that affect post-to-post and grade-to-grade promotions.

The discussion in Chapter Six concentrated on the argument that while the Civil Service Law lists particular factors as the determinants of post-to-post and grade-to-grade promotions, in practice the rules are not followed and merit principles are suspended. The evaluation revealed that while *seniority* and *availability of funds* are the actual factors that determine grade-to-grade promotion, *performance* and *ministers' discretion* are the factors that influence post-to-post promotion. This argument led to the formation of the following null hypothesis, which is to be tested based on participants' views.

Hypothesis 1B: *There is no significant difference between factors that influence grade-to-grade promotion and factors that influence post-to-post promotion, based on the attitudes of the experts group of the sample.*

To test the above null hypothesis, participants were requested to rate the degree of importance of five factors that may influence the above mentioned types of promotion; these factors are: Performance, Availability of funds, Seniority, Ministers' discretion, and Social Influence (see items 15 and 23 of Appendix 6). The factor "Social Influence" was added, based on the argument that if subjective opinion is allowed, favouritism may affect procedures. Responses were measured on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1= Not important at all and 5=Very important, with a neutral midpoint. For the purpose of analysis, the researcher combined the first two categories (Not important and Not important at all) into one category and the last two (Very important and Important) into another, to give a new coding (1= Not important, 2= Not sure and 3 = Important). Hence, the higher the mean, the more important the factor is and the lower the mean, the less important is the factor, whereas a mean score of 2 is the midpoint. Furthermore, the researcher decided to analyse the responses of the 50 expert participants only. This is

basically because experts have the most relevant experience and mixing their responses with those of the other participants may produce misleading results (De Vaus, 1996).

As shown in Table 7.9, Seniority and Availability of funds were considered the most influential in grade-to-grade promotion (mean= 2.96 and 2.70 respectively), while less emphasis was put on other factors (Performance = 1.67, Ministers' discretion =1.62, and Social Influence =1.22). These rates are dramatically different if compared to post-to-post promotion which is used to fill managerial and key posts (see the table below).

Table 7.9: Comparison between factors that influence grade-to- grade and post-to-post promotions (internal recruitments) based on experts' views

Factors	Grade-to-grade promotion				Post-to-post promotion			
	Not important	Not sure	Important	(1 → 3) Mean*	Not important	Not sure	Important	(1 → 3) Mean
Performance	42 (78%)	4 (8%)	7 (14%)	1.67	4 (8%)	4 (8%)	42 (84%)	2.72
Availability of funds	6 (12%)	3 (6%)	41 (82%)	2.70	31 (62%)	7 (14%)	12 (24%)	1.62
Seniority	1 (2%)	0 (0%)	49 (98%)	2.96	35 (70%)	8 (16%)	7 (14%)	1.44
Ministers' discretion	31 (62%)	7 (14%)	12 (24%)	1.62	5 (10%)	4 (8%)	41 (82%)	2.76
Social Influence	42 (84%)	5 (10%)	3 (6%)	1.22	6 (12%)	5 (10%)	39 (78%)	2.66

*The higher the mean (1-3) the stronger the influence of the factor.

As can be seen from the table above, Ministers' discretion, Performance, and Social Influence scored the highest in post-to-posts promotion (mean = 2.76, 2.72, and 2.66 respectively), while less emphasis was put on Seniority and Availability of funds (mean = 1.44, 1.62 respectively). The obtained results are consistent with our argument about the factors that actually influence internal recruitments (see Table 6.4, p. 225). Although the law considers competence and performance as the base for all types of promotion, the 50 experts consulted reported that the reality was different. In their view, Seniority and Availability of Funds are the determining factors when employees are promoted to higher grades, while Ministers' discretion and Social Influence play a significant role when employees are promoted to key and managerial posts.

Not surprisingly, Social Influence scored a higher mean in post-to-post promotion (mean = 2.66) than grade-to-grade promotion (mean = 1.22). This is basically due to the fact that filling managerial posts relies on ministers' discretion, where social influence is considered a major determinant. As indicated before, the unlimited authority given to ministers allows subjective opinion, and accordingly, favouritism. Authors such as

Parry (1994) and Kaler (2001) argue that wherever subjective opinion is allowed, nepotism and favouritism easily may find their way in personnel policy. The results are consistent with this argument and one can argue that the prevailing particularistic value in Oman strongly affects the process of selecting employees to key and managerial posts (the effects of environmental variables will be discussed in the next section).

Chi-square tests were applied to measure if there are significant differences between the five factors that may influence the two types of promotion. Table 7.10 below presents the results. As can be seen, significant differences were reported in all of the five factors (P value < .05). Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Table 7.10: The results of Chi-square (χ^2) tests of factors that influence grade-to-grade and post-to-post promotions

Grade-to-grade * Post-to-post promotions Chi-square Cross-tabulation	χ^2	Df	P
Performance	500.00	4	.000
Availability of funds	23.231	4	.000
Seniority	12.296	4	.015
Ministers' opinions	15.565	4	.004
Social Influence	5.493	4	.020

7.3.3: Extent of Representation of the Workforce

In Chapter 2 we discussed the concept of the Representative Bureaucracy and explained that this concept is rooted in the belief that the bureaucracy should mirror the characteristics of its general public in order to ensure equitable distribution of services to citizens, including employment opportunities (Kelly 2001; Ospin and O'Sullivan 2003). We argued that enforcing this concept in an organisational setting such as that of Oman is a double-edged sword. We explained that allowing bureaucrats to intervene in recruitment decisions through non-merit policies may lead to: 1) active representation where bureaucrats push for their constituents' interests against the interests of the entry society; and 2) policies could be twisted in favour of the dominant groups.

Yet two issues required further investigation: 1) whether or not current employment policy in Oman succeeded in securing representation and, 2) whether or not employees' background affects policy outcomes (active or passive representation).² Hence, the aim is to investigate the link, if any, between background and policy outcome, and the effect

² Active representation is where bureaucrats advocate constituents' interests regardless of the interests of the general public, while passive representation reflects the degree to which individuals mirror the total society by contributing positively to the interest of the all groups (Mosher 1982).

of current policy on the representativeness of the workforce. These concerns led to the formation of the following null hypothesis to be tested against participants' views.

Hypothesis 1C: *There is no significant relationship between participants' background characteristics and their attitudes toward the extent of representation of the workforce in terms of gender, region, and social or economic status.*

The analysis was performed by computing the mean and standard deviation for two components (subscales), where each consists of three items and measures attitudes toward a particular issue (see Appendix 6). The first examines the impact of background on policy outcomes, while the second concerns the extent of representation of the workforce in terms of region, social status, and gender. The mean and standard deviation were calculated by dividing the sum of items in each component by the number of items comprising it. Scores were based on a response scale of 1 to 5, in which 1 represents strong disagreement and 5 represents strong agreement. Therefore, the higher the mean is, the stronger the agreement with the item, and the lower the mean is, the stronger the disagreement. The results are presented in Table 7.11.

Table 7.11: Attitudes toward the extent of representation of the workforce (Descriptive Statistics)

No.	Statement	N	Mean*	S. D.
	<u>Type of representation (active or passive)</u>			
1	Public servants serve the interest of all citizens regardless of their background	250	4.15	.939
2	Government services are not affected by disproportionate representation**	249	4.05	.938
3	Employees' background (e.g. social status, region, tribal affiliation) does not have a strong effect on the selection process of filling managerial posts	249	4.06	.876
	Component Mean and Standard Deviation:	-	4.09	.917
	<u>Extent of representation</u>			
4	Managerial posts are representative in terms of regions (e.g. Muscat, Salalah, and so on)	247	3.80	.979
5	Managerial posts are representative in terms of social status (e.g. rich and poor, influential and less influential tribes)	247	3.78	1.033
6	Managerial posts are representative in terms of gender	250	3.26	1.354
	Component Mean and Standard Deviation:	-	3.62	1.122

* If the higher the mean (1-5) the stronger the agreement with the statement.

** This statement was recoded to positive format to make it consistent with the component (1=5 and 5=1).

Active or passive representation: As can be seen from the above table, the mean score of the first component was M= 4.09, indicating that the employees' backgrounds (e.g. gender, region and so on) do not play a major role in determining attitudes when performing duties and, consequently, when distributing benefits and service to citizens.

Responses to item 1, “Public servants serve the interest of all citizens regardless of their background”, scored the highest (M= 4.15), highlighting inconsistency with our assumption. A similar position was taken in item 3, which examines the same issue but in relation to employment policy (M = 4.06).

It is interesting to note that the attitudes reported in this component are contrary to the controversially held belief that disproportionate representation causes anxiety about distribution of benefits and service (Peters 2001). This may be derived from the popular misperception that the Omani society is homogeneous, since all are Arabs and Muslims.

Extent of representation: The results of the second component are in line with those obtained from the first one. The mean of the second component that examines extent of representation in terms of region, social status, and gender was M= 3.62, indicating a moderate agreement with the component’s items. However it is important to mention that there was slightly less support for Item 6, “Managerial posts are representative in terms of gender” (M = 2.74), particularly by female participants. A Chi-square test was applied to see if there is a statistically significant difference between male and female participants in relation to Item 6. The result revealed a highly significant difference ($p < .05$). As predicted, women are dissatisfied with their current participation in key posts (see Table 5.6, p. 191).

The results suggest that there is no relationship between bureaucrats’ background and policy outcomes. The majority of participants (excluding females’ responses to Item 6) believed that the workforce is relatively representative. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted. However, it is important to note that the demographic representativeness of the bureaucracy (or the lack of it) does not necessarily mean that merit principles are secured when filling key posts, as we will see in the coming section.

7.3.4: Satisfaction with Procedures to fill Managerial Posts

Hypothesis 1D: *There is no significant difference between participants with different background characteristics (gender, age, education, and work experience), in their attitudes toward whether or not current recruitment procedures followed in the Omani civil service to fill managerial posts reflect merit and equal opportunity principles.*

Section Four of the questionnaire contained a measure of attitudes to current recruitment and selection procedures followed to fill managerial posts. Factor analysis produced 14

items that are relevant to this issue (see Que. 19). The 14 items were arranged into three components, each of which measures participants' attitudes toward a particular issue; these are: 1) attitudes toward recruitment and selection procedures, 2) attitudes toward the decision making process, and 3) attitudes toward consistency of rules and practice.

The three components, if put together, aim to evaluate participants' satisfaction of the procedures followed to fill managerial posts. To test the hypothesis, the analysis was performed in two stages. First the results of each component were examined. Second, results from all components were composed into: A) Satisfied Participants (merit is served), and B) Dissatisfied Participants (merit is not served).

The first stage was performed by computing the mean and standard deviation scores, by dividing the sum of components' items by the number of the items that comprising them. The scores were based on a response scale of 1 to 5, in which 1= Strongly Disagree and 5= Strongly Agree, with a neutral midpoint. Hence, the higher the mean is, the higher the extent of satisfaction, and vice versa. In other words, a mean score of more than or equal to 3 indicates an agreement with the statement. All statements were stated in a positive format; if not, they were recoded to ensure the consistency of the scale.

Attitudes toward recruitment and selection procedures

This component consists of five items; the first three discuss recruitment processes (job description, person specification, and advertisement), and the last two discuss selection processes (interviews and examinations). As shown in Table 7.12, the component's mean score was $M= 2.40$, the highest of the three components, indicating a moderate dissatisfaction with the current procedures when managerial posts are filled.

Table 7.12: Component mean and standard deviation scores of attitudes toward recruitment and selection procedures (N=250)

Items no.	Items	N	Mean	S.D.
1/19	During the recruitment stage, adequate Job Description is performed by the concerned authority (job's duties, salary, working hours and so on).	250	2.43	1.241
2/19	During the recruitment stage, Person Specification analysis is conducted (skills, work experience and education required to perform the job)	249	2.38	1.290
3/19	Adequate publicity is made by the concerned authority to allow equal opportunities to all prospective candidates (e.g. advertisements)	250	2.35	1.322
4/19	If interviews are required during the selection stage, practical and job related interviews are conducted	246	2.44	1.247
5/19	If examinations are required during the selection stage, practical and job related examinations are conducted.	246	2.36	1.242
Overall Component mean and standard deviation			2.40	1.268

Responses to item 3/19 which questions whether adequate publicity is made to allow equal opportunities, scored the highest ($M= 2.35$). This might be attributed to fact that the Civil Service Law does not necessitate advertisement when managerial posts are filled unless posts are filled from an external source (see Article 17, Oman 1984:6). As explained in Chapter Five, in practice, almost all managerial posts are filled by in-cadre employees through post-to-post promotion. This simply means that candidates from outside the concerned agency are excluded from competition. Remarkably, even if posts are to be filled internally, candidates from inside the agency are also not allowed to compete, since regulations do not demand announcement within the concerned agency. The rules allow promotion through direct selection through ministerial decisions.³

The obtained results were indeed predictable. On the one hand, the system does not require advertisement unless posts are filled from external sources, and this is very rare. On the other hand, prospective candidates inside the organisation are not informed of vacant posts to enable them to apply and compete for them, since direct appointment is allowed if posts are filled internally. Hence, the basic principles of equal opportunities are suspended in both situations. The results of the other component items that discuss job analysis, interviews, and examinations (1/19, 2/19, 4/19, and 5/19) were similar to those reported of item 3/19. The mean scores for these items were $M= 2.43$, 2.38 , 2.44 and 2.36 respectively. If calculated and analysed jointly, 161 participants out of the 250 (64.4%) reported dissatisfaction with current recruitment and selection procedures.

Attitudes toward the decision making process

The second scale contains four statements and measures views toward the way the final selection decision is made. The first statement discusses ministers' authority and whether or not this authority is properly used, and the remaining examines the role of line-mangers and direct supervisors when the final selection decision is made.

Not much different from the results obtained from the first component, the mean score for this component was $M= 2.66$, indicating a moderate dissatisfaction, as well. It is evident from Table 7.13 below that participants do not think proper procedures are followed when the final selection decision is made to fill managerial posts.

³ No change is made in the newly issued Civil Service Law. The new law requires advertisement only if posts are to be filled from external sources (Oman 2005, Article 13, page 5).

Table 7.13: Component mean and standard deviation scores of attitudes toward the decision making process (N=250)

Ques. Items no.	Items	N	Mean*	S.D.
7/19	The authority given to ministers by the Civil Service Law to make the final selection decision is properly used	246	2.66	.944
8/19	Line managers are given sufficient authority by ministers to give opinion before employees are selected to managerial posts	244	2.60	.953
9/19	Personnel Committees effectively perform the role required from them by the law during final selection decision stage	246	2.66	.896
10/19	Post's direct supervisors are effectively involved in the decision making process when employees are selected to managerial posts	248	2.71	.903
Overall Component mean and standard deviation			2.66	.924

A cross-tabulation between the above responses and participants' occupational group was performed to see if there is any significant correlation. The results revealed that the managers group reported the highest rate of dissatisfaction. Out of the total 60 managers, 36 (71%) took this position, as opposed to 56% from the Experts group and 54% from the Civil Servants group. This might be ascribed mainly to the fact that managers have the most relevant experience during the decision making stage and their involvement allows them to take a clear-cut position.

In general, it can be said that the lack of effective coordination between ministers and line managers is the main obstacle. As explained before, post supervisors are the most qualified people to participate in this stage. Cook (2004), for instance, stresses that identifying the people who are believed to be the most effective to fill posts is the direct role of those who have close involvement with the job, either as incumbent or line managers. In Oman, however, the involvement of line managers is left to the discretion of ministers, who are given the ultimate authority. According to the law, ministers are not obliged to consult these officials (see Article 17 of Oman 1984).⁴

Attitudes toward consistency of rules and practice

The third component contains five statements that aim to measure participants' attitudes about the consistency between the declared rules that demand equality and fairness and the actual practice. As explained, Article 15 of the Civil Service Law declares that merit is the fundamental base for all recruitment and selection procedures. However, as we demonstrated before, the actual practice is different from the declared rules. Authors such as Peterson (2004c) reported that some ministries in Oman could almost be defined by their tribal composition, while some Omani authors, such as Muharami (1992) and

⁴ No change relevant to this issue was introduced in the new Civil Service Law (see Article 9, Oman 2005).

Al-Ameri and al-Farsi (2004), believed that appointments are strongly oriented towards fulfilling personal interests. Items of this component aim to examine these assumptions.

The first item questions whether or not records are maintained to prove that merit procedures are followed. The second and third items discuss whether or not all perspective candidates are given equal opportunity; while the last two evaluate the effect of favouritism and nepotism on the procedures (see Table 7.14).

Table 7.14: Component mean and standard deviation scores of attitudes toward consistency of rules and practice (N=250)

Ques. Items no.	Items	N	Mean	S.D.
11/19	Government agencies keep records that prove that the merit recruitment and selection procedures are followed	246	2.37	.991
14/19*	In practice, as long as candidates meet post's basic requirements, they can be selected even if there are more qualified candidates	247	2.45	.998
6/19	Current procedures followed to fill managerial posts fulfil principles of equality and merit demanded by law	248	2.49	.977
12/19*	Some managerial posts are designed to be filled by particular employees regardless of agency's actual requirements	249	2.48	1.030
13/19*	Social status, kinship, tribal affiliation (non-job criteria), play a significant role when employees are selected to fill key posts	249	2.49	1.003
Overall Component mean and standard deviation			2.54	.999

* These statements were recoded to positive format to become consistent with the component (e.g. 1=5 and 2=4)

As shown above, the component mean was $M= 2.54$, indicating general disagreement of consistency between rules and practice. The means ranged from 2.49-2.37, showing little variation in attitudes toward different statements. Further analysis revealed that participants with university and postgraduate education scored the highest rate of dissatisfaction. 88% of these participants took this position as opposed to 52% of those who had less education (diplomas or secondary school education). This might be interpreted as indicating that employees with better education are more critical of the frequent misinterpretation of regulations. Adherence to rules is seen by this group as a safeguard against corruption where tribal orientation and social status play a critical role in filling managerial posts, regardless of qualification and skills.

Within this context, it is interesting to note that 91% of participants who had university degrees and above disagreed with the statement of item 13/19: "Social status, kinship, and tribal affiliation play a significant role when employees are selected to fill key posts", the highest rate disagreement for any item. This result corresponds with Al-Ghafri's assessment about current policies followed when managerial posts are filled.⁵

⁵ Interview with H.E. Hamad Al-Ghafri, the MCS (6 July 2004). For more details, see p. 228.

Al-Ghafri was of the view that Omani young graduates come to the service with high aspirations for improving the system but are not given adequate opportunities and find themselves trapped in work, much of which is routine in character. He argued that key posts are still filled based on seniority by older bureaucrats who tend to avoid the challenges of change, prefer to stick to old work methods and hold conservative views.

Table 7.15 summarises the results obtained from the above three tables (components). As can be seen, the overall mean of the three components was $M= 2.50$, indicating a clear degree of dissatisfaction with procedures followed to fill managerial posts.

Table 7.15: Mean total scores for the three components that seek to measure extent of satisfaction with current recruitment and selection procedures (N=250)

Ques. Items no.	Facet (Component)	N	Mean*	S.D.
1/19, 2/19, 3/19, 4/19, and 5/19	Attitudes toward current recruitment and selection procedures	248	2.40	1.268
7/19, 8/19, 9/19, and 10/19	Attitudes toward decision making process	249	2.66	.924
11/19, 14/19, 6/19, 12/19, and 13/19	Attitudes toward implementation of merit and consistency of rules and practice	248	2.46	.999
Overall satisfaction from current recruitment and selection procedures			2.50	1.063

More details are provided in Table 7.16. This table shows the frequencies of participants who were satisfied or dissatisfied with current procedures. Out of the 250 participants, 186 (74.4%) reported dissatisfaction, while the remaining 64 (25.6%) indicated that they were satisfied with current procedures. Hence, about three quarters of the sample were dissatisfied with the current system of filling key and managerial posts.

Table 7.16: Overall extent of satisfaction with current recruitment procedures

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative %
Satisfied (merit is served)	64	25.6	25.6
Dissatisfied (merit is not served)	186	74.4	100.0
Total	250	100.0	

Testing the hypothesis (Inferential Statistics)

As indicated at the start of this section, the second stage of the analysis was to see if there is any significant relationship between attitudes and the background characteristics of participants. Attitudes (the dependent variable) were categorised into two categories: 1) Merit is served, and 2) Merit is not served. Chi-square tests were undertaken to see the differences. Table 7.17 below presents the results. The variables examined for significance were: gender, age, education, work experience, and occupational groups.

Table 7.17: Frequencies of participant' attitudes toward whither merit-based recruitment are served or not in relation to some background characteristics (N=250)

Background characteristics		Attitudes toward recruitment and selection procedures		χ^2	P
		Merit is served N (%)	Merit is Not served N (%)		
Gender	1) Male	53 (26.0)	151 (74.0)	0.084	0.467
	2) Female	11 (23.9)	35 (76.1)		
Age	1) 30 or younger	6 (12.0)	44 (88.0)	45.67	0.000*
	2) 31- 45	30 (19.0)	128 (81.0)		
	3) 46 or older	28 (66.7)	14 (33.3)		
Education	1) Secondary school or below	26 (55.3)	21 (44.7)	42.03	0.000*
	2) Diploma (below University)	13 (48.1)	14 (51.9)		
	3) University education	14 (11.9)	104 (88.1)		
	4) Postgraduate education	11 (19.0)	47 (81.0)		
Work Experience	1) 5 years or less	1 (16.7)	5 (83.3)	13.20	0.004*
	2) 6 -10 years	7 (12.3)	50 (87.7)		
	3) 11- 20 years	31 (24.6)	95 (76.4)		
	4) 21 years or more	25 (41.0)	36 (59.1)		
Occupational Groups	1) Experts	14 (28.0)	36 (72.0)	0.189	0.910
	2) Managers	15 (25.0)	45 (75.0)		
	3) Civil Servants	35 (25.0)	105 (75.0)		

* Significant at $p < 0.05$ (highlighted scores indicate significant difference if compared with other group categories)

Gender: about three quarters of both male and female participants reported that merit is not served (74% and 76% respectively). Because both genders reported almost equal dissatisfaction rates, the chi-square test revealed no significant difference ($P = 0.467$).

Age: while 33% of participants aged 40 years and older reported that merit is not served, 88% of those aged 30 years and younger and 81% of those aged between 31-45 years reported that merit is not served. Clear differences in the percentages calculated can be seen. Accordingly, the chi-square test reveals a high significance level (P value = 0.000). As mentioned, this is mainly due to the fact that older bureaucrats tend to resist change; hence, they preferred to stick to current recruitment methods, while younger employees with higher motivation support change.

Education: whereas 44% of participants who had secondary school education or below and 51% of those who had less than university education reported dissatisfaction with current procedure (merit is not served), 88% of those who had university education and 81% of those who had postgraduate education reported dissatisfaction. As a result, the chi-square test reveals a high significance (P value = 0.000), confirming differences based on educational attainment. Employees with good education reject current policies, basically because these policies do not place much emphasis on education, narrowing their opportunities if compared to those who get selected based on seniority.

Work experience: a significant difference was also reported in terms of work experience of participants (chi-square P value= 0.004). This result is consistent with the frequencies obtained. While 59% of participants who had spent 21 years or more in service reported that current procedures do not serve merit, an average of 80% took this view from the remaining three categories (5 or less, 6-10, and 11-20 years), revealing a higher degree of dissatisfaction between employees who had spent shorter periods in the service. Similar to the explanation provided for age and education, employees who are expected to stay for longer periods in the service are more supportive of change.

Occupational Groups: about three quarters of the three groups (Experts, Managers, and Civil Servants) reported that merit is not served (72%, 75%, and 75% respectively). Because the three groups reported almost equal rates of dissatisfaction, the chi-square test showed no significant difference (P value = 0.910).

It is evident from the above results that three background variables were found to show significant differences. These are age, education and work experience. In contrast no significant differences were found in relation to the gender and occupational groups variables. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected with regard to age, education and work experience and accepted in relation to gender and occupational groups.

7.4. The Effect of Context

In Chapter Four, we explained that organisational activities are directly linked to the environment within which the public bureaucracy functions and professional personnel policies, including those related to recruitment, cannot be achieved without considerable attention to environmental factors. In other words, the bureaucracy cannot be treated as an autonomous institution, but rather as a sub-system of its surroundings. In relation to Oman, we discussed the interaction between bureaucracy and the social value system of the society and explained that Oman is composed of collective groups rather individuals. The basic loyalty of individuals is not to the nation, as whole, but to the collective social units that centre on the tribe and the family. We argued that particularistic values are deeply reflected in officials' conception of their formal duties. Although there are individuals who have their own beliefs, employees, in general, reflect in their attitudes the overall social values, and current norms provide fertile ground for favouritism and nepotism which are the most obvious particularistic expressions in the work place.

The preliminary evaluation revealed that family ties, tribal affiliation, and society's expectations strongly affect employees' conception of their formal duties. As a result, public servants tend to adjust their formal duties to accommodate social norms. The significance of these norms is not only that they affect the efficiency of the system, but they also lead to suspension of the merit principles demanded by law. We assumed that employees are caught in the middle between formal duties, on the one hand, and society's values and expectations, on the other and argued that flexible rules adversely affect the objectives of merit, while clear-cut rules significantly minimise the patronage system. Such assumptions, however, remain groundless without empirical evidence.

This section aims to evaluate the above assumptions based on the attitudes of the 250 participants. The section is organised into two parts to test hypotheses 2A and 2B listed on p. 96. To test these two hypotheses, participants' views are required in relation to two issues: 1) the effects of social norms on the daily work activities, and 2) methods that can be adopted to overcome negative effects, if any.

7.4.1: The Effects of Context on the Functions of the bureaucracy

Hypothesis 2A: *There is no significant relationship between participants' attitudes toward the effects of negative social norms on the daily functions of the bureaucracy and participants' background characteristics (gender, age, region, and payment grade).*

To test the above null hypothesis, the analysis is performed in two stages. The first aims to evaluate attitudes in relation to the effects of social norms on daily work activities, while the second aims to see if there is a significant correlation between attitudes and background characteristics. Section Three of the questionnaire contained a measure to test the above issues (see Que. 15 and 16). Factor analysis produced 7 items that are directly relevant. Similar to the procedures followed in the previous sections, the items were composed into one component and the analysis was performed by computing the means and frequencies on a five points Likert-scale.

As shown in Table 7.18 below, the effects of favouritism in the Omani public service were clearly reflected in participants' responses. The role of particularistic expressions in the daily work activities was evaluated in Item 1/15. Out of the 250 participants, 176 (70.4%) reported that they either agreed or strongly agreed that the most effective way to follow matters in public agencies is through a friend/relative who works there (M=

3.72). This basically means that the rules that organise services are flexible and allow employees to favour an intimate group. It is evident that participants believed that officials are influenced by society's expectations, regardless of formal rules.

Table 7.18: Component frequencies and mean scores of attitudes toward the effects of social norms on the daily work activities (N=250)

Item No.	Statement	Agree or Strongly Agree	Un-decided	Disagree or Strongly Disagree	Total	Mean*
1/15	In the daily work environment, the most effective way to follow-up matters in public agencies is through friends/ relatives working there	176 (70.4)	9 (3.6)	65 (26.0)	250 (100%)	3.72
2/15	In daily work environment, citizens do not have equal access to public services (e.g. lands, loans...etc)	140 (56.0)	34 (13.6)	76 (30.4)	250 (100%)	3.48
4/15	In the daily work environment, officials do not hesitate to favour relatives even if that negatively affects other citizens' interests	148 (59.2)	36 (14.4)	66 (26.4)	250 (100%)	3.40
6/15	In the daily work environment, decisions are made outside offices to accomplish citizens' public services (e.g. social occasions)	146 (59.1)	9 (3.6)	94 (36.8)	247** (98.8%)	2.40
7/15	From my point of view, favouring a relative/friend to get better and faster service is a recognized social duty	92 (37.1)	23 (9.2)	133 (53.2)	248 (99.2%)	2.71
5/15	If we assume that negative social norms affect daily work functions, from my point of view I think that this effect is decreasing with time	99 (39.6)	51 (20.4)	100 (40.0)	250 (100.%)	2.97
10/15	Influenced by prevailing social conceptions and values, officials find themselves trapped between social obligations and formal duties	193 (78.1)	25 (10.0)	29 (11.6)	247 (98.8)	3.89
Overall Component's mean						3.22

* The higher the mean (1-5) the stronger the agreement with the item's statement.

** Variations in numbers are due to missing data.

The issue was also presented in a different context. In item 2/15 participants were asked if they thought that citizens have equal access to public services. Consistent with the responses obtained in item 1/15, the mean of item 2/15 was M= 3.48, indicating a moderate agreement with the statement. Out of the 250 participants, 140 (56%) agreed that citizens do not have equal access, while only 76 (30.4%) reported disagreement. This pattern of responses explicitly manifests the prevailing particularistic values in Oman. Although the rules declare that citizens are equal, participants confirmed that in actual practice those who have influence get better services.

One participant provided some examples in his comments. He indicated that citizens with good contacts in the Ministry of Education easily get scholarships for their children to study abroad, while others can hardly find a place for their children in Oman. Another example provided was that citizens with contacts in the Ministry of Health are sent to private hospitals in Europe and the USA while others receive ordinary health care in local hospitals. This situation might be attributed to the fact that rules are flexible, allowing frequent violation and abuse by officials in charge.

In item 4/15, the issue was put in a rather different but more specific form: “In the daily work environment, officials do not hesitate to favour relatives/friends even if that negatively affects other citizens’ interests”. Remarkably, 148 (59.2%) of participants reported agreement with this statement. The majority agreed that officials serve their intimate group’s interests, even if it may result in harm to other people. This noticeable response rate led to further statistical tests to see if there was any correlation between responses and background characteristics. Chi-square tests in relation to region, gender, and education revealed that there were no significant differences, indicating that equal responses were calculated in groups with different backgrounds.

To understand the role of particularistic values, in item 6/15 participants were asked about the extent they thought decisions related to public services are made outside the office (e.g. social occasions). Such an attitude of providing backing in order to exchange benefits is common in Oman. The responses were affirmative, as evident in Table 17.18 above. More than half the participants (59.1%) agreed that it is common for work related decisions to be made outside the office, confirming the role of informal contacts.

The remaining items of this component (5/15, 7/15 and 10/15) dealt with the issue from a different angle. While earlier statements started with the words: “In the daily work environment” and sought views about the function of the bureaucracy in general, these statements sought participants’ personal stands on the relevant issues and started with the phrase: “From my point of view”.

In item 7/15 participants were asked if they thought that favouring relatives/friends is considered a recognized social duty. As shown in Table 7.18 above, 92 participants (37.1%) agreed with this statement while 133 (53.2%) disagreed. This question was actually adopted from Awaji (1972) who examined the attitudes of 272 Saudi officials in relation to the role of favouritism in public office. In his survey, Awaji reported that 72% of his sample believed that favouring a relative is a recognised social duty (*ibid* 183). In this study, however, only 37% of the sample took that position. Although the two studies were conducted in regions where similar cultural values exist, the difference in result between them can be mainly attributed to the time difference (three decades).

The change in people’s attitudes during a period of time corresponds with Foster’s (1993) argument of the “reconciliation period” required before a genuine change can emerge in people’s attitudes, discussed in Chapter Two (see p. 28). Foster believes that

a period of settlement is required in developing societies before change occurs. Within this context, distinctions were made between material and non-material changes. For every material change, a corresponding change in attitudes is expected, yet the genuine change occurs only once the society is convinced that old ways are useless. Only then, Foster argues, is the strength of conservative forces (e.g. family and tribal affiliation) weakened and change can be expected.

The above argument describes the situation in the Arab Gulf States. The rapid changes achieved in the material field due to sudden oil wealth were not equally met by equal changes in officials' understanding of formal duties as opposed to social obligations. The old pattern of the tribal value system has been difficult to destroy, although it is slowly changing. This is clearly reflected in this study if compared to Awaji (1972). While 72% of public servants in 1972 in Saudi Arabia reported that favouring relatives is a recognised social duty, only 37% took this position in Oman in 2004, indicating that employees' perception of work values is changing for the better, but very slowly.

The role of time in changing attitudes was also indicated in another context. In item 5/15, participants were asked if they thought the effects of social norms (e.g. nepotism) are decreasing with time. The result shows that responses were equally divided between 99 (39.6%) who had a positive vision, and 100 (40%) who did not ($M = 2.97$).

As indicated at the start of this section, the effects of social conceptions on the daily work environment indeed cannot be overestimated when discussing personnel policies. As can be seen, Omani officials are sensitive to their intimate group expectations and tend to accommodate these expectations in their formal duties and adjust their actions accordingly. Their definition of their role toward their intimate group, as opposed to the general public, is influenced by their perception of how the society expects them to behave. This assumption was also reflected in participants' responses to item 16 (not part of the component) which discusses views of the most representative conception of the duty of public servants.

As shown in Table 7.19 below, 142 (56.8%) of participants thought that, as far as the general public is concerned, government employees are expected to serve their personal interest (options B + C2), while 107 (42.8%) selected public interest (options A + C1), either from the outset or after trying to consolidate with private interest. What should be

emphasised here is that 170 participants (68 %) selected option (C), which assumes that employees try to consolidate both interests unless they conflict.

Table 7.19: Frequencies of participants' attitudes toward conception of their priorities in public office

Public servants:	N	%
A. Serve public interests	35	14.0
B. Serve their special interests (personal, family, relatives...etc)	44	17.6
C. Try to consolidate both, but when these conflict, priority is given to:		
1. Public interests	72	28.8
2. Their special interests	98	39.2
	Missing	1
	Total	250
		100

The above results indicate that loyalty to the intimate group (private interests) is largely emotional, while loyalty to organisational mandate is for the purpose of expediency. In a situation where the conflict between personal interests and that of the job is eased (e.g. formal rules or modes of control are flexible) the majority of employees give priority to personal interests. However, if conflicts are anticipated, they may hesitate, particularly if such conflict may jeopardize their careers. As shown in the above table, the dualistic attitude was reflected participants' positions.

Testing the hypothesis (Inferential Statistics)

The second stage of the analysis is to see if there is any significant correlation between participants' backgrounds and their attitudes towards the effects of social norms on the general functions of the bureaucracy. Participants' attitudes (the dependent variable) were categorised into two categories: 1) those who thought that social norms affect the functions of the bureaucracy, and 2) those who disagreed. Table 7.20 below presents the results. Out of the 250 participants, the majority 166 (66.4%) reported that social norms do have this effect, while the remaining 84 (33.4%) reported disagreement.

Table 7.20: Attitudes toward the affect of social norms on the functions of the bureaucracy (N=250)

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative %
Social norms affect the functions of the bureaucracy	166	66.4	66.4
Social norms do not affect the functions of the bureaucracy	84	33.6	100.0
Total	250	100.0	

A Chi-square test was undertaken to determine if there is a significant correlation between attitudes and backgrounds. The variables examined for significance were:

gender, age, region, and payment grade. The results revealed that none of the above variables were found to show significant differences (p value = $>.05$). Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted, although the frequencies revealed the majority of participants agreed that social norms do strongly affect work activities.

7.4.2: The Need for Formal Rules ⁶

After evaluating the effects of social norms on the daily activities of the public bureaucracy, the next concern is to comprehend why this phenomenon exists in Oman, and how it could be overcome. These two concerns, in fact, highlight the central theme of the study. Previously we assumed that the lack of clear-cut rules and regulations can be considered as the main obstacle that opens the door to negative norms. We expected that there would be a correlation between participants' occupation (managers and non-managers) and stands on whether strict rules are required or not. We expected that officials in higher grades or in a decision making capacity would be less supportive of strict rules which may limit their authority, while those in lower grades were expected to be more supportive of further formal rules to avoid subjective interpretation. Such assumptions are debatable and led to the formulation of the null hypothesis below:

Hypothesis 2B: *There is no significant correlation between participants' attitudes toward the need for formal regulations and clear-cut rules to minimise the effects of negative social norms and their post level (managers and non-managers).*

Section Three of the survey contained a measure of attitudes to test this hypothesis. Factor analysis produced 4 items of a direct relevance. These items were composed into one component and the analysis was performed in two stages. In the first stage the analysis was performed by computing responses frequencies and the mean scores based on a five points Likert-scale. In the second, a different statistical method was followed. To see if there was a significant difference in participants' responses, a t-test was applied. This test is appropriate when comparing the values of continuous variables for two groups, or on two different occasions (Pallant 2001:177).

⁶ Rules, within this context, are the formal regulations which their existence is crucial to the success of the bureaucratic form. Hood (1986:21) summarises the features of a rule structure in the following points:

- The rules are known by all.
- The purpose of the rules is clear and based on a valid theory of cause and effect.
- Rules are consistent with each other.
- The scope of subjective interpretation is limited.
- Where rules involve the categorisation, they are robust and unambiguous.

As shown in Table 7.21 below, officials were presented with set of statements that discuss the need for formal rules to secure equality principles, either when services are provided with services or when employees are to be selected to higher public posts. The overall component's mean was $M= 3.91$, indicating a strong agreement with the component's statements. The responses, in general, reveal that participants expressed solid regard for formal rules as means of controlling irrational social norms. However, as will be observed in the second stage of the analysis, the degree of support varies considerably between managers and non managers.

Table 7.21: Component frequencies and mean scores of attitudes toward formal rules and informal relations (N=250)

Item No.	Statement	Agree or Strongly Agree	Un-decided	Disagree or Strongly Disagree	Total	Mean
3/15	The existence of clear-cut rules can significantly help to limit nepotism and favouritism when citizens are provided with public services	165 (66.0)	14 (5.6)	71 (28.4)	250 (100%)	3.67
8/15	In order to secure principles of equality and to avoid subjective interpretation, rules must be literally followed by public servants	168 (68.3)	10 (4.0)	68 (27.2)	246 (98.4%)	3.75
9/15	To secure equality of opportunity when employees are recruited or promoted, merit-based procedures should be literally followed	175 (70.0)	14 (5.6)	60 (24.0)	246 (98.8%)	3.81
11/15	Although regulation is the key to overcome favouritism, contentment from all parties involved is essential to implement rules	228 (94.6)	12 (4.8)	4 (1.6)	244 (97.6%)	4.41
Overall Component's mean						3.91

In item 3/15, participants were asked if they thought the existence of clear-cut rules can significantly help to limit favouritism. The results show that 165 (66%) reported an agreement while 71 (28%) disagreed ($M= 3.67$). Approaching the data differently, the sharp support for the need to implement strict rules confirms that participants believed that if rules are flexible, subjective interpretation is ultimately expected. If subjective interpretation is allowed, corruption, favouritism and nepotism are likely to occur.

The same issue was put to participants in item 8/15 in a rather different but specific form: "In order to secure principles of equality, rules must be literally followed". Responses revealed consistency with those obtained from item 3/15. The majority, 168 (58%) had positive attitudes that securing equality requires rules to be followed literally and only a slightly over quarter of the participants 68 (27.2%) expressed disagreement. Hence, in both situations (items 3/15 and 8/15) officials explicitly supported formal rules and showed a high regard for their effectiveness to overcome informal attitudes.

In item 9/15, attention was drawn to equality of employment opportunity in relation to the need for the literal following of rules. Participants were asked if they thought securing merit necessitates strict formal rules. Almost three quarters of participants 175 (70%) reported that they agreed with this statement, while 74 (30%) reported that they either disagreed or undecided (24% and 5.6%, respectively).

The overwhelming support for a strict implementation of rules in item 9/15 reflects the frustration of civil servants with the continuous violation of recruitment procedures. Currently most merit rules are a matter of formality. The content of the tests used is designed to fit the background of some examinees by initially formulating them in such a way that not many people can qualify to take them. Questions are vague and are directed towards examining personal characteristics rather than the skills required to perform the post. In fact, some of those who were interviewed during the course of this study argued that most procedures are designed to guarantee the selection of the already selected.⁷ Results obtained were consistent with our observation in previous chapters.

Testing the hypothesis (Parametric test)

The above results point to the general trends prevailing among Omani officials towards formal rules. Given the nature of the Omani context, participants expressed support for strict rules as means of controlling work activities. Yet, testing Hypothesis 2B requires further analysis to see if there is a difference between the responses of managers and non-managers. A t-test (parametric test) was performed to determine if the means of the two groups differ statistically. If the difference between the means is close to zero, it is more likely that it is due to chance. However, if the calculated value of (t) is larger than or equal to a critical value at the significance level of less than 0.05 (P-value less or equal to 0.05), the null hypothesis can be rejected (Bryman and Cramer 1997).

It was predicted that the responses of managers would indicate a different level of support for formal rules from non-managers. This hypothesis was supported. As can be seen from Table 7.22 below, managers had a lower overall component mean score (M= 3.05) if compared to non-managers (M= 3.98), signifying that non-managers had stronger support for formal rules and their literal implementation. The calculated significant difference leads us to state that the null hypothesis is rejected.

⁷ Among those interviewees: Dr A. Al-Saidy, an Omani Lawyer (London, 12 January 2004), and K. Al-Balushi, the D.G. of the Directorate of Finance and Administrative Affairs in the Ministry of Higher Education (Muscat, 14 Dec 2003).

Table 7.22: Attitudes toward stronger formal rules (Mean and t-test value) by managers and non-managers participants

Factors	Managers			Non-managers			t-Test	df	P
	N	Mean*	S.D	N	Mean	S.D			
Clear-cut rules help to limit favouritism when public services are provided (3/15)	60	3.00	1.340	140	3.78	1.241	3.96	198	.000
To secure principles of equality, rules must be literally followed (8/15)	59**	3.05	1.166	137	3.96	1.091	5.22	194	.002
To secure employment opportunities, merit procedures must be literally followed (9/15)	59	3.10	1.309	139	4.27	1.026	6.70	196	.000
Overall support of stronger formal rules	59	3.05	1.298	139	3.98	1.176	4.645	196	.000

* The higher the mean (1-5) the stronger the agreement with the item's statement.

** Variations in numbers are due to missing data.

To confirm the above result, we calculated the p value. As shown in the above table, a highly statistically significant difference was calculated in the overall component items ($t = 4.64$, $p < .000$) and the factors affecting it. These factors were: 1) attitudes toward formal rules to control favouritism ($t = 3.96$, $p < .000$), 2) attitudes towards the need of literal implementation of rules ($t = 5.22$, $p < .002$), and 3) attitudes towards further rules to secure merit procedures ($t = 6.70$, $p < .000$). While about three quarters of non-managers supported the need for formal rules and their literal implementation, only half of managers took this position. The difference might be attributed to the fact that officials in a decision making capacity are hesitant to accept further rules. The result shows that managers were divided between those who supported rules and those who appreciated flexibility as a way of maintaining control.

Similar results were obtained when we compared the responses of those who occupied high grades (grades 1-3 of the General Schedule) to those who occupied lower grades (4-6). The higher the grade, the greater the desire for flexible rules, and vice versa. The association between the level of authority and attitudes towards adaptability of rules can be attributed to the fact that officials in higher posts or at higher grade levels, more than others, find their power curbed by the rigidity of rules and regulations. These rules limit their authority, and, as a result, control subjective interpretation for personal interests. On the other hand, officials in lower grades with less authority are critical of misinterpretation of rules by those at top and, therefore, adherence to rules is seen by them as protection against favouritism and nepotism.

7.5. Challenges and Methods to Implement Reform

This section is organised into three parts and aims test the third set of research hypotheses (3A, 3B, and 3C). To test these hypotheses, participants' attitudes need to be

examined in relation to three interrelated issues. These are: 1) the extent to which reform is needed to replace the current recruitment system with the merit-based system, 2) mechanisms of implementing the new merit system, and 3) obstacles that may arise if the new system is adopted in the Omani civil service.

In the Methodology chapter it was explained that the participating sample occupied positions largely at the centre of personnel policies in the civil service. They ranged from Experts and Civil Servants occupying senior grades (the First Group of the General Schedule) to Managers and General Directors who occupied posts in a decision making capacity. The main factor that united all participants was their experience in recruitment policies. It was thought beneficial to consult these officials on the model of the merit-based procedures that will be proposed in the concluding chapter of this thesis.

The last part of the questionnaire was designed for this purpose (see Part Four of Appendix 6). Participants' views were particularly essential in relation to obstacles that may arise if the proposed model is implemented in Oman.

7.5.1: Merit Recruitment as an Alternative

Hypothesis 3A: *There is statistical significance in the number of participants who think the current recruitment system should be replaced with a newly designed merit system.*

Questions 25 and 26 of the questionnaire were designed to test the above null hypothesis. Both discuss the same issue, but the second was put in a rather more direct format to ensure the validity of responses obtained from the first one. A factor analysis produced 6 items relevant to the issue. These items were composed into one component and the analysis was performed by computing the frequencies and means on a five point Likert-scale, with a neutral midpoint.

As shown in Table 7.23 below, the component statements were worded in both positive and negative formats to ensure accurate perception of attitudes. The overall mean score for the component was $M= 3.79$, indicating a strong support for changing the current recruitment and selection procedures with a merit-based system. Items 1/25 and 2/25 scored the highest ($M= 4.21$ and 4.34 respectively). Out of the 250 participants, 212 (85.5%) agreed that there is a need for such change and, similarly, but slightly higher, 231 (92.4%) supported the idea of replacing the current system with merit-based

procedures. Yet, a split in views was reported in item 6/25, which concerns ministers' authority over the selection process. Participants were divided between 113 (45%) who believed that ministers should be given the authority to approve appointment and 124 (49%) who disagreed.

Table 7.23: Component frequencies and mean scores of attitudes toward the need to replace the current system with a newly designed merit-based system (N=250)

Item No.	Statement	Agree or Strongly Agree	Un-decided	Disagree or Strongly Disagree	Total	Mean
1/25	There is a need to change the current recruitment and selection procedures which relies on ministers' direct decisions	212 (85.5)	22 (8.8)	14 (5.6)	248 (99.2%)	4.21
2/25	Current procedures should be replaced with the merit system, which relies on formal procedures (job analysis and announcement)	231 (92.4)	12 (4.8)	7 (2.8)	250 (100%)	4.34
3/25	It is difficult to secure principles of equality and merit declared by the law unless selection decisions are based on formal procedures	176 (70.4)	40 (16.0)	34 (13.6)	250 (100%)	3.82
4/25	The change to the merit system may not fulfil all aims, yet its feature of transparency may provide better ground to secure equality issues	179 (72.5)	28 (11.2)	40 (16)	247 (98.8%)	3.75
5/25*	If the merit-based system is adopted, recruitment procedures will take longer and be unsystematic	57 (23.2)	15 (6.0)	174 (69.6)	246 (98.4%)	3.57
6/25*	Ministers should be given the authority to make direct selection since they are responsible for the overall success of their public agencies	113 (45.6)	11 (4.4)	124 (49.6)	248 (99.2%)	3.07
Overall component's mean score						3.79

*These statements were recoded to positive format so they become consistent with the component (e.g. 1=5 and 2=4)

To confirm the above results, the issue was put to participants in question 26 in a more direct format: "Overall, do you support replacing current procedures with merit-based procedures?" As shown in Table 7.24 below, the mean score obtained was M= 4.27, indicating a solid support for change. Frequencies show that the majority 220 (88%) of participants supported such move while only 24 (9.6%) rejected the idea. The results were overwhelming and are consistent with the results presented in Table 7.23. The consistency means the results were reliable. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected, as there is a clear statistical significance in the number of participants who think that the current procedures need to be replaced with the merit-based recruitment system.

7.24: Attitudes towards replacing the current recruitment procedures with the merit system (N=250)

Overall, do you support replacing current recruitment procedures with merit-based procedures?	Frequency	%	Mean	S.D
I strongly do not support the change	9	3.6	4.27	1.021
I do not support the change to a certain extent	15	6.0		
Undecided	6	2.4		
I support the change to a certain extent	89	35.6		
I strongly support the change	131	52.4		
Total	250	100.0		

7.5.2: Methods to Secure Merit Recruitment

In Chapter Two we identified a working model of the recruitment procedures that can be followed to minimise potential bias when public servants are recruited or promoted. We highlighted areas of potential risk to good practice based on Parry's (1994) seven steps model (see p.67-79) and we intend to link this model to the procedures we will recommend in order to develop the system in Oman to be more responsive to merit and EEO. However, three issues related to procedures when filling managerial posts were not discussed in the above model and require further details. The first is related to the scope of the announcement; the second is linked to the authority in charge of procedures, while the last concerns the authority to make the selection decision. It was thought useful to benefit from participants' experience to obtain some of the required data

Question 27 of the questionnaire was designed for this purpose (see part 4 of Appendix 6). Our assumptions were formulated in the following null hypothesis.

Hypothesis 3B: *If participants are consulted about the merit recruitment and selection procedures that should be followed to fill a managerial post, there will be a significant number who will suggest:*

1. *The post should be opened only to employees in the civil service system.*
2. *Personnel Committees in each public agency should be in charge of all recruitment and selection procedures.*
3. *The selection decision should be made by the authority in charge of the procedures.*

Before considering participants' views, it might be helpful to remind the reader of the current procedures. Although the Civil Service Law and its Executive Regulation declare merit is the basis for filling all public posts, they fail to confirm merit procedures as part of their legal provisions. Currently, merit is mentioned only in an abstract way, without clear-cut rules or step-by-step procedures to secure enforcement.

With regard to advertisement, current policies do not require advertising managerial posts unless these posts are to be filled from external source, which is extraordinary (for details, see p. 226). By law, candidates, whether from inside or outside the agency, are not allowed to apply for vacant posts unless the concerned authority (the minister) decides to advertise these posts. In relation to the authority responsible for carrying out the procedures, the law requires the Personnel Committee in each public agency to take

this role, including interviews and examinations, yet, again, only if the Head of the agency (the minister) decides that such procedures are required. These conditional merit processes explain how the final selection decision is made (the third issue). Ministers are given the ultimate authority to decide who fills the post.⁸

As shown in Table 7.25 below, participants were asked to respond to three questions related to the above issues and were provided with three alternatives to select from if a merit-based recruitment and selection system is adopted in Oman. In response to the first question (to whom should the post be opened?), the majority 114 (45.6%) selected the third option (to citizens in both the public and the private sectors). The other two options (only to employees within the concerned agency and to employees in the civil service system) scored 34.8% and 19.6%, respectively.

Table 7.25: Attitudes toward procedures that should be followed to fill managerial posts (N=250)

Question	Options	Count	%
To whom the post should be opened or announced?	1) To employees in the agency where the post exist	87	34.8
	2) To all employees in the civil service system	49	19.6
	3) To all citizens in the public and the private sectors	114	45.6
	Total	250	100.0%
Who should be given the authority to conduct the recruitment procedures?	1) The Personnel Committee in the concerned agency	47	18.8
	2) The Personnel Committee along with a representative from the Ministry of Civil Service as an observer	102	40.8
	3) The Ministry of Civil Service	101	40.4
	Total	250	100.0%
Who should be given the authority to make the final selection decision?	1) The authority who conducted recruitment procedures	162	64.8
	2) The minister in the concerned public agency	33	13.2
	3) The Ministry of Civil Service	55	22.0
	Total	250	100.0%

The majority of participants were optimistic and wanted to open posts to the maximum range (all citizens). This result contradicts our prediction in part (1) of the above null hypothesis. We expected that a significant number of participants would support the idea that posts should be opened to employees in the civil service system. Accordingly, part (1) of the null hypothesis is accepted.

In the second question, participants were asked to whom the responsibility of carrying out the recruitment and selection procedures should be given. As can be seen from the above table, the great majority, 203 (81.2%) supported the involvement of the MCS in

⁸ See Articles 15,19,24,28, and 47 of the 1980 Civil Service Law (Oman 1980:9-11, and 47), and articles 14-19 and 46-48 of the 1984 Executive Regulations (Oman 1984:6 and 13-14). Further, no change was introduced in the newly issued law (see Articles 13-16 p. 5-6, and Articles and 28-30 p. 9, of Oman 2005)

the procedures, yet they were split between those who thought that this authority should be limited (as an observer, the second option 40.8%), and those who thought the MCS should have the leading role (the third option, 40.4%). In other words, participants agreed that a degree of centralisation is required, but differ on the extent of that degree. While some wanted to give the main role to the centralised authority, others thought it is more proper to allow it to observe procedures while the main role is given to the concerned Personnel Committee in each public agency.

Similar to the first part of the scale, the responses to the second question contradict with our assumption. In part (2) of the null hypothesis, we expected that a significant number of participants would support an autonomous authority being given to Personnel Committees. In fact, this option scored the lowest. Out of the 250 participants, only 47 (18.8%) supported that option. Accordingly, part 2 of the null hypothesis is accepted.

The last issue put to participants was the authority that should be in charge of the final selection decision. Three options linked to our discussion in Chapter Six were provided. As shown in Table 7.25, almost two thirds of participants 162 (64.8%) suggested that the agency who conducted the recruitment procedures should be in charge of making the final selection decision. This position is consistent with Parry's (1994) and Taylor's (2002) proposition of good practice procedures. These writers had a firm position that a post's supervisors or those who occupied the post previously are the most qualified to perform procedures and to make the selection decision. Thomason (1980) adds there is no point in authorising one party to conduct procedures and for another to decide.

The other two options (options 2 and 3) jointly accounted for the remaining one third of responses. While 33 (13.2%) participants suggested that ministers should be authorised of the final selection decision, 55 (22%) thought this authority should be given to a centralised agency (e.g. MCS). Given the fact that a significant number of participants selected the first option, it can be said that part (3) of the null hypothesis is rejected.

Therefore, the majority of participants agreed that: 1) posts should be advertised to all prospective candidates, 2) Personnel Committees should carry out all procedures with the participation of a representative from the MCS as an observer, and 3) the authority in charge of procedures should be in charge of making the final selection decision. As will be observed in the concluding chapter, most of the suggested procedures are

already included in the Civil Service Law rules (both the 1980 law and the proposed 2005 law), but are either misinterpreted or not implemented.

7.5.3: Obstacles to Implementing Merit Recruitment

The last issue put to participants was what obstacle they expected to arise if the new system is adopted. As explained, current procedures have been practised for the last three decades and, in essence, they constitute a body of personnel policies that are not easy to change. It was thought practical to understand the barriers that may retard implementation. The experience of our participants may contribute in obtaining a clear picture. As stated in the following hypothesis, we anticipate that the lack of willingness on the part of those who currently have the authority to be the most pressing obstacle, followed by the lack of qualified personnel to carry out the merit procedures.

Hypothesis 3C: *If participants are asked about obstacles that retard implementation of the proposed merit system, a significant number of these participants will consider the lack of willingness on the part of ministers as the most pressing obstacle, followed by the lack of qualified personnel to carry out procedures.*

Question 28 of the questionnaire was designed to test the above hypothesis. Participants were presented with five factors (obstacles) expected to retard implementation and were asked to rank each of these factors in terms of importance on a five point Likert-scale, where 1= Not important at all and 5= Very important, with a neutral midpoint. The analysis was performed by computing frequencies, the mean, and the standard deviation of each factor. To facilitate this analysis, the first two categories and the last two were combined to give a new coding (1= not important, 2= not sure and 3= important). Hence, the higher the mean, the more important the factor is. Table 7.26 presents the results.

Table 7.26: Frequencies and mean scores of the degree of importance of obstacles that may arise if the merit system is to be adopted (N=250)

Factors (obstacles)	Not important	Not sure	Important	Total (Valid %)	Mean*	S.D
Lack of maturity of the system to deal with merit procedures (e.g. poor organisational structures, lack of job classification)	94 (38.1)	41 (6.6)	112 (45.3)	247 (100%)	2.07	.912
Lack of willingness on the part of ministers since this system may limit some of their authority and power	23 (9.2)	33 (13.6)	194 (77.6)	250 (100%)	2.68	.634
The absence of a competitive legal system that can deal with the merit system	95 (38.2)	54 (21.7)	100 (40.2)	249 (100%)	2.02	.887
Lack of qualified human resources who can efficiently implement the merit-based recruitment procedures	136 (54.8)	27 (10.9)	85 (34.3)	248 (100%)	1.79	.932
The role of negative social norms (e.g. favouritism)	134 (55.4)	14 (5.8)	94 (38.8)	242 (100%)	1.83	.958

*The higher the mean (1-3) the stronger the influence of the factor. The mean of 2 is neutral midpoint.

As can be seen from the results, the second factor, the lack of willingness on the part of ministers, scored the highest (M =2.68), followed by the lack of readiness of the system (M =2.07), while the absence of competitive rules scored third (M =2.02). Less emphasis was given to the remaining two factors, lack of human resources (M= 1.79), and effects of social norms (M =1.83).

In other words, the majority 194 of participants (77.6%) thought that ministers' resistance to change would be the most serious obstacle. This view might be attributed to the fact that ministers will be hesitant to accept a system that suspends their authority to select who they think is suitable to occupy managerial posts in the agencies they run. Although it will be based on regulations and clear-cut procedures, implementing the new system means that ministers will share the authority given to them according to the current system with other people with whom they might disagree. Participants believed that ministers' involvement is important, but needs to be organised to secure fairness.

Another interesting finding from Table 7.26 is the response rate to the fifth factor (effects of social norms). A clear difference in participants' responses can be noticed if we compare the weight given to this factor in relation to the current procedures and to those if the merit system is adopted. Compared to the 166 participants (66%) who indicated previously that social norms affect recruitment procedures (see Table 7.20), only 94 (34%) participants considered that this factor would be an obstacle if the merit system was adopted. This indicates that participants believed that implementing the new system will positively contribute in reducing the effect of favouritism and nepotism on recruitment procedures.

In the above section's hypothesis, we assumed that a significant number of participants would consider ministers' resistance to change and the lack of qualified personnel to carry out the procedures will be the main obstacles. The analysis of participants' views revealed that part of the null hypothesis is rejected and part of it is accepted. It was rejected in its first part, as a significant number (77.6%) supported our assumption and considered the lack of willingness as the most important obstacle, while it was accepted in its second part, as 136 (54.8%) did not consider the lack of human resources as a serious obstacle. The lower level of concerns about personnel who can implement the procedures can be attributed to the significant progress achieved in the civil service in qualifying and retaining employees who can handle the new system. As explained, the

numbers of civil servants with good education and good work experience have improved dramatically in recent years, particularly since 1990 (see Figure 6.1, p 203).

In the preceding part we have presented the findings obtained from the results of the questionnaire administered to 250 Omani civil servants. The survey responses provided valuable quantitative data through which recruitment policy was assessed in both principle and practice. The next part, Part Two, is devoted to the analysis of qualitative data obtained based on the results of the interviews. As we explained in the introduction of this chapter, the rationale for the use of interviews is to probe more deeply into emergent research issues to get an in-depth understanding of the determinants that affect the implementation of recruitment by merit in Oman. Interview results are expected to supplement and validate the questionnaire findings. The two parts will be followed by a summary and discussion of the results obtained from both methods jointly.

Part Two: the Interviews

7.6. The Analysis of Interviews and Survey's Open-ended Questions

In this part we will present the data derived from the interviews. As mentioned in Chapter Three, sixteen interviews were conducted during the summer of 2004, immediately after the completion of the questionnaire survey. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed directly while still fresh. Within this context, it has to be noted that contrary to what was reported by previous Omani researchers (e.g. Muharami 1993, Maawali 2000 and Shafae 2001), the researcher found officials supportive and willing to move away from surface talk to rich discussion. This can be attributed mostly to the approach used before commencing these interviews (for details, see pp. 122-123).

The data obtained from the interviews were categorised into two types. First, there is data obtained from unstructured questions and associated with each interviewee's circumstances. This type of data was used in Chapters 4-6 when we discussed the context of the Omani civil service. Second, there is data obtained from structured questions where interviewees were asked similar questions (see the Interview Schedule in Appendix 8). This type of data will be analysed in this part to supplement the questionnaire results and to cover the topics that require more elaboration.

Unlike traditional methods followed when analysing qualitative data, the researcher decided to analyse the results of the interviews and open-ended questions jointly. The intention is to avoid repetition, since both produced qualitative data.

Content analysis was performed for the responses obtained from qualitative data. First, the researcher reviewed all data and located the common themes participants mentioned most often. Three themes (factors) were identified within this context. These are: 1) factors that influence promotion, 2) effects of social norms that adversely affect the objectives of merit recruitment, and 3) proposed procedures if a new merit system is adopted. Issues that were mentioned by only a small percentage of respondents were not categorized, although benefited from in the general discussion. Second, new codes were entered into the SPSS program for the new themes (variables) and 16 cases (interviewees) were added. “Yes” was used as a code if the respondent commented on the new variables and “No” if no comment was provided. The “Yes” responses were considered in calculating the percentage in the analysis.

In total, 42 participants provided valid answers or comments to the new variables, 16 based on interviews, and 26 based on open-ended questions in the survey. As shown in Table 7.27 below, the last theme (Proposed procedures if merit-based system is adopted) engrossed participants’ attention, as 37 responses (88%) were reported. These responses, along with those related to the other two themes, reflect the patterns and trends influencing emergent issues in the research, raised by experts and decision-makers.

7.27: Themes and number of responses obtained from the interviews and the survey’s open-ended questions (N=42)

Main Themes (factors)	Responses based on semi-structured interviews	Responses based on Survey’s open-ended questions	Total (Sum =42)	%
Factors that influence promotion	14	20	34	80%
Effects of social norms on recruitment	10	18	28	66%
Proposed recruitment procedures if a merit-based system is to be adopted	15	22	37	88%

7.6.1. Factors that Influence Promotion

Question 2 of the Interview Schedule and items 14 and 23 of the survey open-ended questions discussed factors that influence promotion in the Oman civil service. In total, 34 respondents (80% of the total) provided answers or comments on this issue, most of which concentrated on deficiencies of the current promotional system:

“Currently, promotion to higher grades occurs without distinction between who is good and who is not, who is distinguished and who is not, who is qualified and who is not. The real factor that determines promotion is the completion of four years in the current grade, and then all employees are equal...” (I: 2, Department Director, MSC)⁹

“Everybody who completes four years gets promoted to next financial grade, regardless of strengths and weaknesses. This contradicts with the meaning of the law and results in frustration among employees with good performance.” (RS: 17, Civil Servant)¹⁰

“...when it comes to promotion, a hard-working employee is equal to a negligent one. They are 100% equal. Grade-to-grade promotion is purely based on seniority.” (RS: 40, Department Director)

The above comments discuss grade-to-grade promotion. Comments are consistent with the responses obtained from the questionnaire, where 98% of participants (the highest proportion for any item) agreed that seniority is the main factor that influences grade-to-grade promotion (see Table 7.9). However, this type of promotion is not as important as post-to-post promotion, which involves filling managerial posts. More attention was paid to this second type and most responses criticized the system for being excessively reliant on ministers' discretion:

“When it comes to higher posts, ministers' assessment is the determinant. Regrettably, education and skills are secondary to non-work related factors, such as loyalty to the decision maker and the social status of the candidate. Personal interests and exchange of benefits play a major role here.” (RS: 18, Personnel Department Expert)

“Promotion to managerial posts relies on ministers. Employees know if they win their blessing [ministers'], they do not have to worry about anything else. They do anything to get closer to them. As a result, public agencies become like private properties. This suspends the principles of efficiency and narrows the chances of qualified employees who rely on their work as the basis of evaluation. The effect of such attitudes differs from one agency to other, depending on the impartiality of ministers.” (I: 8, Director General)

“...closeness to the Head of the Unit [the minister] is important. If you meet him on a regular basis, you can show your strength, and, hence, you will be remembered when a key post is to be filled. If not, do not expect the system to secure your right since open competition is not allowed when key posts are filled.” (RS: 17, Civil Servant)

Contrary to grade-to-grade promotion, where seniority was considered as the key factor, ministers' personal evaluation was seen as the determinant of post-to-post promotion. The above comments are also consistent with the results of the questionnaire, where 82% of participants rated ministers' role as the main factor that influences promotion to managerial posts (see Table 7.9). Interviewees believed that the unlimited authority given to ministers suspends the principles of equality and merit, since decisions are based on one person's assessment and not made through professional procedures. As a

⁹ I = Interviewee, the number next = Interviewee's code in the transcript, next his/her designation.

¹⁰ RS = Response to Survey open-ended question, the number next = participant's code; next his/her designation.

result, personal interests become the determinant. The logical point we can deduce from this position is that the lack of adequate procedures suspends the objectives of merit. One specialist from a personnel department was very critical when he indicated:

“Filling managerial posts is purely ministers’ choice. These officials claim that they are champions of merit, but if you look around you, you will notice that this is not the case. Directors are either ministers’ friends or relatives or other ministers’ friends and relatives... they exchange favours. Personal relations are what count here. Is this merit? Is this what regulations demand? Indeed not. Oman is a tribal society. If we ignore this fact and continue relying on people’s personal assessment, not rules, merit will not be secured and the problem will not be solved.” (I: 12, Specialist in Personnel Department)

The transcript was full of similar comments, in which the system was criticized for over-reliance on ministers’ discretion when filling managerial posts. It is impractical, however, to evaluate the issue by relying on the views of one side only. It is essential to understand the views of those who are actually involved in the process. A senior official was generous in expressing his views openly. Interestingly, this official was interviewed when he was an Undersecretary and recently he was appointed Minister:

“The minister is the bulldozer of the ministry; not only in terms of personnel issues, but in all affairs related to the function of his ministry. This supremacy is protected by law. He may or may not consult posts’ direct supervisors. Nothing in the law obliges him to consult others. However, and based on my experience, ministers do consult their assistants. In fact, they do not get involved directly unless DGs’ posts are sought to be filled [Director Generals]. Second layer posts, e.g. Department Directors and Section Heads, are left to posts’ direct supervisors.” (I: 9, H.E. Official)¹¹

With relevance to the consultation issue, the official mentioned, however, that there are cases where ministers do not consult and surprise everyone in the agency, including their undersecretaries, with major appointments and changes. It can be inferred from the above comments that the processes of selecting managers, in the best circumstances, are built on the consensus between ministers and their close aides. No adequate procedures (e.g. job analysis, interviews) were mentioned within this context. When this official was asked about the criteria based on which managerial posts are filled, he replied:

“Over the years a clear impression is formed about the capabilities of each employee and it becomes easy to determine who fits where and when. In the daily work activities, employees are put in situations where important decisions need to be made. Here, talents and skills are tested in the real world. We evaluate these employees from time to time, and when a post becomes vacant we decide. Experience and skills relevant to the post are the main determinants. If two candidates are equal, priority is given to seniority. You may criticise these procedures; yet the outcome is fine. I believe as long as good intentions exist, merit is automatically served and secured.” (I: 9, E.H. Official)

¹¹ H.E official stands for His/Her Excellency. These officials are either Ministers or Undersecretaries.

This above quote is central to the research study. Claiming that merit can be secured through “good intentions” is, indeed, an illusion. Selecting people to key posts without practical processes is undoubtedly a serious risk to equal opportunity. The question that imposes itself is: What if intentionally or unintentionally “good intentions” do not work? Commentators such as Taylor (2002:41) and Mullins (2005:801) clearly emphasise that professional recruitment and selection procedures cannot be replaced with arbitrary actions. They assert that without systematic and planned procedures, staff turnover is an inevitable result. Defiance of legal requirements is another expected result if recruitment is not based on professional procedures. According to the description provided by the above official, it can be said that the steps followed by those at the top neglect important procedures, job analysis, announcement, and adequate selection and grading methods.

Specialist interviewees in personnel affairs provided valuable assessments about current internal recruitment policies and how such policies affect the efficiency of the system. Three quotations are presented within this context below. The first was provided by a Director General from the MCS who had long experience in personnel appraisal:

“When vacancies arise, personnel departments are not allowed to carry out their duties to determine the post’s requirements. Selection of employees to managerial posts comes as a surprise. Ministers think the more confidentially the appointments are planned and issued, the more professional the procedures are. They forget the simple fact that these are public posts that should be filled according to rules and regulations...who can question their decisions?” (I: 15, Expert)

The second response comes from another MCS’s official. This official explained how the lack of standardized procedures results in posts being filled by unqualified employees:

“Internal recruitment lacks clear methods to secure the true meaning and ambition of the law. The system lacks the existence of standardised procedures necessary to ensure equal treatment of individuals, such as interviews and examinations. As a result, key posts are filled by unqualified personnel where there is no connection between skills, qualification, and work experience and the post’s requirements.” (I: 2, Department Director, MCS).

The third comment is provided by an expert from the Institute of Public Administration in Muscat. This official commented on one of the most important issues we covered in Chapter Six. He discussed the failure of the system to implement sufficient measures when filling high grades, while imposing unnecessary requirements for low grades:

“...employment policy excludes top grades from procedures, particularly the grades above the 4th level of the First Group. Eliminating these grades from procedures is a sign that favouritism will be the obvious result. Contrary to the actual need, the lower the financial grade, the more involved the selection process, and the higher the grade, the less the procedures.” (I: 7, Expert from the IPA)

To sum up, interviewees provided concrete argument that the current promotion system adversely affects the objectives of merit. The limited nature of the procedures, which concentrate on the candidate rather than the post, paves the way to selection of the desired person, who may not be the best qualified. The absence of clear-cut rules allows ministers to be both administrators and executors of the procedures. This supports Smith's (1988:234) and Haque's (1997:340) argument on the relationship between bureaucracy and political power in the Third World. These authors stressed that elites attempt to achieve specified interests through the formulation and implementation of public policies. The interviewees' position was consistent with such arguments, as the majority believed that the lack of systematic procedures results in ultimate control by those at the top and, ultimately, merit principles are suspended to serve personal interests.

7.6.2. Effects of Social Norms on Recruitment Policy

The lack of effective procedures is not the only factor adversely affecting the objectives of recruitment and selection in the public service in Oman. The analysis of qualitative data revealed that the interlocking of social relations and bureaucrats is another key variable that indirectly imposes conditions on personnel policies. Questions 1 and 3 of the Interview Schedule and items 16 and 17 of questionnaire open-ended questions discussed this issue. Out of the 42 participants (16 from the interview and 26 from the survey), 28 responses were obtained (see Table 7.27).

Interviewees were asked about the extent to which social norms interplay with the objectives of effective recruitment and promotion policies. The responses obtained were consistent with those obtained from the questionnaire. While 166 participants from the survey (66%) reported that social norms negatively affect recruitment policies (see Table 7.20), most interviewees (23 out of 28) took this same position. The following quotations provide examples of the trends of responses:

"...development since 1970 may have accomplished progress in terms of standards of living and infrastructure, but did not achieve much in terms of peoples' attitudes. Tribalism and lineage are still basic values of the Omani society and these values are reflected in the way employees perform their official duties. It is not surprising, hence, to see a degree of favouritism in public office." (I: 2, Department Director, MCS)

"A new millennium has started and we still have people with a medieval mentality... backing based on tribes and personal interests results in an imbalanced workforce. While inferior posts are filled with people from mixed backgrounds, higher posts are largely occupied by individuals who come from certain groups. Despite education and exposure to the advanced world, nepotism still plays a critical role when key posts are

filled. The observer can easily see that each ministry has a certain social or regional background. This is a reality nobody ignores.” (I: 4, Female Director General)¹²

“Since the entire social structure has been historically based on tribalism, it is normal to find a certain amount of influence being exercised in favour of relatives. It is taken for granted that an individual will use his position to benefit relatives, and failure to do so would generally be regarded as socially reprehensible.” (I: 10, Expert)

As detailed in Chapters Two and Four, the rapid development in Oman since 1970 has created an over-optimistic environment without taking into consideration the capacity of the bureaucracy. The bureaucracy gained a controlling influence under the command of a particular elite circle which operates in the context of the rule of an absolute monarch. This political philosophy was explored by many authors (e.g. Rippenburg 1998; Peterson 2004c). As explained, the obvious result was that the traditional elites in Oman are heavily dependent on the bureaucracy as the instrument of their welfare, particularly when filling key public posts.

Obtained responses reflected the above assumption. The last comment by I: 4 above, when he noted: “The observer can easily see that each ministry has a certain social or regional background”, was particularly salient. Other participants had similar views, but commented on how to overcome the problem. Some called for strict rules as a means of avoiding a concentration of authority in the hands of a limited circle of elite officials. They stressed the need for effective checks and balances:

“Without regulations, nepotism will have fertile ground in the workplace. The power given to senior officials to approve or disapprove appointments without control is used as a mechanism to gain personal interests. Some officials do not appoint their relatives in their agencies, but appoint the relatives of other officials and exchange favours. Rules may help to control such attitudes.” (I: 6, Specialist HRM)

“The current system is not impartial. Most officials work according to the principle “serve me and I will serve you.” I believe that fairness in Oman cannot be secured without strict rules. The system should not allow anyone to intervene in the selection process.” (I: 11, Department Director)

Similar comments were made in the survey, in response to open-ended questions:

“When personal interests exist among those at the top, merit procedures will be used as a cover. Law makers need to be aware of this fact. ” (RS: 26, Civil Servant)

Typically, if an official is given the opportunity to make selection decisions and among the candidates is a relative or a friend, I think he will not hesitate to appoint him. Many Omanis consider this as a social obligation, even if this results in an equal harm to other citizens.” (RS: 17, female Civil Servant)

¹² The interviewee supported this argument by naming some ministries. However, we thought it is not necessary to name these agencies in this study.

“Appointment to managerial posts, I mean posts of decision making capacity, is purely based on social status. This results in serious damage to work efficiency. Instead of appointing the most qualified, employees are appointed because they are the sons of so and so. This is an unfortunate fact in the Sultanate. Worst of all, those who fill posts based on their tribal or familial background become indebted to this orientation and do not hesitate to serve relatives or tribesmen.” (RS: female Civil Servant)

The above responses are consistent with the results obtained of the questionnaire. When participants were asked about the need for formal rules to overcome nepotism, 175 participants (70%) expressed agreement that clear-cut rules can significantly help. In general, participants from both instruments (the interview and the survey) expressed solid regard for formal rules as a way to control misuse of authority.

The results suggest that social norms are sufficiently powerful to defeat the objectives of merit recruitment and selection. These findings are consistent with Fred Riggs’ discussion of the characteristics of Prismatic society, when he emphasised that the failure of public administration in developing countries is essentially caused by the lack of efficient rules that control the effects of the environmental variables (see pp. 26-27). Most interviewees agreed that securing merit and equal opportunities in Oman would require systematic recruitment and promotion procedures.

7.6.3. Proposed Merit Recruitment Procedures

One of the objectives of this research is to suggest policies and procedures that can be adopted to help making recruitment procedures responsive to merit objectives. Similarly to the survey, interviewees were consulted on three issues if managerial posts are to be filled through a newly designed merit-based system (see Que. 4 of Appendix 8). The procedures discussed were: 1) the scope of the announcement (to who posts should be opened to), 2) the authority that will be in charge of carrying out the procedures, and 3) the authority that will be responsible for making or approving the final decision.

With regard to the first issue, the scope of the announcement, respondents’ views fell into distinct groups. On one side, there were those who believed posts should be opened to all candidates, regardless whether they are from inside or outside the organisation. On the other side, there were others who believed that posts should be limited to employees inside the concerned agency, unless there is a lack of qualified candidates in that agency. Each of the two groups gave a justification for their views. The following quotations represent the views of the first group:

“...if public agencies advertise managerial posts to all citizens, they can achieve two goals at once. First, they will have the opportunity to select the best available candidates and, second, their employees will find themselves pressured to develop their talents. These employees will know that if they do not improve their education, training, and skills, they will not be able to compete with others from the private sector or other public agencies.” (I: 2, a Department Director, MCS)

“The 1996 Constitution indicates that taking up public employment is the right of all citizens who meet the requirement. By excluding qualified citizens, you are violating the law and suspending rights. You may argue that in-cadre employees are better, but I do not think this is right on all occasions. If only in-cadre employees are good, why do ministers appoint people from outside? If a new system is to be adopted, public posts should be opened to everyone.” (I: 5, Expert in Administrative Law)

“...nothing in the Civil Service Law demands that public posts should be limited to employees in the civil service or in the agency where posts become vacant. All potential candidates should be given equal opportunity, based on open competition. This will allow new blood to enter the service. In my experience, people from outside come with new ideas and new work methods that contribute positively to efficiency... so why not give all citizens the chance?” (I: 3, E.H. official)¹³

Hence, supporters of opening posts to all prospective candidates argued that this step will encourage in-cadre employees to develop their skills and capabilities in order to be competitive with outsiders. They also argued that this would allow new blood to enter the system and would help in improving work methods. More essential, proponents of this view emphasised that the law (e.g. Article 17 of the Constitution and 15 of the Civil Service Law) demands that public employment is the right of all qualified citizens. By restricting posts to in-cadre employees, a major equal opportunity principle is violated.

Whilst the above position demonstrates the benefits of opening posts to the general public, other respondents, on the contrary, supported the closed career system. They considered filling managerial posts by in-cadre employees is an important method of motivating these employees and improving their self-confidence about their future in the organisation. Further, they argued that advertising posts to outsiders is useless since the authority in charge of selection will be biased towards the people it knows, and , hence outsiders will not get equal opportunities during the competition process:

“It is impractical to advertise posts when you have plenty of good candidates inside the agency. The latter are familiar with work conditions and are impatient to fill higher posts in their organisations. I believe that competition should be limited to qualified employees inside the concerned agency. If nobody meets the requirement, then the authority in charge may think of advertising posts to the general public, although I do not think there will be a need to get to this stage.”(I: 1, Director General, MSC)

¹³ This comment was made by H.E. A. Al-Abri, the Undersecretary of the MCS. He referred to the researcher's experience when he was transferred from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the MCS, and he considered this step as a positive step in exchanging knowledge and work methods.

“It is illogical to announce managerial posts outside the government unit. It is difficult to imagine that all employees in this unit do not meet the requirements.” (RS: 18, Expert)

“The Committee in charge [the Personnel Committee] will be biased towards the people it has known for many years. Those from outside will not get an equal chance, anyway. Hence, advertisement will be used just as a cover. If you already know who you want to appoint, why not declare it from the start and avoid wasting people’s time... nothing is wrong with that.” (I: 12, Specialist in Personnel Department)

“Opening posts to the public might be applicable in advanced systems where plenty of qualified candidates are available. This is not the case in Oman, however. Competition should be limited to those who meet the requirements inside the organisation. It will be a great achievement if you can secure merit on this level.” (RS: 22, Civil Servant)

“After careful study of the available candidates inside the agency, Personnel Committees should decide to whom posts should be opened to.” (I: 9, E.H. official)

Therefore, those who believe posts should be limited to in-cadre employees built their argument on two main bases: 1) in-cadre employees need to be motivated, and 2) outsiders will not get equal opportunity. Out of the 15 interviewees who responded to this item, 9 were convinced that posts should be limited to in-cadre employees while 6 suggested they should be opened to the general public. Most of those who supported the first option were MCS officials with experience in personnel policies. MCS’s experts were pragmatic. They supported the gradual change and thought it would be easier to start by reflecting merit inside public agencies. Further, as mentioned in one of the above comments, opening in-cadre public posts to the outside labour might apply to western models of HRM which pre-suppose a competitive extended labour market. This does not apply to Oman or similar developing countries’ public systems, primarily because these systems usually attract the most qualified personnel (Jreisat 2002).

If we compare the above results to those obtained from the questionnaire, a clear difference can be noticed. In the questionnaire, 114 participants (45.6%) suggested that posts should be advertised to the general public, while 87 (34.8%) believed that these posts should be limited to in-cadre employees (see Table 7.25). Nevertheless, consistency was noticed in another area. Experts in personnel policies from various public agencies, including MCS officials, had a similar position, in both the interview and the survey. As mentioned above, experts agreed that limiting competition to in-cadre employees is more practical. Unlike other participants, experts thought the system is not ready to adopt the Open Career System.

The second issue put to interviewees was the authority in charge of carrying out recruitment and selection procedures (see Part B of the Interview Schedule). In general,

respondents agreed that the Personnel Committee in each public agency is the most appropriate government authority to handle such duty. According to them, the challenge to carry out standardised and adequate merit procedures is twofold: one, to identify the functions of the concerned authority, and, two, to secure implementation of its decisions. Their concern was to make the process in accordance with the meaning and ambition of the law. The following quotations provide examples of the trends of responses:

“Standardised and adequate techniques are necessary to ensure equal treatment of individuals. Currently most procedures are neglected and posts are filled through administrative appointments. By allowing Personnel Committees to perform their duties, many benefits will be gained. First, instead of letting one person decide who is the best for the post, this authority will be shared by 3-4 specialists, including post supervisors. Second, employees selected will not be under an obligation to a particular person [e.g. the minister], but instead to the system. This process will transfer loyalty to organisation rather than to people. (I: 14, Director General)

“Indeed, Personnel Committees are the most qualified authority to perform procedures. In fact, this rule is recognised by the Civil Service Law, but is not activated. Currently these committees only approve appointments. If a new system is to be implemented, the MCS should make clear guideline of procedures to be followed...ambiguity results in misinterpretation... this must be avoided.” (I: 5, Expert in Administrative Law)

What we need when selecting employees to key posts is to activate the relevant rules in the Civil Service Law. The law demands that Personnel Committees in public agencies be responsible for conducting procedures.¹⁴ A selection decision made by four people is not the same as when it is made by one person. If Personnel Committees did what they are supposed to do, favouritism would be notably minimised.” (I: 7, Expert, IPA)

Responses from survey open-ended questions also offered a range of opinions on the rule of Personnel Committees ranging from acknowledging the importance of selecting qualified members, to methods that can ensure efficiency, for instance:

“The MCS, Personnel Committees, and a specialist from a neutral institution should be responsible for procedures. I also suggest that it is important to create an auditing institution to monitor the efficiency of procedures regularly.” (SR, 33, Civil Servant)

“I agree Personnel Committees should be responsible for all procedures. However, it is important when selecting committees’ members to ensure that these people are known for their faithfulness and capability” (RS: 32, Civil Servant)¹⁵

“The committee can be chaired by the Undersecretary from the concerned agency. If the post is Director General or equivalent, it must be chaired by the minister. What is important is to make its decision final. If any member of this committee has a relative as a candidate, he/she should be excluded. This rule should be clearly stated in the law or the relevant regulation, to avoid favouritism.” (SR, 26, Manger)

¹⁴ The rules the interviewee is referring to are Article 46 and 47 of the Civil Service Law (Oman 1980:15). Article 8 of the newly issued Civil Service Law contains similar procedures (see p. 8 of Oman 2005).

¹⁵ The need to ensure the faithfulness and justice of Personnel Committee members was mentioned by many interviewees. Respondents stressed these members must be selected based on well defined standards.

The above responses clearly suggest that Personnel Committees are the most qualified to carry out the selection procedures. Respondents explained that specialization is demanded by current regulations, but these regulations are not activated and ministers currently act as legislators and executors of procedures. The first two comments raised the issue that if Personnel Committees were allowed to perform their duties, the outcome would be legitimate compared to current practice. Instead of letting one person control all processes and taking the risk of possible bias, merit would have more chance to be secured if this authority is shared by 3-4 specialised officials, and, hence, favouritism will be significantly minimised. Other respondents pointed to another key benefit. They indicated that by allowing Personnel Committees to perform their duties, selected employees would not be obliged for their appointment to a particular person, but to the system, instead. As a result, loyalty would be transferred to the organisation.

Reresponses, in general, confirm the findings from the questionnaire, where the great majority 203 participants (81.2%) agreed that Personnel Committees should be responsible for carrying out selection procedures. The only difference noticed in the responses from the two methods is related to the role of the central personnel public agency. While most of the survey participants stressed the need to involve the Ministry of Civil Service as either the sole participant or as an observer, most interviewees believed that the MCS should not have a direct role. Interviewees suggested that the MCS should intervene only if rules were misinterpreted or violated and MCS's role should be limited to monitoring the implementation of policies, without direct involvement. The following quotations provide justification for taking this position:

“Appointment to this type of posts [managerial posts] is an internal issue of the agency concerned. The law should list clearly all procedures required and the centralised agency may monitor accuracy of implementation, but there is no need to involve any party in agencies’ internal matters, including the MCS.” (RS: 37, Civil Servant)

The last issue discussed was the authority responsible for making or approving the final selection decision. In the survey, two thirds of participants 162 (64.8%) suggested that this duty should be given to the same authority who was responsible for conducting the procedures. Similar views were expressed by interviewees. Respondents from the interview added that if Personnel Committees’ decisions are not made final (e.g. if made subject to ministers’ approval) there is no point in conducting the merit procedures from the outset. The following quotations provide examples of the trends of responses:

“...the committee [the Personnel Committee] should be authorised to make the final decisions and should be held responsible for its decisions. What is important is that it should not be influenced by ministers. The MCS must monitor functions from time to time.” (SR: 23, Manager)

“If the minister in charge has particular candidates or particular views, he/she can explain these concerns to the committee. In fact, he/she can head this committee, but when the committee makes a decision, the decision must be final. Nobody should be allowed to change this decision. If decisions are not made final, there is no point in conducting procedures from the beginning.” (I: 15, Expert)

“...the final selection decision should be made by the minister concerned. However, if this decision is contrary to Personnel Committee’s suggestion, then an explanation needs to be provided to the MCS, whose decision must be final.” (I: 16, H.E. Official)

Hence, respondents believed Personnel Committees should be responsible for both procedures and the final selection decision. However, it can be inferred from the above views that the structure of Personnel Committees can be different from the structure organised by current laws and regulations. Respondents suggest that ministers should chair these committees if they want to intervene in the selection decision. The objective is to give Personnel Committees the strength required to make their decisions final. In other words, participants rejected allowing ministers to refuse committees’ decisions or to make changes in these decisions. They stressed that if this authority is suspended, the objectives of merit, equality, and efficiency will be suspended as well.

The analysis of qualitative data relevant to future recruitment and selection procedures reveals that respondents called for procedures that consist of specific stages organised sufficiently to lead to effective and objective merit results. Three stages of procedures were suggested that could be easily implemented and followed in a systematic way. These procedures were separated from each other by sub-steps for the purpose of implementation and each has certain requirements that must be attained in order to achieve objectives. In the final chapter, we will evaluate these views and suggestions, along with Perry’s (1994) seven steps model of good practice (outlined in Chapter Two) in order to present a model of merit procedures that can be implemented in Oman.

7.7. Summary and Conclusion

This chapter presented the results obtained from a questionnaire administered to 250 Omani civil servants and interviews conducted with 16 senior officials. In its first part, the chapter examined the study hypotheses based on the quantitative data obtained from the survey. After presenting the response rate (320 questionnaires were distributed, 288

returned and 250 accepted), the characteristics of the sample were analysed. In relation to gender, the results revealed a clear bias towards males in filling key posts (71% were occupied by men as opposed to 28% by women). The least participation by females was reported in managerial and expert post (6.7% and 22%, respectively), revealing the obstacles facing women in achieving equal opportunity. The analysis also revealed inconsistency between the rates obtained by this study and those declared by the MCS.

The age structure of participants was analysed, as well. The results revealed that the majority were in the middle age group (31-45 years). This result corresponds with the MCS's Report and led to two key observations: 1) A large portion of the workforce is expected to remain for a longer time (the retirement age is 60) and, consequently, fewer jobs are expected to be offered by the public sector to solve the unemployment problem. 2) The Omanisation strategy is not expected to contribute much in solving the problem, as well, since most expatriates' posts have already been filled by Omanis.¹⁶ Therefore, the focus will be on the private sector. We explained that this sector, however, has its own obstacles. Employers in the private sector need skilled and talented employees, while most Omanis are secondary school graduates without sufficient training and education, when compared to foreign labour. Hence, the government's only option is to qualify citizens to make them competitive with expatriates in the private sector.

The analysis of the educational attainment of the sample provided key findings, as well. First, it revealed that the civil service has achieved significant progress in attracting and retaining educated employees. A large portion of the sample (70.4%) had university or post-graduate education. Second, the finding that 29.6% of participants occupying managerial posts with education equal to or less than secondary school raises concerns about the need to implement an accurate position classification system. An emphasis need to be placed on education when recruiting or promoting employees to key posts, since a significant number of qualified Omanis are now available.

Next, research hypotheses were tested. We started by measuring compliance with the merit procedures, based on participants' personal experience. Three essential procedures were examined: 1) the use of job analysis, 2) advertisement, and 3) the selection method used. The results revealed non-compliance, as 60.8% of participants confirmed that no

¹⁶ According the MCS Annual Statistical Report, expatriates represented 35.4% of the workforce in 1990 as opposed to 16.9% in 2003 (MCS:2004:13)

job analysis was used, 68.4% of posts did not have a job description from the outset, and 82% of posts were filled purely based on the education attainments of candidates. With regard to advertisement, only 33.6% of posts were filled through official means (7.2% were advertised and 26.4% through MCS's transfer), while 66.4% were filled through non-merit means (34% directly and 32% through a relative/friend). The selection method used was no different. Only 27.6% of participants reported that they went through merit procedures, while the majority (72.4%) confirmed that either no procedures were followed or a relative/friend intervened in the appointment. In general, 65% of the survey respondents were selected for their posts through non-merit means.

Factors that affect internal recruitment were examined, as well. Contradictory to what is declared by the Civil Service Law, Seniority and Availability of Funds were considered the determinants of grade-to-grade promotion, while Ministers' Discretion and Social Influence were considered the most influential in post-to-post promotion. The results revealed that the reality is different from the declared principles. In practice, rules are not followed and merit is suspended, due to the unlimited authority given to ministers, where subjective opinion is allowed, and accordingly, favouritism and nepotism.

In relation to the Representative Bureaucracy concept, the study examined the impact of employees' background on policy outcomes and the extent of representation of the workforce in managerial posts in terms of region, social status, and gender. Contrary to our assumption, the majority of participants (excluding females in the gender factor) believed that the workforce is relatively representative and background does not play a major role in determining attitudes when performing duties (Mean = 3.62). Although responses were inconsistent, we explained that this stand could be attributed to popular misperception that the Omani society is homogeneous, since all are Arabs and Muslims.

The study, then, evaluated participants' extent of satisfaction with current recruitment and selection procedures when managerial posts are filled. The issue was examined in relation to three specific procedures: recruitment process, the decision making stage, and consistency of rules and practice. The results revealed that three quarters of the sample (74.4%) were dissatisfied with the current system. Further analysis of this result was carried out to see if there is any significant correlations between extent of satisfaction and participants' background characteristics. Three background variables were found to show significant differences (age, education and length of service), while

no difference was found in relation to others (gender and occupational groups). Younger and educated officials reported higher rates of dissatisfaction as opposed to older and less educated officials. The first two groups showed stronger support for reform and for the accurate implementation of the merit system as opposed to the second two groups.

The field study also explored the interaction between personnel policies and the social values of the Omani society that adversely affect the objectives of merit in public office. Two research hypotheses were tested within this context. The first was related to the extent of such an effect, while the second related to methods that could be followed to avoid negative circumstances. Out of the 250 participants, the majority (66.4%) reported that social norms do affect the functions of the bureaucracy, in general, and personnel policies, in particular. In response to the role of particularistic expressions in the daily work activities, 56% of participants agreed that citizens do not have equal access to public services, confirming the assumption that officials are influenced by society's expectations when performing their duties, regardless of formal rules. The results also supported the study's hypothesis that organisational effectiveness is directly linked to the environment within which the bureaucracy functions and revealed that social norms in Oman provide fertile ground for favouritism and nepotism when employees are being recruited or promoted to key posts. Based on participants' responses, it was clear that particularistic values are deeply reflected in the conception of formal duties. Although the rules declare that citizens are equal, in actual practice, those who have influence get better services and better access to key public posts.

The next concern was to comprehend why this phenomenon exists in Oman, and how the system can overcome its negative impacts. Participants expressed solid regard for formal rules as means of controlling the patronage system. 66% expressed agreement that the existence of clear-cut rules can significantly help to limit favouritism in the workplace, and 58% agreed that securing equality requires rules to be followed literally. Participants believed that if rules are flexible, subjective interpretation can ultimately be expected. If subjective interpretation is allowed, corruption, favouritism and nepotism are likely to occur. In relation to securing merit, 70% reported a solid stand for strict formal rules as the most effective means to secure merit principles.

The last issue discussed in the first part of this chapter was methods to develop the system to be more responsive to merit procedures. Three interrelated issues were put to

participants. First, participants were asked about the extent to which reform is needed. 85.5% agreed that there is an urgent need for reform, and a slightly higher proportion (92.4%) supported the idea of replacing the current system with a newly designed merit-based system. Second, participants were consulted about procedures that could be adopted to minimise potential bias when managerial posts are filled. The majority agreed that: 1) posts should be opened to all prospective candidates, 2) the Personnel Committee in each public agency should be responsible for carrying out all procedures with the participation of an observer from the MCS, and 3) the same Committee should be authorised to make the final selection decision. We evaluated these views and explained that most of the suggested procedures are already included in the CSL, but are either misinterpreted or not implemented. Third, participants were asked about obstacles that may arise if the new system is adopted. Unwillingness on the part of ministers was considered as the most pressing obstacle (M=2.68), followed by the lack of readiness of the system (e.g. poor organisational structures, absence of job classification) (M= 2.07). Other factors such as the lack of competitive rules and the lack of human resources, scored less (M = 2.02 and 1.79, respectively).

The second part of this chapter was devoted to the analysis of the results obtained from the interview and the open-ended questions from the survey. The results of the semi-structured interviews shed further light on the factors that influence recruitment by merit in Oman. The rationale for using qualitative data was explained, followed by the methods the researcher used to present the obtained data. Three themes were explored within this context, based on the issues raised most often by participants. These were: 1) factors that influence promotion, 2) effects of social norms on recruitment policies, and 3) proposed procedures if the new merit system is adopted in the Omani civil service.

Responses obtained from the interview in relation to the first factor were consistent with those obtained from the survey. Contrary to the ambitions of the law where performance and merit are considered the determinants of promotion, officials emphasised that seniority (completion of four years in the current grade) is the main factor that influences grade-to-grade promotion, while ministers' discretion and candidates' social status are the determinants in post-to-post promotion, through which managerial posts are filled. They criticised the limited nature of current procedures which concentrate on candidates' background rather than the requirements of the post and believed that the ultimate authority given to ministers without checks and balances suspends the

objectives of merit. Experts explained that the absence of clear rules allows ministers to act as both legislators and executors of procedures and, as a result, appointments become purely based on subjective decisions, or, in some case, personal interests.

The second issue put to interviewees was the effects of social norms on recruitment policies and procedures. Similar to the first factor, the results obtained were consistent with those from the survey. Respondents stressed that social norms are sufficiently powerful to defeat the objectives of merit. They explained that the interlocking of social relations and bureaucrats' perception of their formal duties impose conditions on recruitment and promotion policies. Tribalism and lineage were considered as the main barriers to securing equal employment opportunity. To overcome this problem, officials interviewed called for strict rules and their literal implementation as a means of avoiding the concentration of authority in the hands of a limited circle of elite.

Finally, interviewees were consulted on the procedures that can be followed if a new merit system is implemented in Oman. Experts, mostly from the MCS, suggested that vacant managerial posts should be opened only to prospective candidates from the concerned public agency. Similar to the views obtained from the survey, interviewees suggested that Personnel Committees should be authorised to carry out all recruitment procedures, including the final selection decisions.

How close is Oman, based in this evidence, to good HRM? Are we still looking at the outcomes of a prismatic society, as explained by Riggs? The evidence presented in this chapter suggests that major deficiencies face the Omani civil service system as regards implementation of an efficient and EEO based recruitment policy. The findings obtained from this chapter will be considered when we present some possible alternatives that can help develop the system to be responsive to merit principles discussed in the literature. The aim will be to create a system that minimises potential bias when public servants are recruited or promoted. The next chapter, the concluding chapter, is designated for this purpose. Chapter Eight will discuss the results obtained in this chapter and will attempt to relate these findings to previous research findings obtained from previous chapters.

Chapter Eight

Conclusions and Research Implications

8.1. Introduction

This chapter is devoted to summarising the study and to highlighting its findings and implications for implementing efficient recruitment policy in the Omani public personnel system. It begins by critically interpreting the findings obtained from the field study in the light of the literature, followed by the limitations of these findings and suggested ideas for future research. Next, the recommendations to implement systematic procedures that can secure merit are presented. The recommendations are based on a working model of merit-based HRM and cover both internal and external recruitment. The chapter ends by bringing all the study's elements together. After presenting the contribution obtained based on the field study, the last section highlights the theoretical contribution by relating the approach adapted to the EEO approaches discussed in the literature.

8.2. Summary and Findings

The study's primary research interest is merit in public personnel management. The aim was to enrich the literature on equal employment opportunity by investigating how merit-based recruitment HRM principles and practices are embedded into the HRM systems of developing countries' public services. The Omani civil service was taken as a case study and the aim was to investigate the factors that influence the implementation of recruitment by merit. The study focused on the challenges and prospects of applying systematic recruitment that suits the context of the Omani public administration, with particular attention to procedures when filling managerial posts. The main instruments used to examine the propositions derived from the literature were survey questionnaires combined with semi-structured interviews, allowing triangulation of quantitative and qualitative methods. It was explained that the use of different research methods of data collection enabled more accurate testing of hypotheses and allowed in-depth coverage of the issues investigated.

The six objectives presented in Chapter One provided the foundation for the structure of the study and the way its research questions and hypotheses were formulated. The

findings from the analysis of the documentary data and the content analysis of the field study provide evidence that modernising personnel policies in developing countries is not an easy task, particularly in the light of the cultural background and the nature of the social and political factors that surround the functions of the public bureaucracy. The field study provided clear evidence that environmental variables were essential features of the explanation of the problems preventing efficient personnel policies in Oman.

The study has shown that prior to the discovery and export of oil, Oman was a poor society, and was regionally and tribally divided. The direct and indirect effects of the growth of oil exports led to a rapid transformation of the economy and society, and saw the swift evolution of a government public bureaucracy. This progress is remarkable when put in the context of Oman's recent creation as a developing country. The success of the development plans the government adopted since 1970 was apparent in terms of achieving high rates of growth and improvements of infrastructure. However, while government plans met success in terms of material changes, the change did not equally touch people's traditional attitudes.

The study found that Oman has not passed the "Maladjustment" period mentioned by Ogburn (1993); "a period required for transformation to a modern society". Tribal and familial interdependence still exist in society, which, consequently, leads to the practice favouritism and nepotism when civil servants are recruited or promoted to public posts. Material development in Oman did not succeed in weakening the hold of the negative social norms and the government's plans failed to educate people to cope with changes. In fact, the results of the field study provided clear evidence that social attitudes have succeeded in conditioning changes according to their demands, and, therefore, traditions and social attitudes remain obstacles to the evolution started in 1970.

The study found that change in people's attitudes requires a period of time. This finding corresponds with Foster's (1993) argument of the "Reconciliation period" required before a genuine change emerges. Developing societies require a period of settlement and a distinction has to be made between material and non-material changes. We have shown that material change does not necessarily mean a corresponding change in attitudes. This argument was supported by strong empirical evidence which was reflected in the results obtained based on this study questionnaire if compared to Awaji (1972). While 72% of public servants in 1972 in Saudi Arabia reported that favouring

relatives is a recognised social duty, only 37% took this position in Oman in 2004, indicating that employees' perception of work values is changing for the better, but very slowly. The difference in the rates between the two studies describes the HRM situation in the Arab Gulf States. The rapid changes achieved in the material field due to sudden oil wealth were not matched by equal changes in civil servants understanding of their formal duties as opposed to their social obligations. The old pattern of the tribal value system has been difficult to destroy, although it is slowly changing.

The results from the field study confirmed the assumption that society in Oman remains traditional, and that loyalty to the tribe and family influences employees' attitudes when performing their formal duties. The outcome is a bureaucracy whose efficiency is diminished by the spread of nepotism, and bargaining for personal and tribal interests instead of a positive contribution to the general welfare. Unconstructive social norms in Oman cause serious impediments that have affected the performance of the bureaucracy in general and employment practice in particular.

After accepting the regulatory merit-based recruitment system as the most practical EEO approach that can be implemented in Oman, the study identified from the literature a working merit-based recruitment model. It was found that systematic recruitment policy is the cornerstone for all organisational success. Distinct procedures, such as effective job analysis, practical selection processes and fair assessment can lead not only to successful appointments, but also to securing equality principles. The study critically examined current recruitment policy in Oman using Parry's (1994) seven-step model of good practice as the criteria for comparison. The findings were summarised and their implications were outlined. The focus was mainly on answering the study's main and subsidiary questions listed in the Methodology chapter.

The evaluation of the procedures in Oman was based on the results obtained from the survey questionnaires administered to 250 civil servants and interviews conducted with 16 government officials, most of whom were MCS officials. In the following we present the major findings based on the results of the field study and their implication.

8.2.1: The Findings of the Field Study

1. The analysis of the features of the survey sample revealed important findings. First, it reveals a clear bias towards males in filling managerial posts and confirms the

obstacles females in Oman face in gaining equal access to key posts. Second, the age structure of the sample revealed that the majority of civil servants were of a middle age (31-45 years). This means that a large portion of the workforce is expected to remain for a longer time, limiting the job vacancies expected to be offered by this sector in solving the unemployment problem. We explained that the emphasis, accordingly, should be on the private sector. The main obstacle in the private sector is the fact that this sector needs skilled employees while most Omanis lack the required attributes. The only option is to take sufficient measures to qualify Omanis to be competitive with expatriates. Finally, the analysis of the educational attainment of the sample revealed that the system has achieved major progress in retaining educated employees. Yet we found a large portion of key posts were occupied by employees with education equal to or less than secondary education. The system needs to take sufficient measures to implement an accurate position classification system to secure the selection of qualified personnel.

2. The results of the field study revealed that implementing an effective recruitment system in Oman relates to some environmental variables. The study examined the interaction between implementing efficient personnel policies and the patronage system practiced in Oman that adversely affects objectives. Two hypotheses were tested within this context, and the results revealed that social norms strongly affect the functions of the bureaucracy, confirming our assumption that employees are influenced by society's expectations to serve intimate groups, regardless of formal rules. The results also supported the hypothesis that organisational effectiveness is directly linked to the environment within which the system functions, and revealed that social norms in Oman provide fertile ground for favouritism and nepotism, particularly when employees are recruited or promoted to senior public posts.
3. The study examined methods to overcome the affect of the patronage system. Respondents, through both research instruments (the survey and the interviews), expressed the belief that subjective interpretation of rules ultimately opens doors to nepotism. They expressed solid regard for formal rules as an effective means to control negative attitudes and agreed that the existence of clear-cut rules and their literal implementation can significantly help to control favouritism and nepotism. They were convinced that implementing a regulatory merit-based recruitment and selection procedures can help to secure both equal opportunity and efficiency.

4. Factors that influence promotion were evaluated. Contrary to the ambitions of the law where merit is considered the determinant, experts interviewed emphasised that Seniority is the determinant in grade-to-grade promotion, while ministers' discretion and candidates' status are the determinants in post-to-post promotion. Experts and specialists from personnel departments criticised the limited nature of the current selection procedures, which concentrate on candidates' seniority and status rather than the post's requirements. They believed the ultimate authority given to ministers, without procedures and checks and balances, undermines the merit objectives. Some indicated that ministers currently act as both legislators and executors of recruitment policies and procedures. The result is appointments purely based on subjective decisions, and in many cases, personal interests.
5. Participants were consulted on the procedures that can be followed if a new merit recruitment system is adopted. After confirming the urgent need for reform, the majority supported the idea of replacing the current system with the proposed merit-based personnel system. With regard to procedures, participants agreed that posts should be opened to all prospective candidates and Personnel Committees in public agencies should be in charge of all procedures, including the final selection decision. They agreed that an observer from the MCS can participate, if needed. We found that most of the procedures suggested are already included in the law, but rules are either misinterpreted or not implemented. When participants were asked about obstacles that may arise in adopting the merit system, the majority believed that unwillingness on the part of ministers would be the most pressing obstacle, followed by the lack of qualified personnel to carry out the procedures.

8.2.2: Limitations of the Field Study

Before presenting recommendations, it is appropriate to make the reader aware of the limitations of the field study that restrict its utility. A major limitation is the fact that the sampling technique used was not based on probability sampling where each case is known and is equal for all cases (all have a specific non-zero chance of being included). To use this advantageous technique, particular requirements must be met, most of which this study was not capable of. For instance, names of all prospective participants should be known and a systematic selection made from them. In our case, the study population were distributed among 38 agencies in various regions and towns in Oman.

Further, no list of all names was made available from which a random selection could be made. To overcome this, non-probability sampling was adopted based on the availability of subjects (convenience sample), where the researcher took advantage of an accessible situation which happened to fit the research context and purpose.

Second, all participants who met the sampling criteria from the selected agencies were invited to participate, yet the decision to return the questionnaire was the participant's. Therefore, the results reflected the responses of those who chose to participate and may not be representative of the actual population.

A third limitation is the fact that the sample was drawn from ministries' headquarters in Muscat and some major cities (e.g. Salalah and Sur). Therefore, it is possible that these agencies attract a unique sort of civil servants, thus limiting the generalisability of the sample. Though one might assume that those participants are not remarkably different from those who did not participate, it is still a consideration to bear in mind.

The fourth limitation is that not all agencies who participated in the survey participated in the interviews. However, there were rich comments obtained from these agencies' participants based on the open-ended questions from the survey which, to some extent, compensated for this particular limitation.

Lastly, the constraints on the scope of the study precluded the examination of some personnel activities which may be central to the complete understanding of recruitment policies. For example, position classification, a key characteristic in many studies on recruitment and selection, could not be ascertained due to the restrictions of the study. This research study was able to examine only some of the wide range of aspects of personnel policies and procedures.

8.2.3: Suggested Ideas for Future Research

Improving personnel policies and practice to be more responsive to modern HRM is an area with room for development. Implicit in most research is the fact that it leads to the discovery of further research questions, while answering others. In this study's case, the findings suggest that an area to be considered is the position classification system used in the Omani civil service. This system should not be static, and the potential of new applicants cannot be predetermined; there is a need for further research to determine the effectiveness of the current system.

The study found that the current position classification system has many shortcomings that prevent it from being effective. While the law emphasises the importance of this system in various chapters and articles, there is no systematic pattern put into practice that would enable the objectives to be achieved. As explained, current rules cannot be considered more than guidelines for an effective position classification system.

Future research on this subject would need to take advantage of qualitative research methods (e.g. interviews with practitioners) to evaluate the effectiveness of the current system. The experience of this study showed how effective and useful such a method can be. Omani officials can provide valuable information if good arrangements are made. A field study evaluation of the extent of commitment from the part of public agencies may help to build a greater understanding of the complex relationship between policies and practice. Indeed, future research needs to investigate how the civil service can develop and sustain a sound system of position classification.

8.3. Recommendations

Overall, people ought to be the end as well as the means of the adopted personnel system. As explained before, organisational effectiveness depends on human resources and the best use of these resources greatly depends on the personnel policies adopted and followed to enhance the ability to perform the required duties. Hence, policies must be responsive to change; not incrementally, law-by-law, but continuously. The challenges that face the development of these policies in Oman have emphasised the acquisition and utilisation of HRM as vital for organisational success. In this context, several issues need to be considered in reference to factors that have an adverse effect on the objectives of the implementation of merit recruitment in principle and practice.

In the following, we will present some of the key recommendations that can lead to the standardisation of recruitment procedures in Oman in order to make the system more responsive to the merit principles declared by the country's constitution and the relevant rules in the Civil Service Law. These recommendations are based on this research's findings and are supported by the working model of good practice identified from the literature. However, it has to be acknowledged that some of these suggestions listed, particularly those related to internal recruitment, benefited to a large extent from the valuable views provided by MCS's experts and senior officials who were interviewed in the course of this research.

8.3.1: Internal Recruitment (filling managerial posts)

1. This type of recruitment should be used to fill all vacant or newly created managerial or supervisory posts. Only in-cadre employees are to be allowed to apply. However, if the concerned authority finds that there is an insufficient number of qualified candidates inside the concerned agency, then posts can be advertised to the general public. All prospective in-cadre candidates should be informed of the available vacancies and should be allowed sufficient time to apply and to submit their fields (e.g. CV). Personnel Committees in each government agency should be directly responsible for all recruitment procedures, including the final selection decision. Ministers or Undersecretaries can chair these committees, if they want to be involved. However, if these officials decide not to participate, they should be obliged by law to accept the committees' decisions. This will strengthen the role of Personnel Committees and will help to secure the implementation of merit principles by avoiding potential subjective opinions.
2. The selection procedures conducted by Personnel Committees must be based on a clear job analysis (post description and person specification). Skills, qualification, and experience required to perform the post should be clearly listed based on an actual requirements (duties and responsibilities). Systematic merit-based selection procedures should be carried out by the concerned committee if competition processes are required (e.g. interviewees and/or examinations). Procedures should secure the implementation of the true meaning of equal employment opportunity.
3. Successful recruitment procedures are highly dependent on the participation of posts' direct supervisors. These people are the most familiar with the quality of the employees needed for the post and have the most relevant experience. Hence, posts' managers and supervisors should be included in the membership of the Personnel Committee responsible for carrying out the selection procedures.
4. The MCS, as the central authority responsible for securing the implementation of merit, may oversee the procedures, delegating a staff member to participate with Personnel Committees in public agencies to ensure the process implemented as intended. As explained, centralising procedures requires defined responsibilities, delineated relationships between the centre and concerned public agencies, and an accepted system of central control. Unfortunately, the MCS is far from meeting these requirements. Therefore, decentralisation might appear to be desirable when

filling managerial posts (internal recruitment), as long as the procedures are based on unified rules. Decentralisation may allow greater discretion by agencies in deciding about their needs, methods and means that suit their particular objectives.

5. Qualified applicants should be allowed to compete for all vacant or newly created posts from grade 2/1 (the Second grade of the First Group) and below, including grades designated for General Directors posts. Grade 1/1 and above can be filled through royal decrees or decisions by the CSC, if necessary. However, the MCS should abandon its exceptional employment policy that excludes ordinary posts from competition. As explained, the present challenges require the selection of people with qualification, training, and skills, especially in managerial level posts.

8.3.2: External Recruitment (filling entry level posts)

6. Posts filled from external sources must be advertised to all candidates. The MCS should supervise the procedures based on the 1997 Central Recruitment Act issued by the Council of Ministers with the participation of one or two staff from the agency who seeks to fill the post (e.g. post's direct supervisors). Procedures would be held in two stages. In the first stage, a computer software program can be designed to select the first 5-10 candidates based on points system calculated against qualification, training, skills and relevant experience. In the second stage, the candidates who obtained the highest number of points would be interviewed by the concerned committee and the points earned in the interview would be added to those obtained based on the first stage. As explained before, currently hundreds of candidates apply to entry level posts and there are no specific criteria based on which selection is made. This situation makes merit selection almost impossible. The objective of using the computer software is to limit the number of candidates who go to the second stage to a reasonable number based on standardised criteria, so that objective assessment can be made in the interview stage.
7. The points system software program should be easy to use. For instance, if a public agency seeks to fill a typist post, the person specification requirements might include a minimum of Secondary School Certificate. Three months training and some practical work experience can be listed as desirable conditions. The data provided by candidates who meet the basic requirements can be entered into the program and the grading criteria can be based on the following arrangements:

- 40 points for educational qualifications (GNP as good, very good, etc)
- 20 points for work experience in the post or in posts of a similar nature.
- 20 points for training skills based on official certificates.
- 20 points based on the interview (2nd stage) which would be held for the 5-10 candidates who obtained the greatest number of points in the first stage.

Based on the above measures, if candidate X has a Diploma (35 points), three months training (10 points), one year’s work experience (15 points) and obtained 5 points in the interview, while candidate Y has a Secondary School Certificate (25 points), six months training (15 points), six months work experience (10 points) and obtained 8 points in the interview, the program should automatically select candidate X who obtained 65 points. Finally, all the results must be announced, including the criteria through which the selection was based, either after the first stage (the computer stage) or after the second stage (the interview stage). This way the MCS will save time and efforts, and, more essential, merit will be secured.

To assist the reader, Table 8.1 below summarises internal and external recruitment and selection procedures recommended by this study, which can be compared to current procedures illustrated previously (for summary, see Figure 6.2 p.210, and Tables 6.3 p. 218 and Table 6.4 p.225).

Table 8.1: Study recommended procedures for internal and external recruitment

Type of Recruitment	Nature of posts	Authority responsible for the procedures	Selection Criteria	Applying requirement
External	Entry level posts	The MCS with the participation of post’s direct supervisors from the concerned public agency	Stage 1: 80% of points based on computer program Stage 2: 20% of points based on the interview	All prospective candidates
Internal	Managerial Posts	The Personnel Committee in the concerned public agency with the participation of an observer from the MCS	Interviews and/or examinations, based on the criteria set by the Committee	In-cadre employees in the concerned agency

8.3.3: General issues

8. The MCS has not yet initiated a proper position classification system, without which recruitment and selection have no value. Indeed, a new system is required as soon as possible. The new system should be the cornerstone of all personnel policies and should be the starting point to secure the concept of the right person in

the right job. The system should also guarantee the principle of equal pay for equal work by grouping positions into occupational categories according to their level of responsibilities; not according to the individuals who occupy them. This will lead to standardisation of requirements, which, in turn, can lead to effective recruitment and selection procedures that would minimise potential bias.

9. The analysis in Chapter Six showed that there is a need to re-evaluate the salary scales so they reflect performance, effort, skills and experience. The MCS should make further attempts to improve the salaries. Otherwise hardworking civil servants with talents and skills may find jobs elsewhere and leave, while average employees would stay, but unsatisfied. Even if salaries are improved, the MCS should review scales periodically to keep up with changes. For instance, salaries need to be consistent with inflation and salaries offered by the private sector.
10. The present Civil Service Law needs to be changed to accommodate the changes the civil service witnessed since 1980, when the current law was issued. The rules of the new law should be clear and easy to understand. The law should not declare principles the system is not capable of implementing. Such declarations could be the subject of legal claims by civil servants, particularly in the light of the creation of the new Administrative Court in 2001, which is authorised by the constitution to intervene in all administrative decisions. Flexibility in the law must not become a cover for irregularity in practice and subjective interpretations of rules should be avoided, especially if it may result in favouritism when citizens are selected to public posts. There should be a continuous monitoring of the application of policies and procedures and the rules should be correctly adhered to in the normal practice. Ensuring merit principles is probably the most important issue that needs to be subject to periodical review. Above all, merit principles should inform all recruitment, selection, examination, interview, and promotion procedures.

These considerations are just a few steps on the way to solving the problem, but are not the ultimate solution. The task of finding people who possess or have the potential to develop the knowledge and skills that enable the system to carry out the tasks necessary for the achievement of aims, is obviously of fundamental significance. As explained, the MCS, as the central agency in charge for personnel policy, must take action to disrupt the influence of patronage, which indeed retards this objective.

Some of these suggestions have been discussed with senior MCS officials. During his visit to Oman to carry out the field work (April to August 2004), the researcher had several meetings with these officials, including the Minister H.E. Hilal Al-Maawali and the Undersecretary H.E. Abdurahman Al-Abri. The researcher explained the benefits of developing the current recruitment system to be more responsive to merit objectives, particularly in the light of the legal development introduced by the constitution and the Administrative Court. His suggestions received positive responses from many staff in the MCS, including the Minister himself. The researcher believes that his efforts have borne fruit even before the final findings have been made available.¹

Recently (April 2005), the researcher was informed by an official from MCS who was visiting the U.K that the MCS is proposing to the Civil Service Council the need to create a specialised committee to review and evaluate the current recruitment policies. If this committee is created, the researcher is confident that the findings will trigger the Council's attention to the major deficiencies, particularly those related to contradictions between rules and practice. However, the key question is: To what extent are ministers, including Council's members, willing to accept a genuine change that may result in limiting their power and authority?

It is difficult to predict an answer, yet the potential of implementing fast and effective reform in the Omani civil service is possible given its legal and political conditions. Flynn and Strehl (1996) evaluated civil service reform in relation to the constitutional position of the civil service in different states' contexts and found that where there were strong and detailed rules, the implementation of management changes were slower and had less success if compared to administrative systems where ministerial actions are implemented without genuine constitutional or legal change. The system in Oman can be categorised within the latter category, where ministerial actions do not require major legal and institutional change. Therefore, reform can be easily implemented, but only if accompanied with real desire from the part of those in power (e.g. ministers).

Evidence is mounting that Oman might experience a slow-motion crisis of an inefficient workforce which may have the capacity not only to affect development, but also the country's stability, as consistent failure may lead to legitimation problems. Riphenburg

¹ One of the meetings held with the Undersecretary of the MSC was attended by researcher's supervisor Dr. Richard Common who was visiting Oman in an academic mission. This particular meeting left a good impression about the research and contributed positively in gaining confidence in its recommendations.

(1998:116) stressed this issue and argued that the symptoms of a crisis in Oman due to the patronage system that results in inefficient government are incremental and cumulative rather than posing a dramatic threat. Other observers, such as Katz (2004), accept that the lack of systematic HRD is a background condition for many deficiencies of the Omani government that may result in serious problems in the near future. Indeed drastic measures to maintain adequate qualified personnel selected based on quality and merit principles must be considered if the Omani government seeks to cope with challenges. The government should rethink its employment policy, not just in terms of equality, but more essentially in terms of retaining an efficient workforce. The present and future challenges require people with competitive qualities, especially in posts with decision making capacity. The MCS, as a central personnel agency, should act fast to reform the civil service personnel policies. The difficult question is: when and how fast? Finally, it might be fair when discussing the capability of Omanis and their government to cope with challenges to conclude with the words of Peterson (2004c) who wrote the following after detailing the challenges Oman faces:

Although formidable challenges await Oman after oil and after Qabus, it cannot be said that the prognosis is dire. Certainly mistakes have been made and goals have not been fully achieved. The Oman of a decade or two hence might be a less prosperous place, but it would be unfair to underestimate the Omanis' capacity for resilience and adaptability (Peterson 2004c:136)

8.4 Study Contribution

What does this research tell us about its theoretical and field study contributions? What are the practical implications of this research in terms of policy for improving equal employment opportunity in public office? Finally, what implications does this research have for future studies in public personnel management?

8.4.1: The Implications of the Field Study

This is an extensive research study, covering public agencies who employ 85% of the total public workforce in Oman (80893 out of 95158), and a relatively large sample (250 out of the total 4799 occupants of senior grades), giving the study a high degree of representativeness and external validity.² Although it has its limitations, the study still represents the first detailed field research that examines employment policies in Oman,

² Based on the MCS's 2003 Annual Statistics Report (MCS 2003:14), agencies participated in the study employ 80893 (43953 from the Ministry of Education, 18798 from the Ministry of Health and 18142 from the other agencies).

and is the first that evaluates the challenges the public sector faces to secure fair and merit recruitment and selection procedures.

The triangulation of survey and interview methods of data collection, plus the analysis of documentary data, greatly adds to the reliability of the findings and allows a more sophisticated understanding of the complex interplay between the various factors and phenomena investigated. The interviews conducted with senior officials, experts and policy-makers provided useful information and explanations for the results obtained from the questionnaire and gave the analysis strength and the findings extra reliability.

Further, the instrument used to measure the factors influencing the implementation of merit recruitment policies was extensively modified from the original scales in order to meet the needs of this research study. Scientific methods were used to verify the validity of the scales used. The reliability of the scales and the subscales was acceptable based on statistical tests, and the topics selected for evaluation, particularly those related to social factors, were representative of the Omani work environment. Thus, this scale can be used in future research in Oman or in any of the neighbouring Arab Gulf States, and elsewhere, insofar as they have similar structural and cultural settings. However, future studies that attempt to use this scale need to carry out both validity and reliability analyses to ensure that the relevance and the integrity are maintained.

Parallel to the field research, the study attempted to fill an existing gap in the literature on Oman. Researchers who studied related topics (e.g. Muharami 1993, Maawali 2000, and Shafae 2001) mentioned the lack of data on institutions and laws responsible for formulating and implementing personnel policies in the civil service. It can be said that this study provided most of the needed data for future research, and went further to trace the variety of structural and functional changes the Omani public sector has gone through, particularly after 1970. The study reviewed the main characteristics of four personnel institutions and three civil service laws during the past 35 years (1970-2005). The issues covered also included the occasional modification these institutions and laws witnessed during that period, alongside the achievements and deficiencies. Particular attention was paid to policies directly or indirectly related to effective recruitment and selection procedures and practices.

8.4.2: The Theoretical Implications of the Thesis

This research derives additional importance from its contribution to understanding of differences between personnel management systems in different administrative settings. Closely related to the instrument implications is the approach adopted for this study. The study enriches the literature on merit-based HRM by investigating how merit principles can be secured in the public administration of a developing country where cultural values play strong role in affecting proper implementation. The personnel policies accepted in this study as a model of good practice and the EO approach upon which these policies were built, provide a good base for future studies of systems of a similar nature. Commentators like Haque (1997) and Peters (2001) clearly emphasised how the evaluation of personnel policies should take account of the differences in work-related beliefs and national cultures between countries and their bureaucratic settings.

The study explored the effects of the environmental factors on daily functions of the public bureaucracy in Oman (e.g. political, economic and social) and found that it is impossible to evaluate personnel policies without comprehending the effects of these external factors. The results revealed that environmental factors have resulted in the development of a bureaucracy whose values and patterns are unique, if compared to its counterpart in western liberal democracy states and their public service systems. Unlike developed countries, culture in Arab countries is a major source of work-related beliefs. Arab culture tends to be more collectively oriented and social values are preserved in the work-place. The study showed how commitment to social values influences almost all organisational activities, including those related to recruitment and selection. Hence, blind imitation of western approaches might result in unexpected consequences. What might be suitable in advanced countries' personnel systems may not be applicable or useful in developing countries' systems, such as that of Oman.

An extensive literature review was carried out to develop a theoretical framework of the equal opportunity approach that can be adopted in the public bureaucracy of developing countries where environmental variables have strong effects on personnel policies. After comprehending the Omani circumstances, the study discussed two equal opportunity approaches as apposed to the regulatory merit system approach demanded by Omani regulations (Articles 12 and 17 of Oman 1996 and Article 15 of Oman 1980). These were the Representative Bureaucracy approach and the Management Diversity approach.

The results of analysis differ from the views of the supporters of both approaches. The representative bureaucracy approach was challenged on three bases. 1) The usefulness of enforcing representation and EO policies in the public sector since this sector is a middle-class occupation, particularly if we exclude key posts which are usually filled through political appointments. 2) Field studies (e.g. Wardy 1996 and Kaler 1998) suggested that bureaucrats' background has little effect on behaviour since socialisation is an ongoing process and employees tend to adopt the values of the dominant class. Finally, 3) if bureaucrats adopt their constituents' values and push for interests, this may result in active representation where the interests of the entire society might be ignored.

The management diversity approach was also challenged on three grounds. 1) Diversity strategies are driven through a business case and based on the self-interest of the organisation. Voluntary beliefs are fundamentally different from legal public actions (Positive Action in U.K and Affirmative Actions in USA) which are imposed rules. 2) At the level of practice, empirical evidence appears to be equivocal. Organisations do not perceive diversity as being different from equal opportunities and the two were seen as complementary means to achieve equality in employment. 3) The notion is criticised for the lack of successful implementation.

Despite the argument of the collapse of the traditional merit system, this research shows that the basic concept of merit still survives in professional practice. The study looked toward the combination of the value of merit and the needs of modern government. The requirements of the twenty-first century demand a model of public sector HRM that is founded on recognition of the special demands of openness and equal opportunity. The study provided examples of how public organisations can fully integrate their HRM policy with their institutional needs while maintaining merit. The challenge was to build a framework around this loose network of independent, merit-based HRM systems and tie them together in a broad model of accountability.

A closer look at this study's recommendations reveals that most of the ideas adopted do not differ much from those declared by Max Weber decades ago when he formulated his concept of public bureaucracy (see pp.26-27). Consistent with Weber's views of the rational/legal authority, the study accepts that success in securing efficient and equality-based recruitment procedures in a bureaucratic setting such as that of Oman can be achieved through the existence and the implementation of clear-cut formal rules. The

study sees this alternative as the most valid policy to overcome the patronage system the country encounters. Further, and within the framework of the Weberian approach, the study agrees that obedience of public servants should be owed to the legally established rules and loyalty should be to the office, regardless of orientation and background. It confirms the effectiveness of the Weberian criteria against which public servants should be appointed. Public servants should be subject to the authority of official obligation only and should be selected on the basis of merit. Their affairs should be organised in a clearly defined hierarchy, including grades, which should be organised in a legal sense based on responsibility and competence. Most of these principles were declared by Max Weber and are well known (see Weber 1971, pp.21 cited in Lawton and Rose 1994:31).

Good practice in recruitment is meaningless if the quality of the staff recruited is damaged by favouritism and nepotism. Fairness requires that selection must be on the basis of achievement criteria and neutral competence. Given the regulatory nature of the Omani public personnel system and its elite dominated administration, a Weberian type of bureaucracy needs to be established. The study suggested systematic personnel procedures that can contribute to securing the implementation of this approach that can lead to achieving the objectives of both equality and merit principles. The proposed procedures can be also implemented in countries with a similar context. This framework can be accepted as a model of merit-based HRM. It is hoped that the findings and recommendations presented will contribute to the formulation of appropriate personnel management policy in Oman. Above all, adopting a systematic approach will enhance public confidence in the integrity and efficiency of the public bureaucracy, in general.

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Personal Interviews

Unless otherwise stated, all interviews were held in Muscat. Names are listed according to protocol order, August 2004.

H.E Sheik Abdulaziz Al-Azizi, the Minister of Civil Service (1996-2004), 18 Dec 2002, 10 April 2003, 27 and 30 June 2004.

H.E Sheik Hilal Al Maawali, the Minister of Civil Service (2004 to present), 28 June and 4 August 2004.

H.E Ali Al-Snaidy, the Minister of Sport, 23 August 2004, 20 February and 24 May 2005 (Hull, U.K)

H.E. Abdurahman Al-Abri, the Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Civil Service, 17 April 2003, 3, 4 and 9 August 2004.

H.E. Hammad Al-Ghafri, the Ministry's Advisor, Ministry of Civil Service, 6 and 7 July 2004.

H.E Dr. Talib Al-Hosni, the Deputy Chief of the Administrative Court, 8 June 2004.

Dr. Said Al- Oraimy, Vice-Dean of the Faculty of Engineering, Sultan Qaboos University, 15 Dec 2003, and 27 July 2004.

Salim Al-Musharfy, the Minister's Advisor for Administrative Affairs, MCS, 30 June, and 7 July 2004.

Sajida Al-Allawati, the Minister's Advisor for Legal Affairs, MCS, 14 July, 2 and 8 August 2004.

Zaki Al-Busaidi, the Director General of the Directorate of Organisation and Job Classification, MCS, 3 August 2004.

Abdulhamed Al-Balushi, the Director General of the Directorate of Employment and Training, MCS, 28 and June, 7 July, and 9 August 2004.

Khalfan Al-Wahibi, the Director General of the Directorate of Civil Service, MCS, 16 April 2003, and 27 June 2004.

Ahmed Al-Muhrazi, the Director General of the Civil Servants' Pension Funds, 28 June, and 5 August 2004.

Dr Abdullah Al-Saidy, a Senior Omani Lawyer specialised in Administrative Law, 12 January 2004 (London), 9 August 2004, Muscat.

Said Adaim, the Director of the Legal Department, MCS, 18 April 2003, 28 June and 5 August 2004.

Mohammed Al-Kulaiby, the Director of Employment Department, MCS, 6 August 2004

Khamis Al-Balushi, Director General of the Directorate of Finance and Administrative Affairs, the Ministry of Higher Education, 14 Dec 2003.

Yahya Al-Khusaibi, the Director of the Department of Local Regulations, the Ministry of Legal Affairs, Hull, UK, 29 Sep 2004.

Abdullah Al-Azizi, the Director of Personnel Department, IPA, 15 August 2004.

Appendix 1

Types of Representation and Extent of Independence

Types of representation and extent of independence in the public bureaucracy:

- 1) Formal representation: this form takes place in democratic countries via the election process. By means of elections, citizens give authority to others to act on their behalf. Citizens hold representatives accountable for their actions at the next election by either voting for or against them.
- 2) Descriptive representation: this refers to the extent subgroups are similar or comparable to the political body or bureaucracy. Through this form, policy making and implementation is thought to be increased if public officials are enough like those affected by their decisions. By understanding the context of the policy, a descriptive representative can present the shared characteristics, knowledge, views, and concerns of those who are absent. In reality, particular individuals might or might not perform this role.
- 3) Symbolic representation: refers to the fact that symbols, like a flag or a soldier, stand for people who are absent. More indefinite than the descriptive type, symbolic representation rests on emotions and attitudes and is based upon a system of shared values and functioning as a two-way correspondence. This type promotes the notion of fairness and neutrality of the bureaucratic actions. Kelly (1998:204) explains that if actions can be portrayed as equal, fair, and just for all parts of the population, acceptance will be broader.
- 4) Substantive representation: this type is most directly concerned with acting for another. It occurs when an agent actually performs in the way the principal would act for him/herself. Pitkin (1967) identifies three forms of substantive representation; trustee, delegate, and politico. The trustee is someone who uses discretion to make decisions on the best interests of the represented; the delegate is one who seriously attempts to discern the desire of the represented, while the politico is one that acts to maximize a political position or status.

Source: Pitkin (1967) (cited in Kelly 1998:204)

Appendix 2

A. Example of Job Description

Job Title	Personnel Officer		
Post No.	164	Grade	GS2
Department	Personnel and Administration	Location	Council Headquarter
Responsible to	Principal manpower manager officer		
Staff Responsible for	Registry assistants		
Job Purpose	The main objectives to be achieved by the Postholder.		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advise officers and councillors in all Personnel matters. • Carry out a full range of Personnel duties. • Ensure that up-to-date information about the local authority's staff is available at all times. 		
Main Activities	What the Postholder will actually do. What prescribed duties the Postholder will have.		
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Prepare and maintain personnel files continuously 2. Prepare personal emoluments (annual) 3. Counsel staff who have personal problems as required 4. Continuously update personal knowledge of LGSC staff regulation and interpret them to councillors as required 5. Recruit and select staff up to G.S.4 as required 6. Implement disciplinary procedure as required 7. Co-ordinate performance appraisal for staff in the Personnel and Administration Department (annual) 8. Prepare and implement a training programme (annual) 9. Prepare minutes of management team meetings as required 10. Any other duties within the scope of this appointment and which are requested by the Executive Director 		
Form	Prepared by -----	Date / /	

B. Example of Person Specification

Attribute	Details	Essential (E) Desirable (D)
Skills	1. Communication skills	E
	2. Counselling skills	E
	3. Administrative skills	E
Experience	1. Three years experience of administrative duties	D
	2. Experience of local government work	D
	3. Experience of personnel work	D
Knowledge (Includes required qualifi. if any)	1. Advanced Diploma in Public Administration or degree or equivalent	E D
	2. Knowledge of the schemes of service	D
	3. Knowledge of local community	
Special Requirements	1. Age 18-45	E
	2. Able to satisfy medical requirements	E

Appendix 3 Validity Assessment

31 March 2004

Dear respondent

Below is a **summary** of our study's argument and objectives along with tables that explain how the questionnaire, the main tool of data collection, was designed to answer the research's main and subsidiary questions.

You are requested to review these materials and to provide your views of the validity of the scales, their relevance to the issues and their appropriateness. Also you are asked to list any area that is pertinent to the issues measured in the scale but not covered in the items. The research at this stage depends a great deal on your views and we are confident that your views will be of great value (a full copy is attached)

Study's argument and objectives

The study investigates challenges and prospects of implementing merit-based recruitment and selection procedures in the Omani Civil Service. As explained in details in the literature review, transparency is the main feature that characterized the merit-based system where the aim is to select the right employee to the right post through clear administrative procedures (e.g. job analysis, announcement, shortlisting, tests and interviews, and so on). To narrow down the questionnaire's dimension, procedures followed to fill managerial posts (e.g. Director General, Department Director, and Section Head posts), in particular, were selected for the field study.

The study argues that Oman's laws demand that equality and merit are the bases to fill posts, while current regulations for filling managerial posts give Heads of government agencies (e.g. Ministers) the ultimate authority to select and appoint employees to fill these posts. The system does not require any particular procedures to be followed by these officials (e.g. announcement, interviews, and so on) and relies heavily on their discretion to translate principles of equality and merit.

The study discusses the extent to which the current system followed to fill managerial posts can really provide equality and merit as demanded by country's laws. It investigates this issue in relation to various employment equal opportunity concepts and approaches discussed in the contemporary literature, and argues that present procedures are based mainly on what is referred to as 'subjective opinions' that hardly can provide transparency. It also argues that in Oman, as a transitional developing country, cultural and social norms play a major role in the bureaucracy's daily functions where favouring friends/relatives is common bureaucratic behaviour; in fact, a socially recognised norm. Tribal affiliation, social influence, origin status (*the son of so and so*) and personal interests play an important role in how citizens get public services, including those related to personnel policies when employees are selected to fill public office. The study discusses these issues in relation to various management concepts and argues that the effect of the work environment cannot be over-emphasised and a reform might be required in the Omani civil service to cope with challenges of modernisation. Implementing a formal merit-based selection system might be a necessary step if equality and efficiency are to be achieved.

Research Question:

What recruitment procedures should be implemented in Oman Civil Service when employees are selected to fill key posts that maximise equality and merit as demanded by law and consistent with the country’s Basic Law and social environment?

To answer this question, the following three subsidiary questions are asked:

- 1) To what extent do civil servants think current recruitment and selection system fulfil the equality and merit principles demanded by the constitution?
- 2) To what extent do civil servants think cultural norms and values affect the daily work environment, particularly when the recruitment activity takes place?
- 3) To what extent can the merit-based recruitment and selection system be considered as an acceptable alternative if the current system is to be changed, and if so, through what mechanisms can the merit system be implemented?

Methods and Sampling

To achieve its objectives, the study employs both qualitative and quantitative methods. For the qualitative method, semi-structured interviews are to be conducted with experts and policy-makers, while for the quantitative a questionnaire is to be used. For questionnaire validity purposes, we shall focus on how the questionnaire’s sample is selected and how it is constructed to answer the research questions.

The questionnaire is to be distributed to a sample of 250 Omani civil servants categorised into three groups: 1) experts in personnel departments, 2) civil servants occupying managerial posts, and 3) high grade civil servants. To select the most connected to the study’s topic and the most capable to provide valuable views, the researcher decided to involve all Omani civil servants occupying the First Level of the General Schedule and all Omani civil servants occupying the Special Schedule. Out of approximately 5000 officials occupying these grades, 300 participants is the targeted number (making 6% of the total). A strata sampling method is to be employed to ensure generalisability as much as possible.

Our sample population represents officials occupying grades at the top of civil service skeleton and are either occupying managerial posts, or potential candidates to occupy these posts. Between these two groups comes the third which includes those who have work experience in personnel departments’ activities. The aim of creating these three separate groups is to see if there is a statistical significance between them in their views when responding to various questionnaire items.

The questionnaire items were designed mainly to answer the research’s main and subsidiary questions and in such a way that statistical analysis can be conducted using SPSS. Finally, it should be noticed that questions discussing key issues were put in two or three different forms to prevent the effect of any possible mis-reading.

Comments:-----

1. Items that aim to test participants' views in relation to the First and Third Subsidiary Questions: (the extent to which selection procedures provide equality)

Items are divided into two sets: 2.1 tests the issue from the participants' personal experience, while 2.2 tests the issue from participants' general knowledge when managerial posts are to be filled.

2.1 Items based on participants' personal recruitment and selection experience

Item No.	Content
12	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <u>On Job Analysis</u>, How much did you know about the job before applying? (True or Not True to four statements) 2. <u>On the Advertisement</u>, How did you apply or know about the job? (to select one from four statements) 3. <u>On the Selection Procedures</u>, How were you selected for the job? (to select one from four statements)
13	Do you think your education, experience, and skills match your present job? (Five-point Likert scale)
14	Five statements on factors that may affect promotion from one pay grade to another (Five-point Likert scale ranging from "Very Important" to "Not Important at all")

Comments:-----

2.2 Items based on participants' views even if they are not directly involved

Item No	Content
19	14 statements on current procedures followed to fill Managerial posts (Five-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree")
20	6 statements related to bureaucracy's extent of representation (Five-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree")
21	Level of competence among those who occupy Managerial Posts when compared with competence needed for the sufficient completion tasks? (to select from three options)
22	If principles of equality and merit demanded by the Constitution and the Civil Service Law differs from the actual practice (to select from three options)
23	Five statements on factors that may affect promotion from post to another higher post (Five-point Likert scale ranging from Very Important to Not Important at all)
24	On the overall extent of satisfaction with the current procedures followed to fill key posts (Five-point Likert scale ranging from "Very Satisfied" to Not Satisfied at all)

Comments:-----

3. Items that aim to provide an answer to the Second Subsidiary Question (the influence of social and cultural norms on bureaucrats' attitude)

Item No	Contents
15	11 statements on the influence of social norms on bureaucrats' attitudes when carrying out duties (Five-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree")
16	Image of officials in Oman in terms of their priorities (to select one from three options)
17	To respond to 3 statements based on a hypothetical case related to the role of nepotism when employees are selected to fill public posts (True or not True to 3 statements)
18	On participants' overall views of the extent they think social obligations prevail among officials (Five-point Likert scale ranging from "Very Satisfied" to Not Satisfied at all)

Comments:-----

4. Items that aim to provide an answer to the Fourth Subsidiary Question related to the extent to which change is required to replace the current procedures with the merit-based system and the mechanisms through which this system can be implemented to suit the Omani work environment.

Item No	Contents
25	9 statements on to the need to replace the current procedures to fill managerial posts with the merit-based selection system (Five-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree")
26	On participants' overall extent of support for changing the current selection procedures for filling managerial posts in favour of a merit-based system (Five-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Support the Change" to "Strongly Do Not Support the Change")
27	Participants are asked to provide views on three questions, assuming the Merit system is to be implemented in Oman, by selecting one from three options; the questions are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To whom should the announcement be made? • Who should be given the responsibility of conducting the selection procedures? • Who should be given the authority of making the final selection decision?
28	Participants are asked to rate 4 statements about the obstacles that might arise if the merit-based system is to be implemented (Five-point Likert scale ranging from Very Important to Not Important at all)

Comments:-----

Think you for your cooperation

Rashid Al-Ghailani
 University of Hull
 31 March 2004

Appendix 4

The Results of the Cronbach's Alpha Internal Reliability Tests for Questionnaire's 7 Subscales

Subscale	Item Name &No	Item total correlation	Alpha if item deleted	Reliability of the scale
The impact of the environment variables	EMPATT1/Q15	0.66	0.74	0.77
	EMPATT3/Q15	0.54	0.74	
	EMPATT4/Q15	0.68	0.72	
	EMPATT5/Q15	0.18	0.78	
	EMPATT6/Q15	0.32	0.77	
	EMPATT7/Q15	0.43	0.76	
	EMPATT10/Q15	0.49	0.75	
	EMPATT11/Q15	0.24	0.80	
	MANGER9/Q19	0.36	0.76	
	MERIT8/Q25	0.53	0.76	
	MERIT9/Q25	0.58	0.73	
Attitudes towards current recruitment procedures	MANGER1/Q19	0.37	0.80	0.79
	MANGER3/Q19	0.76	0.72	
	MANGER4/Q19	0.29	0.81	
	MANGER5/Q19	0.71	0.73	
	MANGER11/Q19	0.59	0.76	
	MANGER14/Q19	0.67	0.75	
	SATASMAN/Q24	0.45	0.79	
Attitudes towards the concept of Representative Bureaucracy	MANGER12/Q19	0.64	0.85	0.87
	MANGER13/Q19	0.68	0.85	
	REPRSAT1/Q20	0.68	0.85	
	REPRSAT2/Q20	0.56	0.86	
	REPRSAT3/Q20	0.86	0.83	
	REPRSAT4/Q20	0.57	0.86	
	REPRSAT5/Q20	0.39	0.88	
	REPRSAT6/Q20	0.75	0.84	
Attitudes towards implementing the merit-based procedures	MANAGE7/Q19	0.75	0.77	0.80
	MANAGE8/Q19	0.52	0.78	
	MANAGE10/Q19	0.65	0.75	
	MERIT1/Q25	0.44	0.78	
	MERIT2/Q25	0.42	0.79	
	MERIT4/Q25	0.60	0.77	
	MERIT5/Q25	0.39	0.79	
	MERIT6/Q25	0.47	0.78	
	MERIT7/Q25	0.52	0.87	
Attitudes towards compliance of current procedures with principles of law	EMPATT2/Q15	0.67	0.74	0.80
	EMPATT8/Q15	0.70	0.73	
	EMPATT9/Q15	0.40	0.80	
	MANGER2/Q19	0.36	0.80	
	MANGER6/Q19	0.73	0.74	
	MERIT3/Q25	0.54	0.77	
Promotion	GTOGPRO1/Q14	0.74	0.84	0.87
	GTOGPRO2/Q14	0.50	0.86	
	GTOGPRO3/Q14	0.58	0.86	
	GTOGPRO4/Q14	0.74	0.84	
	GTOGPRO5/Q14	0.75	0.84	
	PTOPPRO1/Q23	0.57	0.86	

Appendix 5
The Results of the Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Tests (11/05/04)

1) Subscale: effects of environment on bureaucrats' attitudes

N of Cases = 12.0
N of Items = 11
Alpha = 0.7770

***** Method 1 (space saver) will be used for this analysis *****

R E L I A B I L I T Y A N A L Y S I S - S C A L E (A L P H A)

Item-total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item- Total Correlation	Alpha if Item Deleted
EMPATT1	20.5000	19.3636	.6620	.7451
EMPATT3	19.5000	16.6364	.5451	.7458
EMPATT4	20.0000	17.4545	.6860	.7282
EMPATT5	19.9167	21.7197	.1830	.7805
EMPATT6	18.6667	19.8788	.3246	.7715
EMPATT7	19.8333	20.3333	.4372	.7625
EMPATT10	20.3333	20.0606	.4993	.7578
EMPATT11	19.7500	16.7500	.3403	.8010
MANGER9	20.4167	20.6288	.3641	.7679
MERIT8	20.2500	20.0227	.5364	.7559
MERIT9	20.0000	17.4545	.5800	.7398

Reliability Coefficients

N of Cases = 12.0

N of Items = 11

Alpha = .7770

2) Subscale: Attitudes towards current R&S procedures to fill managerial posts

N of Cases = 12.0
N of Items = 7
Alpha = 0.7976

***** Method 1 (space saver) will be used for this analysis *****

R E L I A B I L I T Y A N A L Y S I S - S C A L E (A L P H A)

Item-total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item- Total Correlation	Alpha if Item Deleted
MANGER1	19.8333	16.3333	.3771	.8026
MANGER3	20.5000	13.5455	.7636	.7208
MANGER4	20.9167	17.3561	.2946	.8140
MANGER5	19.9167	14.9924	.7138	.7386
MANGER11	19.0833	17.1742	.5950	.7697
MANGER14	19.9167	15.9015	.6716	.7512
SATASMAN	20.3333	15.3333	.4519	.7909

Reliability Coefficients

N of Cases = 12.0

N of Items = 7

Alpha = .7976

3) Subscale: Attitudes towards the concept of the Representative Bureaucracy

N of Cases = 12.0

N of Items = 8

Alpha = 0.8758

***** Method 1 (space saver) will be used for this analysis *****

R E L I A B I L I T Y A N A L Y S I S - S C A L E (A L P H A)

Item-total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item- Total Correlation	Alpha if Item Deleted
MANGER12	18.1667	28.5152	.6437	.8598
MANGER13	18.0000	26.5455	.6818	.8557
REPRSAT1	17.9167	29.5379	.6815	.8588
REPRSAT2	18.0000	28.3636	.5671	.8681
REPRSAT3	17.7500	27.2955	.8626	.8399
REPRSAT4	17.7500	28.3864	.5724	.8674
REPRSAT5	17.7500	30.7500	.3996	.8836
REPRSAT6	17.5833	25.5379	.7562	.8465

Reliability Coefficients

N of Cases = 12.0

N of Items = 8

Alpha = .8758

4) Subscale: Attitudes towards implementing the merit-based procedures

N of Cases = 12.0

N of Items = 9

Alpha = 0.8001

***** Method 1 (space saver) will be used for this analysis *****

R E L I A B I L I T Y A N A L Y S I S - S C A L E (A L P H A)

Item-total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item- Total Correlation	Alpha if Item Deleted
MANAGE7	15.5833	14.0833	.5740	.7771
MANGER8	15.5833	14.2652	.5214	.7817
MANGER10	14.4167	10.6288	.6541	.7592
MERIT1	14.9167	12.9924	.4436	.7890
MERIT2	15.2500	12.9318	.4272	.7927
MERIT4	15.0833	13.5379	.6063	.7700
MERIT5	14.5833	14.0833	.3967	.7918
MERIT6	15.0000	13.6364	.4787	.7822
MERIT7	14.9167	13.7197	.5291	.7775

Reliability Coefficients

N of Cases = 12.0

N of Items = 9

Alpha = .8001

5) Subscale: Attitudes towards the extent compliance of current procedures with principles of law (equality and merit)

N of Cases = 12.0

N of Items = 6

Alpha = 0.8019

***** Method 1 (space saver) will be used for this analysis *****

R E L I A B I L I T Y A N A L Y S I S - S C A L E (A L P H A)

Item-total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item- Total Correlation	Alpha if Item Deleted
EMPATT2	13.9167	13.7197	.6764	.7468
EMPATT8	13.0000	11.4545	.7090	.7325
EMPATT9	14.5833	14.9924	.4066	.8047
MANGER2	14.2500	15.8409	.3662	.8094
MANGER6	14.6667	14.2424	.7392	.7434
MERIT3	13.3333	13.3333	.5416	.7770

Reliability Coefficients

N of Cases = 12.0

N of Items = 6

Alpha = .8019

6) Subscale: Promotion

N of Cases = 12.0

N of Items = 10

Alpha = 0.8735

***** Method 1 (space saver) will be used for this analysis *****
 RELIABILITY ANALYSIS - SCALE (ALPHA)

Item-total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item- Total Correlation	Alpha if Item Deleted
GTOGPRO1	20.5833	53.1742	.7411	.8485
GTOGPRO2	20.7500	58.7500	.5099	.8684
GTOGPRO3	20.7500	54.7500	.5842	.8646
GTOGPRO4	20.8333	53.0606	.7422	.8484
GTOGPRO5	20.9167	54.4470	.7598	.8475
PTOPPRO1	21.3333	59.8788	.5782	.8628
PTOPPRO2	20.9167	64.2652	.3493	.8771
PTOPPRO3	21.2500	62.7500	.4175	.8733
PTOPPRO4	21.0833	62.2652	.5141	.8675
PTOPPRO5	20.8333	57.7879	.7903	.8498

Reliability Coefficients

N of Cases = 12.0
 Alpha = .8735

N of Items = 10

7) Subscale: Obstacles to implement the merit-based procedures

N of Cases = 12.0

N of Items = 4

Alpha = 0.7896

***** Method 1 (space saver) will be used for this analysis *****

RELIABILITY ANALYSIS - SCALE (ALPHA)
 Item-total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item- Total Correlation	Alpha if Item Deleted
OBSTCLS1	9.2500	10.2045	.6271	.7238
OBSTCLS2	9.3333	11.1515	.5407	.7683
OBSTCLS3	8.6667	11.6970	.5778	.7481
OBSTCLS4	8.5000	11.3636	.6633	.7100

Reliability Coefficients

N of Cases = 12.0
 Alpha = .78

N of Items = 4

Appendix 6
Translated English Version of the Questionnaire



The Business School

Subject: A Request to Fill an Academic Research Questionnaire

Dear Civil Servants

We are conducting research into current selection procedures followed in the Omani Civil Service to fill government posts. The study discusses the extent to which the current procedures reflect equal opportunity and merit values demanded by the regulations (Articles 12 and 17 of the Basic Law and 14 of the Civil Service Law). It examines this issue in relation to the context of the Oman public bureaucracy (e.g. cultural and social norms) and investigates challenges to implement sound merit recruitment and selection procedures.

We approach you with a questionnaire and request you to fill it in. Before doing so, please note:

1. All participants should be civil servants occupying the grades of the First Group of the General Schedule.
2. Participants' identity will remain undisclosed.
3. Information collected will be treated in strict confidence and will not be used for any purpose other than that of this study's analysis.
4. Filling the questionnaire is expected not to take more than 30 minutes.
5. After filling the questionnaire, please enclose it in the attached envelope addressed to the researcher, make sure it is sealed, and return it to the party it was received from.

We appreciate your time and cooperation. Your sincere and transparent responses will be the cause of this study's success and accuracy.

Rashid Al-Ghailani
Date: 20/05/2004

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9. If Yes, what is your work experience in these posts?

5 years or less		6 - 10 years		11 years or more	
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10. Do you currently or have you previously occupied posts relevant to Personnel Departments' activities (e.g. recruitment and selection, training, appraisal, pay and benefits)?

Yes		No	
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11. If Yes, what is your work experience in these posts?

5 years or less		6 - 10 years		11 years or more	
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Section 2: Recruitment and Selection

12. The following three questions discuss your experience when you obtained your first job.

- **On the Job Analysis, How much did you know about the job before applying?**
(Respond to all statements by selecting one of the three provided options)

	True	Not True	Not Sure
Clear job analysis was provided (job description and person specification)			
After I was recruited, I found out that the post has no job description			
My educational attainment was the basis of my appointment			
Others, if any please specify:			

- **On the Advertisement, How did you apply for the job?**
(Select one)

It was advertised in public media (e.g. newspapers)	
Directly; agency's specialty corresponds with my education	
Transferred to that agency by the Ministry of Civil Service	
Told to apply by a relative/friend who works there or knows someone who works there	
Others, if any please specify:	

- **On the Selection Procedures, How were you selected for the job?**
(Select one)

Through merit-based computation procedures	
Merit procedures took place and relative/friend helped	
No competition was required	
No competition was required because relative/friend helped	
Others, if any please specify:	

13. To what extent do you think your personal qualities (e.g. education, experience, and skills) match your present job? (Select one)

Match to large extent		Match		Not sure		Do not match		Do not match at all	
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14. There is a group of factors based on which an employee can be promoted. Based on your experience and knowledge, what is the extent of importance of the following factors when an employee is to be promoted from one pay grade to another higher pay grade? (e.g. from grade 1/6 to grade 1/5).

Factors	Very Important	Important	Not Sure	Not Important	Not at all important
Performance (achievements and work skills)					
Availability of funds					
Seniority in the pay grade					
Ministers' discretion					
Social Influence					
Others, if any please specify:					

Section 3: The Effect of the Social System on Bureaucrats' Attitudes

HRM specialists assert that bureaucracy cannot be treated autonomously but, rather as a sub-system of its cultural and social norms which, directly or indirectly, affects officials' attitudes and behaviours when carrying out duties.

15. Below some statements that discuss the above subject. You are requested to indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree.

		1=Strongly Agree	2=Agree	3 = Undecided	4= Disagree	5= Strongly Disagree				
No	Statement	1	2	3	4	5				
1	In the daily work environment, the most effective way to follow-up matters in government departments is through friends/relatives working there									
2	In daily work environment, citizens do not have equal access to public services (e.g. lands, loans...etc)									
3	The existence of clear-cut rules can significantly help to limit nepotism and favoritism when citizens are provided with public services									
4	In the daily work environment, officials do not hesitate to favour relatives even if that may negatively affect other citizens' interests									
5	If we assume that negative social norms affect daily work functions, from my point of view I think that this effect is decreasing with time									
6	In the daily work environment, decisions are made outside offices to accomplish citizens' public services (e.g. social occasions)									
7	From my point of view, favouring a relative/friend to get better and faster service is a recognized social duty									
8	In order to secure principles of equality and to avoid subjective interpretation, rules must be literally followed by public servants									
9	To secure equality of opportunity when employees are recruited or promoted, merit-based procedures should be literally followed									
10	Influenced by prevailing social conceptions and values, officials find themselves trapped between social obligations and formal duties									
11	Although regulation is the key to overcome favouritism, contentment from all parties involved is essential to implement rules									

16. Societies differ in their images of public servants. In your view, what do you consider the most representative image of government's officials in Oman? (select one)

A. Serve the public interest	
B. Serve their special interests (personal, family, relatives...etc)	
C. Try to consolidate both, but when these conflict, priority is given to:	
1. The public interests	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Their special interests	<input type="checkbox"/>
Others, if any please specify:	

17. Read the following hypothetical statement and then select what you consider the most typical of the real Omani work environment.

Citizen A is entering a job competition where his/her relative is a top official who has the power to make the final decision. (Respond to statements by selecting True or Not True)

	True	Not True
The top official will try to help A in one way or another		
Family/relatives expect the top official to select A regardless of the situation		
Family/relatives will consider the top official to be betraying family interests if he/she does not intervene to help his/her relative		
Others, if any please specify:		

18. Overall, to what extent do you think social obligations prevail among officials? (Select one)

Most of the time		Occasionally		Not sure		Do not		Do not at all	
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Section 4: Selection Procedures to fill Managerial Posts

19. Below there are statements concerning various aspects of recruitment and selection procedures to fill managerial posts. You are requested to indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with these statements based on your knowledge and experience of what is followed in the civil service.

	1=Strongly Agree	2=Agree	3 = Undecided	4= Disagree	5= Strongly Disagree				
No	Statement				1	2	3	4	5
1	During the recruitment stage, adequate Job Description is performed by the concerned authority (job's duties, salary, working hours and so on).								
2	During the recruitment stage, Person Specification analysis is conducted (skills, work experience and education required to perform the job)								
3	Adequate publicity is made by the concerned authority to allow equal opportunities to all prospective candidates (e.g. advertisements)								
4	If interviews are required during the selection stage, practical and job related interviews are conducted								
5	If examinations are required during the selection stage, practical and job related examinations are conducted								
6	Current procedures followed to fill managerial posts fulfil principles of equality and merit demanded by law.								

7	The authority given to ministers by the Civil Service Law to make the final selection decision is properly used					
8	Line managers are given sufficient authority by ministers to give opinion before employees are selected to managerial posts					
9	Personnel Committees effectively perform the role required from them by the law during final selection decision stage					
10	Post's direct supervisors are effectively involved in the decision making process when employees are selected to managerial posts					
11	Government agencies keep records that prove the merit recruitment and selection procedures are followed					
12	Some managerial posts are designed to be filled by particular employees regardless of agency's actual requirements					
13	Social status, kinship, tribal affiliation (non-job criteria), play significant role when employees are selected to fill key posts					
14	In practice, as long as candidates meet post's basic requirements, they can be selected even if there are more qualified candidates					

Field specialists assert that there is strong relationship between employment policies and the efficiency of the administrative system to understand the actual needs of citizens. They advocate that the bureaucracy should mirror all groups of the society in order to provide efficient services all citizens based on equality and fairness.

20. You are requested to indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements that discuss the extent of representation of the workforce in managerial posts.

		1=Strongly Agree	2=Agree	3 = Undecided	4= Disagree	5= Strongly Disagree		
No	Statement	1	2	3	4	5		
1	Public servants serve the interest of all citizens regardless of their background							
2	Government's services are not affected by disproportionate representation							
3	Employees' background (e.g. social status, region, tribal affiliation) does not have strong effect on the selection process of filling managerial posts							
4	Managerial posts are representative in terms of regions							
5	Managerial posts are representative in terms of social status (e.g. rich and poor, influential and less influential tribes)							
6	Managerial posts are representative in terms of gender							

21. How do you consider the level of competence among those who occupy Managerial posts in your agency when compared with competence needed for the sufficient completion of organisation's task? (Select one)

Most are competent		Some are competent		Only few are competent	
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22. Do think principles of equality and merit demanded by the Constitution and the Civil Service Law differs from the actual practice when employees are to be selected to fill managerial posts? (Select one)

There is disagreement	
Undecided	
Rules and practice are congruous	
Others, if any please specify:	

23. Based on your experience and knowledge, what do you think is the extent of importance of the following factors when an employee is to be selected to fill a managerial post or to be promoted from one managerial post to another higher managerial post? (e.g. to become a General Director or a Department Director).

Factors that may affect promotion to managerial post	Very Important	Important	Not Sure	Not Important	Not at all important
Performance (achievements and work skills)					
Availability of funds					
Seniority in the pay grade					
Ministers' discretion					
Social Influence					
Others, if any please specify:					

24. Overall, to what extent are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the current procedures followed to fill managerial posts in the Civil Service? (Select one)

Very Satisfied		Satisfied		Undecided		Dissatisfied		Very Dissatisfied	
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Section 5: Challenges of Implementing Merit-based Selection Procedures to Fill Managerial Posts

25. Part of this study investigates challenges and prospects to implement the merit recruitment system. Below there are some statements that discuss this issue and you are requested to indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with these statements.

		1=Strongly Agree	2=Agree	3 = Undecided	4= Disagree	5= Strongly Disagree				
No	Statement	1	2	3	4	5				
1	There is a need to change the current recruitment and selection procedures, which relies on ministers' direct decisions									
2	Current procedures should be replaced with the merit-based system, which relies on formal selection steps (e.g. job analysis and announcement)									
3	It is difficult to secure principles of equality and merit declared by the law unless selection decisions are based on formal procedures									
4	The change to the merit system may not fulfil all aims, yet its feature of transparency may provide better ground to secure equality issues									
5	If the merit-based system is adopted, recruitment procedures will take longer and be unsystematic									
6	Ministers should be given the authority to make direct selection since they are responsible for the overall success of their public agencies									

26. Overall, do you support replacing the current recruitment and selection procedures with the merit-based system? (Select one)

I strongly do not support the change		I do not support the change to certain extent		Undecided		I support the change to certain extent		I strongly support the change	
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27. If the current recruitment and selection procedures were replaced with Merit-based system, please indicate your views on the mechanisms of implementing this alternative.

A) To whom the post should be opened or announced?

(Select one)

To employees in the public agency where the post becomes vacant	
To all employees in the civil service system	
To all citizens in the public and the private sectors	
Others, if any please specify:	

B) Who should be given the authority to conduct the recruitment and selection procedures?
(This includes: writing the job descriptions, drawing person specifications, advertising, shortlisting and conducting interviews and tests)

(Select one)

The Personnel Committee in the concerned public agency	
The Personnel Committee in the concerned public agency with the participation of a representative from the Ministry of Civil Service as an observer	
The Ministry of Civil Service	
Others, if any please specify	

C) Who should be given the authority to make the final selection decision?

(Select one)

The authority who conducted the recruitment procedures	
The minister in the concerned public agency	
The Ministry of Civil Service	
Others, if any please specify:	

28. The following statements include obstacles that might arise if the current selection procedures are to be replaced with the merit system. You are requested to indicate the extent of importance of each of these obstacles based on your experience.

1=Very Important 2 =Important 3 = Not Sure 4=Not Important 5=Not important at all	1	2	3	4	5
Obstacles to implement the Merit-based selection procedures to fill managerial posts					
Lack of maturity of the civil service system to deal with the merit recruitment system (e.g. poor organisational structures, absence job classification system)					
Lack of willingness on the part of ministers since this system may limit some of their authority and power					
The absence of a competitive legal system that can deal with the merit system					
Lack of qualified human resources who can efficiently implement the merit-based recruitment procedures					
The role of negative social norms (e.g. favouritism and nepotism)					
Others, if any please specify:					

**This is the end of the questionnaire
Think you for finding the time to complete it**

The Arabic Version of the Questionnaire



THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

The Business School

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

اخي الموظف، اختي الموظفة

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته ،،،

الموضوع: استبيان بحث علمي

تهدف الدراسة الى تقييم إجراءات الاختيار والتعيين المتبعة لشغل الوظائف الإشرافية في الوحدات الخاضعة لقانون الخدمة المدنية ولائحته التنفيذية، وتبحث في مدى انسجام تلك الإجراءات مع مبادئ الجدارة وتكافؤ الفرص التي اعتمدها القانون كأساس لشغل الوظائف (المادة 12 من النظام الاساسي للدولة والمادة 15 من قانون الخدمة المدنية). كما تعنى الدراسة في مدى تأثير النظام الاجتماعي والعلاقات السائدة في قرارات شغل تلك الوظائف والسبل التي من شأنها التطوير بما يحقق الغايات التي اعتمدها القانون.

واذ اعرب عن خالص الشكر لتعاونكم في استيفاء الاستبيان المرفق، ارجو توضيح التالي:

- لا يدخل في اطار الاستبيان الوظائف التي تشغل بمراسيم سلطانية.
- الفئة المستهدفة لاستيفاء الاستبيان هم الموظفين العمانيين شاغلي الحلقة الاولى من الجدول العام (1/1 ، 2/1 ، 3/1 ، 4/1 ، 5/1 ، 6/1).
- سعياً لتحقيق افضل درجات الشفافية، لا يوجد في الاستبيان ما يدل على شخصية المشارك ولن تستخدم البيانات المستخلصة من الاستبيان لأية اغراض خارج نطاق البحث العلمي .
- بعد استيفاء الاستبيان نرجو وضعه في الظرف المرفق واعادته للجهة التي استلم منها.

لاشك أنكم تدركون، اخوتي واخواتي، اهمية الشفافية والدقة عند استيفاء الاستبيان ليتسنى رسم صورة واضحة وواقعية تساهم في نجاح الدراسة.

طالب الدراسات العليا
راشد بن محمد الغيلاني
20/05/2004

الاستبيان

لأغراض الاستبيان

- الوظائف الإشرافية : يعنى بها وظائف مدراء العموم ومدراء الدوائر ورؤساء الاقسام.
- إجراءات المفاضلة: هى الإجراءات المتعارف عليها في علم الادارة والتي تهدف في مجملها لإختيار الموظف المناسب في الوظيفة المناسبة وفق إجراءات محددة (وصف الوظيفة، تحديد شروط شغلها، الاعلان عنها، المفاضلة بين المرشحين، واخيراً تسمية المرشح حسب معايير الاستحقاق والافضلية).

القسم الاول: فى البيانات الأساسية

اختر الاجابة المناسبة بوضع علامة (√) فى المربع المناسب

1- الجنس

ذكر		انثى	
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2- الفئة العمرية

30 سنة او أقل		31 - سنة 45		46 سنة او اكثر	
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3- المنطقة التى تنتمى اليها (ليس مكان العمل)

مسقط		الباطنة		الشرقية		ظفار	
الداخلية		الظاهرة		مسندم		الوسطى	

4- المؤهل التعليمي

الثانوية العامة او ما دون		جامعي	
دبلوم (دون المؤهل الجامعي)		دراسات عليا	

5- المدة التى امضيتها فى قطاع الخدمة المدنية

5 سنوات او ما دون		6-10 سنوات	
11- 20 سنة		21 سنة او اكثر	

6- الدرجة المالية

الحلقة الاولى من الجدول العام	1/1	2/1	3/1	4/1	5/1	6/1

7- المدة التى امضيتها فى درجتك المالية الحالية

سنتين وما دون		3-4 سنوات		5 سنوات او اكثر	
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8- هل تشغل حالياً او شغلت فى الماضى احدى الوظائف الإشرافية؟ (مدير عام، مدير دائرة، رئيس قسم)

نعم		لا	
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9- إذا كانت اجابتك "نعم" ، كما سنة تقدر اجمالى خبرتك في تلك الوظائف ؟

5 سنوات وما دون	6-10 سنوات	11 سنة او اكثر
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10- هل تشغل حاليا او شغلت في الماضى وظائف مرتبطة باختصاصات دوائر شئون الموظفين؟ (تطبيقات قانون الخدمة المدنية، الاختيار والتعيين، تصنيف الوظائف، الرواتب والمستحقات، التدريب، تنمية الموارد البشرية)

نعم	لا
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11- إذا كانت اجابتك "نعم" ، كما سنة تقدر اجمالى خبرتك في الوظائف المرتبطة باختصاصات دوائر شئون الموظفين؟

5 سنوات وما دون	6-10 سنوات	11 سنة او اكثر
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القسم الثانى : فى إجراءات التعيين والترقية

12- تناقش النقاط الثلاث التالية تجربتك عند تعيينك الاول بالوظيفة

- فى الوصف الوظيفى ، ما هي المعلومات التى توفرت لديك عن الوظيفة قبل الالتحاق بها؟
(اجب بنعم او لا على كافة المواقف ادناه)

نعم	غير متأكد	لا	توفرت لدي معلومات لآباس بها عن الوظيفة (مسماها، واجباتها، ظروف العمل المحيطة بها) وشروط شغلها (المؤهل العلمى، الخبرة العملية، المهارات الشخصية المطلوبة)
			بعد تعييني وجدت ان الوظيفة المعين بها ليس لها وصف وظيفي
			عندما تم تعييني، كان المعيار الأساسى هو المؤهل الدراسى الذى بموجبه تم تحديد الدرجة المالية
			إذا كان لديك اضافة اذكرها:

- فى الاعلان عن الوظيفة، كيف تقدمت لجهة العمل بطلب التوظيف؟
(اختر اجابة واحدة)

	تم الاعلان عنها (على سبيل المثال: فى الصحف اليومية)
	تقدمت لجهة العمل بصورة مباشرة لان اختصاصات تلك الوحدة الحكومية تتماشى مع مؤهلى الدراسى
	تم احوالى لتلك الوحدة الحكومية عن طريق وزارة الخدمة المدنية
	ابلغني احد الاقارب او الاصدقاء بان اتقدم الى تلك الوظيفة
	إذا كان لديك اضافة اذكرها:

- فى إجراءات الاختيار والتعيين، كيف تم اختيارك للوظيفة ؟
(اختر اجابة واحدة)

	وفقا لإجراءات المفاضلة (مقابلات او اختبارات)
	وفقا لإجراءات المفاضلة وكان لأحد الاقارب او الاصدقاء دور فى تسهيل وتسريع إجراءات اختياري
	لم يكن هناك حاجة لإجراءات المفاضلة
	لم تكن هناك إجراءات المفاضلة لان احد الاقارب او الاصدقاء تدخل لتسهيل وتسريع إجراءات اختياري
	إذا كان لديك اضافة اذكرها:

13- هل ترى بان وظيفتك الحالية تتماشى مع قدراتك (المؤهل الدراسى، الخبرة العملية، المهارات الشخصية)؟
(اختر واحدة)

نعم، الى حد كبير	نعم، الى حد ما	غير متأكد	لا تتماشى	لا تتماشى على الاطلاق
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14- هناك عدد من العناصر التي تؤثر في قرار الترقية. من واقع ملاحظتك لما هو معمول به حالياً، ماهي اهمية العوامل التالية عندما يتم ترقية الموظف من درجة مالية الى درجة مالية اعلى؟ (مثال: من الدرجة 6/1 الى 5/1)

العامل المؤثر في الترقية	هام جدا	هام	غير متأكد	غير هام	غير هام اطلاقاً
الكفاءة والاداء المتميز					
توفر الاعتمادات المالية					
الاقدمية في الدرجة المالية					
رغبة رئيس الوحدة					
المكانة والنفوذ الاجتماعي					
اذا كان لديك اضافة، اذكرها:					

القسم الثالث: تأثير النظام الاجتماعي في بيئة الادارة

يرى المختصون في مجال الادارة أن اختيار الأسلوب الامثل لتطبيق اية إجراءات ادارية لا يمكن تحديده بمعزل عن بيئة العمل بما في ذلك عادات المجتمع السائدة واسلوب تعامله مع إجراءات العمل اليومية والتي تؤثر بشكل او بآخر على اداء الموظفين.

15- ادناه عدد من المواقف التي تناقش الموضوع اعلاه، يرجى قراءتها بدقة وتحديد درجة اتفاقك او اختلافك معها.

البيان	اوافق بشدة	اوافق	غير متأكد	لا اوافق بشدة
من واقع بيئة العمل اليومية، افضل طريقة لانجاز المعاملات في المؤسسات الحكومية هي عن طريق صديق او قريب يعمل هناك يقوم بتسهيل وتسريع انجازها				
من واقع بيئة العمل اليومية، المواطنون غير سواسية في الحصول على الخدمات العامة (بعثات دراسية، فرص استثمار، توظيف)				
وجود انظمة وقوانين واضحة تساعد بشكل فعال في التغلب على الوساطة والمحسوبية عن تلقي المواطنون مختلف الخدمات العامة				
في بيئة العمل، اغلبية الموظفين لا يترددون في تفضيل الاقارب او الاصدقاء وتقديم الخدمات لهم وإن كان ذلك على حساب مصلحة المراجعين الاخرين				
اذا افترضنا ان المكانة الاجتماعية والعلاقات الشخصية لها تأثير في الحصول على الخدمات العامة، يمكننا القول أن هذا التأثير يتناقص او يقلص بمرور الوقت				
من واقع بيئة العمل، كثير من القرارات المتعلقة بانجاز معاملات المواطنين تتم خارج المكاتب (المناسبات الاجتماعية، الزيارات المتبادلة، الاتصالات الهاتفية خارج العمل)				
من وجهة نظري، أرى ان تقديم الخدمات السريعة والمميزة للأهل والاقارب هو واجب تمليه الاصول والعادات والتقاليد على الموظف طالما ان ذلك متاح				
للمحافظة على مبادئ المساواة والعدالة ولتجنب المزاجية في تفسير الانظمة، يجب تطبيق القوانين بنصوصها من قبل موظفي الحكومة				
لتحقيق مبادئ المساواة وتكافؤ الفرص في التعيين والترقية، يجب التطبيق الحرفي الاجراءات الاستحقاق				
متأثرين بواقع المجتمع وعاداته، يجد الكثير من الموظفين أنفسهم في مأزق بين الالتزام بانظمة العمل، من جانب، وواجبهم الاجتماعي، من جانب آخر				
رغم ان وجود اللوائح القوانين يساهم في تقليص الوساطة والمحسوبية، تعاون جميع من لهم علاقة شرط اساسي للتطبيق				

16- تختلف المجتمعات في نظرتها للموظف الحكومي. من وجهة نظرك ، كيف ينظر المجتمع لأولويات الموظف؟
(اختر اجابة واحدة)

	يخدم المصلحة العامة
	يخدم مصلحته الشخصية
	يحاول التوفيق بين المصلحتين، ولكن عند وجود تضارب تعطى الاولوية لـ: (اختر واحدة)
	1- المصلحة العامة
	2- المصلحة الشخصية
	إذا كان لديك اضافة اذكرها:

17- افترض أن المواطن (أ) متقدم بطلب وظيفة لأحدى المؤسسات الحكومية وسوف يدخل في إجراءات المنافسة ضمن عدد من المواطنين وكان احد اقاربه يشغل وظيفة هامة ويبيده القرار النهائي للاختيار. من واقع خبرتك في بيئة العمل، اجب على الاسئلة التالية باختيار نعم او لا :

لا	نعم
	سوف يسعى متخذ القرار لمساعدة (أ) بطريقة او بأخرى بما لا يثير ملاحظة او انتباه الآخرين
	الأهل والاقارب يتوقعوا من قريبهم متخذ القرار مساعدة (أ) بغض النظر عن ظروف العمل
	سوف يعتبر الأهل والاقارب متخذ القرار مقصر في واجبات القرابة وصلة الرحم اذا لم يتدخل لمساعدة (أ)
	إذا كان لديك اضافة، اذكرها:

18- بصفة عامة ، ومن وجهة نظرك، ما مدى تأثير الالتزامات الاجتماعية والمحسوبية في سلوك الموظفين؟ (اختر واحدة)

تؤثر الى حد كبير	تؤثر الى حد ما	غير متأكد	لا تؤثر	لا تؤثر على الاطلاق
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القسم الرابع: في إجراءات الاختيار المتبعة لشغل الوظائف الإشرافية

19- أدناه عدد من المواقف التي تناقش الموضوع المشار اليه، يرجى قراءتها وتحديد درجة اتفاقك او اختلافك معها وذلك في حدود خبرتك ومعرفتك فيما هو متبع.

البيان	وافق بشدة	وافق	غير متأكد	لا اوافق بشدة	لا اوافق
في اجراءات التعيين، تقوم الوحدة المختصة باتباع خطوات الوصف الوظيفي (مهام الوظيفة، الراتب، ساعات العمل... الخ)					
في اجراءات التعيين، تقوم الوحدة المختصة باتباع خطوات الشروط الواجب توفرها في المرشح لشغل (المؤهل الدراسي، المهارات المكتسبة، الخبرة العملية... الخ)					
يتم اتخاذ اجراءات كافية للاعلان عن الوظائف المتاحة لكافة المرشحين بما يسمح بتكافؤ الفرص					
إذا كان اجراء المقابلات مطلوب خلال عملية الاختيار، يتم اجراء مقابلات مرتبطة في محتواها بالوظيفة المراد شغلها					
إذا كان اجراء الاختبارات مطلوب خلال عملية الاختيار، يتم اجراء اختبارات مرتبطة في محتواها بالوظيفة المراد شغلها					
الاجراءات المتبعة حاليا لشغل الوظائف الإشرافية تحقق مبادئ العدالة والاستحقاق التي يدعو اليها قانون الخدمة المدنية					

تابع لما سبق

٢	البيان	وافق بشدة	وافق	غير متأكد	لا اوافق	لا اوافق بشدة
	صلاحية الاختيار النهائي التي اعطاها قانون الخدمة المدنية لرؤساء الوحدات تستخدم بصورة مقبولة					
	يعطى الرؤساء المباشرين للوظيفة المراد شغلها الصلاحيات فرصة ابداء الرأي من قبل رؤساء الوحدات قبل اختيار المرشح للوظيفة					
	تلعب لجان شؤون الموظفين الدور المناط بها وفق القانون عند اصدار قرار التعيين					
1	يلعب الرؤساء المباشرين للوظيفة المراد شغلها دوراً في عملية الاختيار والتعيين					
1	تحتفظ الوحدات الحكومية بسجلات تثبت أن مبدأ الجدارة قد تم اعطاؤه الاهتمام اللازم قبل صدور قرارات التعيين في الوظائف الإشرافية					
1	يتم استحداث بعض الوظائف الإشرافية خصيصاً لبعض الموظفين بغض النظر عن حاجة الهيكل التنظيمي					
1	النفوذ الاجتماعي، تبادل المصالح، وغيرها من المعايير التي ليس لها علاقة بشروط شغل الوظيفة، تلعب دوراً هاماً عندما يتم اختيار الموظفين لشغل الوظائف الإشرافية					
1	طالما ان الموظف المراد تعيينه مستوفي للشروط الاساسية لشغل الوظيفة فانه يتم تعيينه حتى اذا كان هناك مرشحين اكثر استيفاء للوظيفة					

يرى المختصون أن هناك علاقة وثيقة بين سياسات التوظيف وكفاءة الجهاز الاداري في تفهم الاحتياجات الفعلية للمواطنين وأن الجهاز الاداري في مختلف المستويات الوظيفية ينبغي أن يكون مرآة لمختلف شرائح المجتمع بما يساهم في تحقيق المساواة في تقديم مختلف الخدمات الحكومية.

20- أدناه عدد من المواقف التي تناقش درجة تمثيل بعض شرائح المجتمع في الوظائف الإشرافية. يرجى قراءتها وتحديد درجة اتفاقك او اختلافك معها وذلك في حدود معرفتك ملاحظتك العامة.

٢	البيان	وافق بشدة	وافق	غير متأكد	لا اوافق	لا اوافق بشدة
	الموظفون يخدمون مصلحة جميع المواطنين بغض النظر عن الشريحة الاجتماعية التي ينتمون اليها					
	التمثيل الغير متكافئ لشرائح المجتمع في الوظائف الحكومية ينتج عنه توزيع غير متكافئ للخدمات الحكومية ، بما في ذلك فرص شغل الوظائف الإشرافية					
	في الوقت الراهن، يمكن القول أنه كلما زاد نفوذ فئة من فئات المجتمع كلما زاد مستوى تمثيلها في الوظائف الإشرافية ، وبالتالي مستوى حصولها على الخدمات العامة					
	شاغرى الوظائف الإشرافية يمثلون " بصورة عادلة " مختلف مناطق السلطنة					
	شاغرى الوظائف الإشرافية يمثلون " بصورة عادلة " مختلف المستويات الاجتماعية					
	الرجل والمرأة ممثلان في الوظائف الإشرافية في الخدمة المدنية " بصورة عادلة"					

21- من وجهة نظرك، ماهو تقديرك لمستوى كفاءة الموظفين الذين يشغلون وظائف إشرافية في بيئة العمل المحيطة بك وبالذات في ظروف العمل الضاغطة التي تتطلب سرعة ودقة في الانجاز؟ (اختر الاجابة المناسبة)

معظمهم على مستوى من الكفاءة	بعضهم على مستوى من الكفاءة	عدد قليل منهم على مستوى من الكفاءة
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22- هل تعتقد أن النظام المعمول به حالياً في اختيار الموظفين لشغل الوظائف الإشرافية ينسجم مع مبادئ الجدارة وتكافؤ الفرص التي نص عليها النظام الاساسي للدولة وقانون الخدمة المدنية؟ (اختر الاجابة المناسبة)

هناك أنسجام بين ما تدعو اليه التشريعات والمعمول به حالياً	ليس لي رأى محد	هناك تناقض بين ما تدعو اليه التشريعات والمعمول به حالياً
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23- من واقع ملاحظتك لما هو معمول به حالياً، ما هي اهمية العوامل التالية في ترقية الموظف لشغل وظيفة إشرافية او عند ترقيته من وظيفة إشرافية الى وظيفة إشرافية اعلى (مثال: من مدير دائرة الى مدير عام) ؟

العامل المؤثر في الترقية	هام جدا	هام	غير متأكد	غير هام	غير هام إطلاقاً
الكفاءة والاداء المتميز					
توفر الاعتمادات المالية					
الاقدمية في الدرجة المالية					
رغبة رئيس الوحدة					
المكانة والنفوذ الاجتماعي					
إذا كان لديك اضافة، اذكرها:					

24- بصفة عامة، ما هي درجة رضاك عن الإجراءات المتبعة لشغل الوظائف الإشرافية؟ (اختر اجابة واحدة)

راض الى حد كبير	راض		
غير راض	غير راض الى حد كبير		

القسم الخامس: آلية تطبيق إجراءات المفاضلة لشغل الوظائف الإشرافية

يعنى قسم من الدراسة ببحث البدائل المناسبة لتطوير الإجراءات المتبعة حالياً لشغل الوظائف الإشرافية ومن ضمن تلك البدائل تطبيق إجراءات المفاضلة الذي تتلخص اهدافها في اعتماد الشفافية في اجراءات الاختيار وفق خطوات محددة ومتعارف عليها (تصنيف الوظيفة، تحديد شروط شغلها، الاعلان عنها ، تطبيق إجراءات المفاضلة، وتسمية المرشحين).

25- ادناه عدد من المواقف التي تناقش الموضوع المشار اليه، يرجى وتحديد درجة اتفاقك او اختلافك معها.

البيان	اوافق بشدة	اوافق	غير متأكد	لا اوافق بشدة
هناك حاجة لتغيير الإجراءات المتبعة حالياً لشغل الوظائف الإشرافية والتي تعتمد بشكل اساسي على مرئيات وتقدير رئيس الوحدة دون اتباع إجراءات مفاضلة محددة				
الإجراءات الحالية يفترض أن يتم تبديلها بتطبيق إجراءات المفاضلة بحيث يتم اختيار المرشح وفق إجراءات ادارية محددة (تصنيف الوظيفة، تحديد شروط شغلها ... الخ)				
من الصعب تحقيق مبادئ الاستحقاق التي يدعوا اليها القانون اذا لما تعتمد اجراءات الاختيار والتعيين على خطوات واضحة ودقيقة				
التغيير الى نظام المفاضلة قد لا يحقق كافة الاهداف (الجدارة، المساواة) ولكنه بالتأكيد سوف يخدم الشفافية وتكافؤ الفرص اكثر من المعمول به حالياً				
نظام المفاضلة سوف يطيل الإجراءات ويجعل عملية الاختيار غير عملية				
يفترض أن يمنح رؤساء الوحدات صلاحية اختيار من يروونه مناسباً من الموظفين لشغل الوظائف الإشرافية طالما أن مسؤولية نجاح المؤسسة من عدمه ملقاه على عاتقهم				

26- بصفة عامة، هل تؤيد تبديل الإجراءات المتبعة حالياً لشغل الوظائف الإشرافية بنظام المفاضلة ؟

اؤيد التغيير الى حد كبير	اؤيد التغيير الى حد ما	ليس لي رأى محدد	لا اؤيد التغيير	لا اؤيد التغيير على الاطلاق
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27- فيما إذا تم القبول فرضاً بتغيير الإجراءات المتبعة حالياً لشغل الوظائف الإشرافية بإجراءات المفاضلة، يوجد ادناه ثلاثة محاور تستطلع وجهة نظرك في الإجراءات التي تناسب بيئة العمل في قطاع الخدمة المدنية.

• **الإعلان عن الوظيفة: لمن تعلن الوظيفة؟ (اختر اجابة واحدة)**

	فقط للموظفين داخل الوحدة الحكومية عن طريق تعميم داخلي
	لكافة الموظفين في الخدمة المدنية عن طريق تعميم تصدره وزارة الخدمة المدنية
	لكافة المواطنين في القطاع الحكومي والخاص بالاعلان عبر وسائل الاعلام (الجراند اليومية، الانترنت)
	إذا كان لديك اضافة أذكرها:

• **الجهة المعنية بتطبيق إجراءات المفاضلة: لمن يعطى اختصاص تنفيذ إجراءات المفاضلة؟**
(تشمل هذه الاختصاصات وصف الوظيفة، تحديد شروط شغلها، الاعلان عنها، استلام وتحديد الطلبات المستوفية للشروط، اجراء المقابلات، تسمية المرشحين حسب الافضلية)

	للجنة شؤون الموظفين داخل الوحدة الحكومية التي توجد بها الوظيفة
	للجنة شؤون الموظفين داخل الوحدة الحكومية التي توجد بها الوظيفة بمشاركة مندوب من وزارة الخدمة المدنية
	لجهة مركزية مثل وزارة الخدمة المدنية بمشاركة مندوب من الجهة المعنية
	إذا كان لديك اضافة أذكرها:

• **الجهة المعنية باتخاذ قرار الاختيار النهائي: بعد أن يتم تسمية المرشحين حسب الافضلية، لمن يعطى اختصاص البت في اختيار المرشح للوظيفة؟**

	للجنة شؤون الموظفين داخل الوحدة الحكومية التي قامت بتنفيذ إجراءات المفاضلة
	لرئيس الوحدة
	لرئيس الوحدة، وفيما إذا كان اختياره مختلف عن توصيات الجهة التي قامت بتطبيق إجراءات المفاضلة فإن عليه ابداء المبررات لجهة مركزية واخذ موافقتها قبل صدور قرار التعيين
	لجهة مركزية مثل وزارة الخدمة المدنية
	إذا كان لديك اضافة أذكرها:

28- المواقف ادناه تتضمن عددا من الصعوبات التي قد تحول دون تطبيق نظام إجراءات المفاضلة لشغل الوظائف الإشرافية. يرجى قراءتها بدقة وتحديد درجة اتفاقك او اختلافك معها كعائق يحول دون تطبيق هذه الإجراءات.

لا اوافق بشدة	لا اوافق	غير متأكد	اوافق	اوافق بشدة	الصعوبات التي قد تحول دون تطبيق إجراءات المفاضلة
					عدم جاهزية نظام الخدمة المدنية للتعامل مع مثل هذه الإجراءات (عدم دقة الهياكل التنظيمية، عدم وضوح اللوائح والقوانين المنظمة للعمل، تداخل الاختصاصات، عدم وجود وصف وظيفي)
					عدم رغبة رؤساء الوحدات في التنازل عن صلاحياتهم
					عدم وجود أنظمة قضاء قادرة على التعامل مع تلك الاجراءات والفصل بها
					محدودية الموارد البشرية القادرة على تطبيق نظام إجراءات المفاضلة
					إذا كان لديك اضافة أذكرها:

انتهى الاستبيان، شكراً لتعاونكم

Appendix 8
The Interview Schedule¹

Date:
Name:
Occupation:
Experience:

Q1: Procedures followed to fill managerial posts

Articles 12 and 17 of the 1996 Basic Law (the Constitution) and article 15 of the Civil Service Law declare that equality and merit are the bases for filling public posts. Can you describe the procedures followed in your public agency when a managerial post is sought to be filled and your personal opinion about these procedures?

Q2: Factors affecting recruitment and promotion

Based on your experience and knowledge, what are the factors that affect or influence promotions (grade-to-grade and post-to-post promotions) in the Omani government agencies that are under the jurisdiction of the Civil Service Law?

¹ Apart from the below structured questions, unstructured questions were subsequently put to interviewees, according to their speciality, experience, and field of work. Data obtained from structured questions were analysed and discussed in Chapter 7, while those obtained from the unstructured questions were presented in Chapters 4-6.

Q3: Effects of social norms

HRM specialists assert that bureaucracies cannot be treated autonomously, but rather as a sub-system of their environment. To what extent do you think favouritism and nepotism affect the processes of selecting employees to higher public posts?

Q4: Suggestions if the merit-based procedures are adopted

Part of our study aim is to propose a model of merit-based recruitment and selection procedures when managerial posts are sought to be filled. To benefit from your experience, please indicate your views and suggestions of the following procedures:

A. To whom should these posts be advertised? (all citizens in both sectors, employees within the civil service, only within the concerned agency, others...please specify)

B. Who should be responsible for implementation of the selection procedures? (the Personnel Committee in the concerned public agency, the Ministry of Civil Service, the Committee alongside the attendance of representative from the MCS as an observer, others ...please specify)

C. Who should be authorized to make the final decision? (ministers, the authority in charge of procedures, the Ministry of Civil Service, others...please specify)

Appendix 9
Chronology of the Omani Civil Service

1970	Sultan Said is overthrown. End of inflexible conservatism and despotic rule.
1970	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accession of Sultan Qaboos bin Said - Qaboos pledges to set Oman on a new course - First Cabinet convenes - To foster national unity, the country's name is changed to Sultanate of Oman
1971	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Oman admitted to the UN and the League of Arab States - The establishment of diplomatic relation with world's capitals
1971-1973	General Directorate of Financial Affairs brought some order to the civil service system. A booklet of guidance, No. BB/2 was issued concerning personnel wages, incentives, and grades.
1973	The establishment of the Department of Civil Service as part of the Sultan's Diwan (later the Ministry of the Royal Court). This Department is the first specialised agency to supervise the civil service.
1974	Gross National Product (GNP) rose from 103.6 million OR in 1970 to 556.2 million in 1974 (an increase of 446.5%) and government expenditure on public services rose from 13.7 million to 197.2 million (fourteen-fold increase).
1975	The issue of Royal Decree No 3/1975 setting up a Special Committee to study and suggest laws to organise the state's administrative institutions.
1975	The issue the Royal Decree No. 26/1975 of the Law Organising the State Administrative Institutions.
1975	The issue the Royal Decree No. 27/1975 of the Civil Service Law as the first code regulating personnel affairs
1975	The establishment of the Bureau of Employees' Affairs as the first independent Civil Service agency.
1975	1972-1975, the Omani cabinet was reshuffled eleven times. Ministerial departments grew from 8 in 1972 to 23 in 1975.
1975	The establishment of The Civil Service Council; Royal Decree No. 28
1980	The issue the Royal Decree No 8/80 that established the second Civil Service Law
1984	The issue the Royal Decree No 52/84 that established the Executive Regulation of the Civil Service Law. The ER addressed in details recruitment and selection.
1988	The issue of the Royal Decree no. 17 which upgraded the status of the Bureau of Employees' Affairs to a ministry, named the Ministry of Civil Service.
1992	60% of the workforce in Oman (public and private) were expatriates. While the civil service was successful in maintaining balance (only 20% by 2002), the number of foreigners in the private sector continued to increase.
1992	The issue of the Centralised Employment Act, which centralised all recruitment procedures to entry-level posts in the Ministry of Civil Service.
1996	The issue of the Basic Law (the constitution)
1996	The issue of the Royal Decree no. 71/96, which provided the Civil Service Council with more autonomy from the Cabinet. The Council is technically and financially the supreme central authority that designs, modernizes, and executes civil service laws.
1998	The issue of the Royal Decree 98/89 that approved the higher organizational divisions of the MCS (General Directorates level), followed by a Ministerial order that organised the lower organizational divisions (Departments level and below).
2002	Secretariat of the Civil Service Council was abolished due to its limited role and all of its duties were transferred to the Legal Department in the Ministry of Civil.
2004	85% of the private sector workforce were non-Omanis.
2004	The issue of the Royal Decree No 120/04 which empowered the Civil Service Council to issue a new Executive Regulation by the year 2006 to put the third Civil Service Law into effect.

Appendix 10
A Framework for Human Resource Planning and Organisation

