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## Query from an IBPP Reader: The Nature of Time in Organizations

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**Abstract.** This article responds to an IBPP reader's query about time in organizations--viz., time limits (or lack thereof) for positions in organizations, time length of incumbency for such positions, and number of times one can be re-elected or otherwise chosen for an organizational position.

An IBPP reader from the Americas writes that s(he) engages in the private practice of a health profession. The license to practice is controlled by the relevant professional organization that--along with a number of other health professional organizations--is regulated by a component of a government health ministry. The ministry appoints the head of each professional organization and approves other staff appointments of each organization. Our reader goes on to write that over the last 40 years or so there have been only 4 heads of her(his) professional organization--at least two heads maintaining incumbency for close to 15 years. Most of the individuals filling staff appointments have remained for similar lengths of time. There also are elected representatives to the professional organization who manifest a higher rate of turnover

According to our reader, time--as in very long incumbencies--has seemed to be causally related to or at least involved as an intermediary or moderating variable with phenomena that can be characterized with the construct of entrenched bureaucracy. This bureaucracy seems to be very resistant to policy and programmatic change and can be characterized as incestuous because very similar people replace very similar people. Such is the case for the heads of the organization, the various staff appointments, and even the elected members. Moreover, a good deal of the membership of the professional organization tends to be politically apathetic.

Our reader then provides recommendations for change. S(He) advocates time-limited terms for the staff bureaucracy including the professional organization's head--as well as an open nomination process, if not formal elections. S(He) also advocates a limit of several 2-year terms for elected representatives. Our reader closes with a request for advice.

IBPP will respond by addressing several issues: the existence of time limits, the duration of time limits, and the number of times one can be re-elected or otherwise chosen for a position.

**Time Limits.** Time limits may facilitate an organization receiving new officials with new perspectives and losing old officials with old ones. However, incumbents still would have time to facilitate the arrival of new incumbents being much like the old incumbents. As well, incumbents who can change with the times and become de facto new representatives must be peremptorily dismissed--regardless of their institutionalized memories and cumulatively developed expertise. Moreover, self-selection for political endeavors would seem to mitigate against a significant variability in political psychological types competing for office regardless of time limits. This latter point is even more crucial given that our reader's colleagues are largely apathetic, while individuals outside the professional organization with de facto political power may be even more effective in protecting so-called vested interests.

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Time Limit Duration. Shorter time limits--as opposed to longer ones--may mitigate against the development and maintenance of entrenched interests contrary to the formal purpose of a professional organization. However, the Issues described above in the Time Limits section mitigate against this mitigation. Only the shortest time limits might be effective against entrenchment, but such limits also might mitigate against effective governance.

Limits on Opportunities to Serve (Enrich(?)). Limiting opportunities to serve possesses the same face validity but the same vulnerabilities as the previous two recommendations. Moreover, limiting opportunities to serve--especially concurrent terms of service, but not total numbers of service opportunities--may exacerbate "revolving door" phenomena that may corrupt more than just the purview of the professional organization in question.

As with the best of intentions in campaign finance reform, recommended changes of time-related structure, function, and process are almost fatally dependent on what political psychologists--in their lay phenomenological moments--might refer to as human nature. The "almost fatally" provide a bit of breathing room for political activists like our reader, who hopefully will continue to seek to contribute to the Public Good. (See Adeleke, T. (1997). African and Pan-Africanism: Betrayal of a historical cause. *Western Journal of Black Studies*, 21, 106-116; Goldstein, M.K. (1998). From candidate to criminal: The contingencies of corruption in elected public office. *Behavior and Social Issues*, 8, 1-8; Klugman, J. (1986). The psychology of Soviet corruption, indiscipline, and resistance to reform. *Political Psychology*, 7, 67-82; Messner, E. (1981). Reactive entitlement in elective public office: A possible precursor to political corruption. *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, 35, 426-435.) (Keywords: Corruption, Organizational Psychology, Political Reform.)