WELCOMING SPEECH BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE CIVIL SERVICE COMMISION OF KOREA TO THE SEOUL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON PUBLIC SECTOR HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Kwang-Woong Kim,
Chairman
The Civil Service Commission of Korea

Honorable Foreign Delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the Civil Service Commission of Korea (CSC), I would like to start by formally welcoming all of you to the Seoul International Conference on Public Sector Human Resource Management. Particularly, let me express my special thanks to Ms. Odile Sallard, Director of the Public Management Programme, OECD, without whose co-sponsorship this Conference would not have come into being today.

Since its inception in 1999, the CSC, as the central personnel management agency under Presidential authority, has steadily been carrying out its major missions to reform Korean civil service and personnel policy. Needless to say, the CSC has had to confront a lot of resistance and difficulties owing to “bureaucracy inertia” and “departmentalism” among government agencies. We admit our ideas might have been rather unrealistic sometimes. Indeed we must retrospect our activities so far to check whether we might have not fallen prey to the ‘Paradox of Orientalism’, as Edward W. Said mentioned. Have we not unduly adhered to the perspectives of reformers in carrying out our reform project? The history shows that many government reforms ended failures due to myopic way of thinking of government bureaucracy. We should beware of this possibility all the time.

Another difficulty of the reform springs up in applying specialized knowledge to a reform program. As soon as we set out for any reform project, we instantly confront a certain gap between analytic world and empirical world. Successful reform process surely requires positive orientation towards both explicit and tacit knowledge as well as in practical knowledge. I believe this common understanding has drawn us here together for more pragmatic discussion.
Here I would like to extend my idea at this precious opportunity. First of all, we need to pay attention to the growing awareness that human resources are the key to success in both public and private organizations. A paradigm shift of today’s world is demanding a drastic change in every respect of our daily life. Accordingly, organizational culture and operational mode of the government bodies are also changing. For one thing, the relation between the government and the other sectors is becoming more “flat and horizontal”; the old model of predominance of the government over other sectors has given into a new model of “partnership”. The border between the two sectors are becoming blurred that the government and the private sector are even expected to become an “unbroken, seamless” one. The concept of “open government” emerges in this context. Secondly, the operational mode of the government is also changing; rigid hierarchy is gradually disappearing and the advent of a flat, networking system is promising more egalitarian “team” culture.

Here I would like to share with you an interesting insight from a common Asian word referring to “human being”, “인간(人間)”, which literally means “man + space” or “human-between”. Traditionally, East Asian people (including China, Japan and Korea) have a strong tendency to define a person in the context of the circumstance or relationship they belong to. The mode of existence of a person is defined by constantly changing relations with other entities. I believe the Asian concept of human being sheds light on how to integrate these seemingly separate concepts, ‘human capital’ and ‘social capital’, into a more holistic one. Once we define ourselves as a knot or juncture of numberless webs of relations, we realize that it is impossible any longer to fix or determine the characteristics of ourselves. Constant exchange of ever-increasing ideas and information (whether informative or emotive) among minds builds a virtual sphere of collective intelligence, where the individual boundary loses its original significance. We are now in an era of the global village, where information is measured in “sound bites” and megabytes. This presages the emergence of an entirely new leadership in the coming age; as Don Tapscott articulated precisely, a new form of leadership will be a ‘collective, networked, virtual force with powers flowing from a jointly created and shared vision’.

Hence the society with a firm and solid “social capital” is more likely to succeed in the new paradigm of the 21st century. As such social capital is the necessary infrastructure for the