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ON THE ISSUE OF THE ROLE OF THE CIVIL SERVICE AS A CONDUCTOR OF “PUBLIC INTERESTS”

Abstract. *The article analyzes the factors and conditions for the development of the public service, considering the “public interests”.*

The article tests the hypothesis that in order to form a new type of statehood that meets the objective needs of New Kazakhstan, it is necessary to integrate “civil service with a human face” into the public administration system. Based on the results of the literature review, as well as a sociological survey within the framework of the project IRN BR18574203 “Scientific and methodological substantiation of the processes of development of the civil service and transformation of the activities of government bodies in the context of the construction of the New Kazakhstan” the authors come to the conclusion that in order to take into account the “public interests”, the public service of Kazakhstan must transform. This transformation should focus on developing a culture of communication, ensuring openness and transparency in management, and enhancing infrastructure to facilitate public access to joint decision-making.

Keywords: *accountability, civil service, innovations, “hearing state”, public interest, public administration, transparency.*

■ INTRODUCTION

One of the main goals of government organizations is to serve the people. This obligation turns a civic ideal into a management responsibility for the government. Public officials around the world hold important and respected roles in their communities and in society at large to assist the general public.

One of the types of social activity of people is service in government bodies, state and public organizations. Service to the state is inextricably linked with the state itself and its role in the life of society. This is one of the aspects of the state’s activities in organizing and legal regulation of personnel of state bodies and other state organizations.

Increasing the efficiency and quality of the public service in the interests of developing civil society and strengthening the state is the main direction of reforming public service institutions. To achieve this goal, it is necessary to create competitive, effective government institutions that will be able to:

involve stakeholders in the development and implementation of socio-economic policy and create a new model for the development of society;

ensure a high level and dynamics of the state’s development, increasing the efficiency of its structures and institutions, including by reducing the level of corruption;

identify, structure and consider the interests of social groups when making decisions at all levels of government and bear responsibility for their actions;

create and maintain high public confidence in the public service and government institutions in general, ensuring a consensus on the main issues of development of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

■ LITERATURE REVIEW

Civil service reform typically includes reforms in areas such as salary, human resources, staff reductions, and operational efficiency improvements.

World practice shows that the transformation of public administration is successful when such areas as leadership, clear goal setting and the ability to set priorities, the ability to communicate, the ability to change and coordination in the provision of services to the population are present.

At the same time, according to McKinsey, reforming public administration, considering the identified 5 factors, is strengthened by two cross-cutting imperatives: first, the constructive involvement of public sector employees; and second, the effective use of digital tools [1].

In all developed countries, the basic principles of civil service reform were the concept of a “new public management” (NPM), i.e. orientation towards the introduction of market mechanisms and incentives into the practice of public service. As Kushlin V. [2] notes, this approach is based on a clearer division of all government structures into two categories: 1) policy-making centers and key administrative departments (policy making core) and 2) purely executive structures - agencies (next step agencies) [2].

In addition, global experience shows that civil service reform is a complex task and a process that involves competing interests and depends on many factors, both internal and external. However, one thing always remains the same: public service must work in the interests of society and the population.

In developed and economically wealthy democratic countries, there is more and more talk about the need for the civil service to express the “public interest”, which should regulate all government activities and be associated with public control over the actions of officials. In the modern world, there is a tendency to change the role of the state. The state must have the ability to develop a universal plan for the development of society that unites common interests and promotes social harmony. It is worth noting that in the first half of the 20th century, these changes in the role of the state and civil service began in developed countries of the world (Germany, Great Britain, Sweden, Norway, France). The public service in developed countries systematically works to improve its responsiveness to social change and the needs of society.

Civil officials are required to follow specific guidelines and protocols to act in the “public interest” [3]. Among them are:

Accountability and Transparency: Public workers are required to make sure that the public they serve is informed of all their actions and decisions. They must be prepared to defend their choices and actions as well as give the public fast, reliable information.

Objectivity and Impartiality: When making decisions, public employees must be impartial and objective, abstaining from favoring any one person or group over another. Rather than relying on prejudices or subjective beliefs, they must make decisions based on facts and data.

Efficiency and Effectiveness: To achieve the desired results, civil officials must make sure that their judgments and actions are both efficient and effective.

Blijleven, W., & van Hulst, M. [4] discovered that civil personnel typically engage with the public despite the difficulties presented by bureaucratic and managerial institutions and attitudes. In their paper, they discovered that civil servants negotiate with colleagues to develop shared resolutions and attempt to realize citizens' needs and initiatives by aligning people, structures, and resources, in addition to the traditional use of discretion, such as spending time and resources to assist involved citizens.

They integrate and link components of the local bureaucracy and engagement processes in response to local needs and objectives, creating a hybrid practice at the local level [5].

In their work, Nabatchi et al [6] note the importance of including processes that allow members of the public to actively voice their opinions in the definition of public participation. In doing so, their ideas, concerns, needs, interests and values are included in government decision-making.”

To date, several international organizations have developed measures that can help integrate the core principles of open government. These include transparency, government accountability and stakeholder participation in governance. They are also necessary for the creation of a “Hearing state”, which was initiated by the President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev [7].

The concept of a “Hearing state” involves the implementation of an innovative paradigm of civil service development processes. The innovative paradigm [8] should become an integral part of the new humanitarian knowledge, a constructive means of modernizing public consciousness, and will contribute to the mobilization of the country’s efforts to ensure the construction of a New Kazakhstan on the principles of a listening, effective, accountable, professional and pragmatic state.

■ METHODOLOGY

This article aims to evaluate the factors and prerequisites essential for the advancement of civil service while prioritizing the “public interest.”

Formulated within this context, our hypothesis posits that to establish a new form of governance aligning with the evolving needs of Kazakhstan, there is a requirement to embed a “people-oriented civil service” into the public administration framework. This necessitates the recruitment of individuals into public service who possess the skills and inclination to effectively engage with ordinary citizens, thereby acknowledging and prioritizing their interests.

To assess the state of and prospects for reforming the civil service in Kazakhstan, a sociological survey was conducted as part of this research. The primary objective of this survey was to gather feedback from civil society regarding the current state and potential transformations within the civil service sector of Kazakhstan.

Conducted anonymously online, the survey involved about 3,000 representatives from civil society organizations across Kazakhstan. The Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan, which unites these NGOs, aims to foster collaborative partnerships between society, businesses, international entities, and governmental bodies within the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Before starting the survey, a question was asked to understand the respondent’s expertise: “Have you had experience interacting with government officials as part of the performance of your functional duties?”

The questionnaire included 36 questions with open and closed answers and consisted of 4 parts: I – “Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents (7 questions), II – Quality of professionalism of civil servants (15 questions), III – Reform (9 questions) and IV – Hearing state (5 questions).

I – Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents: this section allowed us to obtain the main characteristics of representatives of civil society: gender, age, education, which region of Kazakhstan it represents, as well as what type of activity it is engaged in.

II – Quality of professionalism of civil servants: in this section, questions were considered to assess the professional competencies and personal qualities of a civil servant. This section presents questions that will allow you to take a comprehensive approach to assessing citizens’ trust in government officials. To assess the so-called structural conditions, indicators have been proposed that show the level of trust/distrust in the activities of civil servants on the part of citizens at the institutional level. To assess justified expectations, indicators have been proposed that allow assessing the experience of citizens in interacting with government officials. The purpose of this section is to get an idea of the quality of professionalism of civil servants (competency assessment) and the level of trust of civil society in the public service.

III – Reform: This section is intended to give us an idea of how representatives of civil society feel about government reforms and what prospects they expect from reforming the civil service.

IV – A Hearing state: This section allowed us to obtain the respondents’ opinion on the extent to which government bodies are listening, accountable, transparent and effective. In this case, the respondent’s task was to show his agreement/disagreement/neutral attitude towards any judgment. A Likert scale¹ was used for this section.

¹ A Likert scale (usually) gives five possible answers to a statement or question, allowing respondents to indicate the strength of their agreement or feeling about the question or statement (from positive to negative).

In the questionnaire, most questions are constructed on the principle of multi-item scales, which are strictly alternative, i.e. the respondent must select only one answer. All cases where several answer options are possible at the same time are specifically stated in the questionnaire.

For open-ended questions, where no answer options are offered and the question is followed by a blank line(s), the respondent must write down their answer option in block letters.

■ ANALYSIS

The country's civil service has gone through significant stages of development since independence. With the adoption of the Constitution in 1995, the institutional and legal framework was laid to ensure that everyone has equal access to public service and that personnel policies should not discriminate. In the same year, a presidential decree was adopted, which had the force of the Law "On Civil Service," which guaranteed the professionalization of the civil service and separated it from the field of general labor law.

In 1997, the long-term strategy "Kazakhstan 2030" was adopted, which marked the next stage in reforming the civil service of our country. In 1998, the Agency for Civil Service Affairs was created. This is an authorized body directly subordinate and accountable to the Head of State to ensure the implementation of a unified policy in the field of public service. To further develop the civil service, the Law "On Civil Service" was adopted in 1999.

The "Concept of a new model of civil service of the Republic of Kazakhstan" was approved by the Presidential Decree in 2011. The creation of a Class A management corps, the introduction of a system for evaluating the performance of civil servants, and the creation of mentoring and internship programs are important elements.

Since 2016, a new law "On the Civil Service of the Republic of Kazakhstan" has come into force in Kazakhstan. A new remuneration system was introduced, a three-stage selection model was introduced, it was established that civil servants must undergo training at least once every three years, and a comprehensive assessment of civil servants was carried out.

Today, the strategic document providing for the development of public service is the Concept for the Development of Public Administration in the Republic of Kazakhstan until 2030, adopted in 2021.

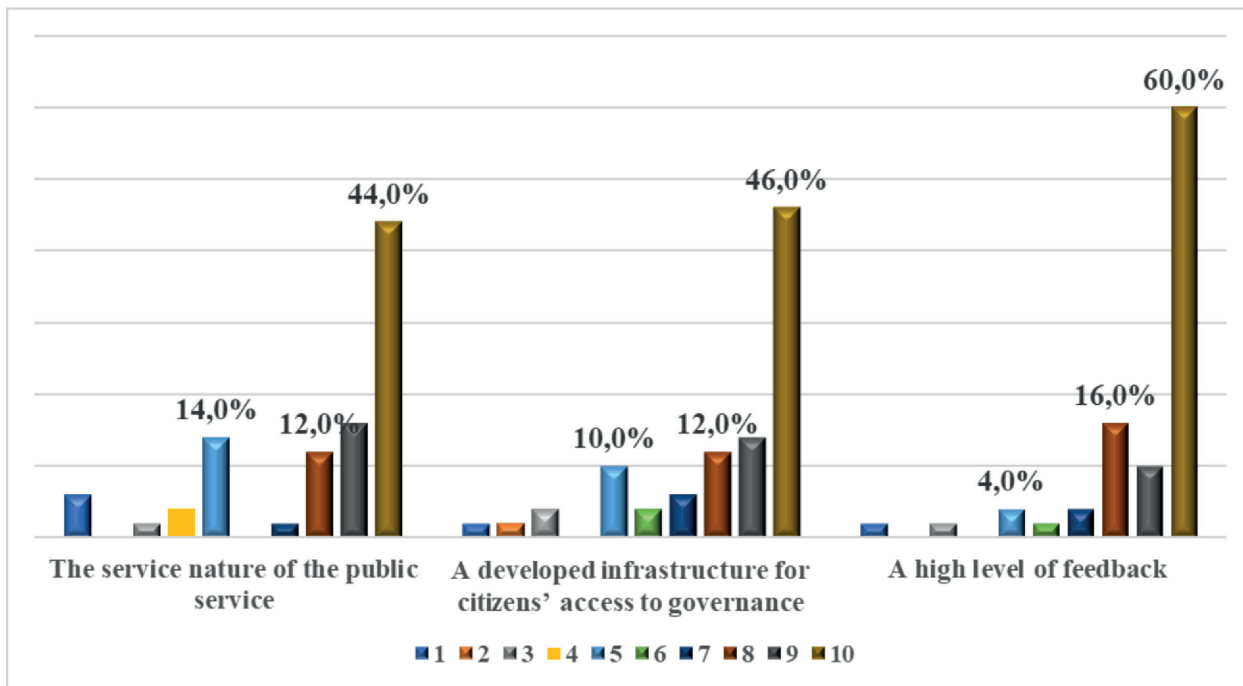
In 2023, the Civil Service Law was amended to include new rules for assessing the workforce and contract employees, barriers to recruitment into the civil service were removed, and pilot projects for new civil service selection began. Expansion of personnel management capabilities, including the possibility of non-competitive appointment of individual positions, and de-bureaucratization of procedures ensured personal responsibility for the state of personnel and a quick solution to the problem of finding and hiring managers who meet modern standards.

To the question "When meeting with the head of any government agency, who would you like to see in front of you?" 60% of respondents said they want a person who focuses on people.

As noted above, government officials are required to follow specific guidelines and protocols to act in the "public interest." Therefore, the responses of respondents in the survey are interesting. Thus, answering the question "Which of the following features of a "Hearing state" do you consider the most important, we received confirmation of what citizens consider the most important:

- The service nature of the public service;
- A developed infrastructure for citizens' access to governance and a high level of feedback.

The assessment was carried out on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is low importance, and 10 is high." At the same time, assessing each of the criteria identified by the population according to the proposed scale, we obtained the following results: 44% of respondents emphasized the importance of the service nature of the public service, 46% noted the need for a developed infrastructure for citizens' access to governance, and 60% noted a high level of feedback (Picture 1).

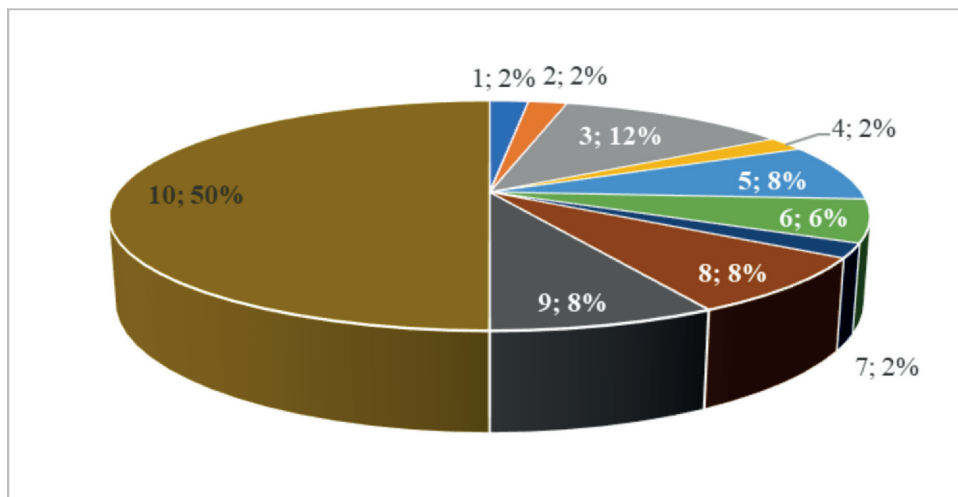


Picture 1. Most important features of a “Hearing state”

Source: Results of a survey of representatives of civil society conducted in 2023 as part of project IRN BR18574203.

To identify the degree of openness and transparency of management, we asked the question “Building a dialogue for the development of both civil society as a whole and the territories in which it lives involves the implementation of several principles of openness of government bodies.”

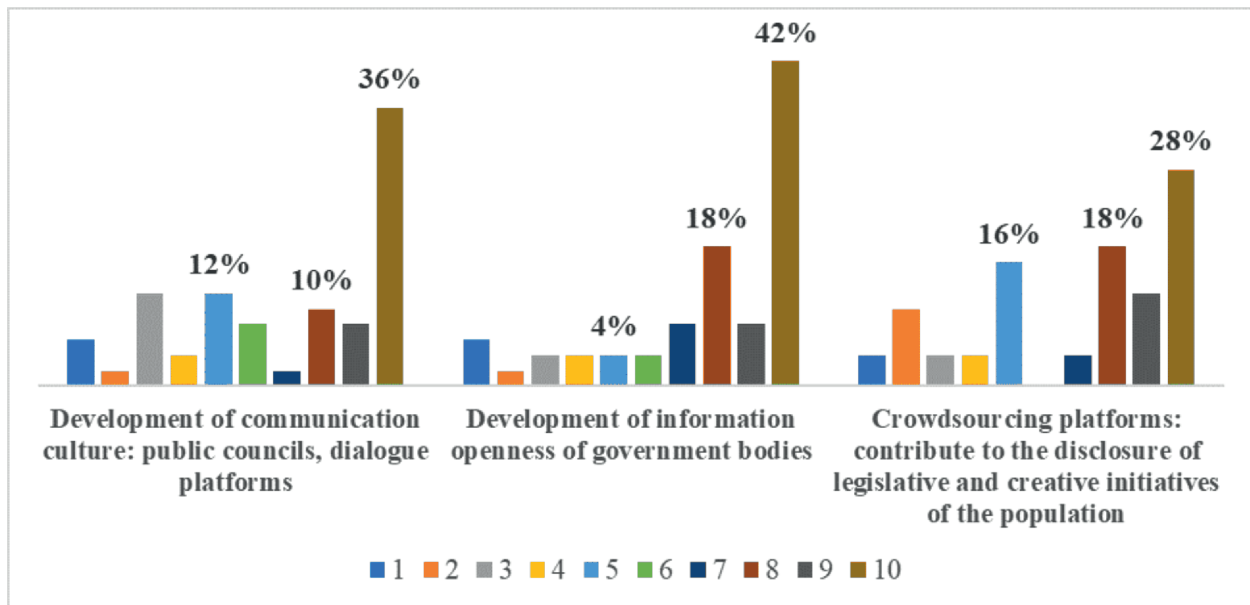
50% of respondents emphasize the high level of implementation of the principle of “openness and transparency of management”, and 12% speak of a low level (Picture 2).



Picture 2. Openness and transparency of management

Source: Results of a survey of representatives of civil society conducted in 2023 as part of project IRN BR18574203.

At the same time, according to the survey results, 36% of respondents believe that the most effective mechanism for involving citizens in the decision-making process is the development of a communication culture through public councils and dialogue platforms, 42% - stress attention to the factor “development of information openness of government bodies” and 28% had mentioned about contribution to disclosure of legislative and creative initiatives of the population through crowdsourcing platforms. (Picture 3).



Picture 3. Development of communication culture: public councils, dialogue platforms
 Source: Results of a survey of representatives of civil society conducted in 2023 as part of project IRN BR18574203.

Thus, the “public interest” according to the survey can be expressed through effective, accountable and participatory institutions guided by the principles of good governance.

■ RESULTS

Analysis of the survey results shows that the model of the civil service of the Republic of Kazakhstan should include the following system-forming elements:

- updated legislation to speed up the process of forming a “hearing state”;
- the service nature of the civil service, combined with a high level of communication competencies of civil servants;
- availability of working mechanisms and tools for interaction between government bodies and citizens;
- developed infrastructure for citizens’ access to governance and active participation of citizens in the development and implementation of public policy;
- an institutional environment that does not interfere with the implementation of the constitutional right of citizens to receive and disseminate information;
- high level of communicative culture of the population.

As the experience of countries that are successful in their democratic promises shows, the priority goal is the transition to a modern model of public administration that is adequate to the new conditions of social development.

In this regard, it is important to understand that the key goal is to create a government that is fully accountable for its actions and develops its policies on an evidence-based basis.

According to the theory of strategic management, any goal is derived from a mission. **The mission of a civil service** typically includes the following aspects:

Meeting the needs of citizens: The public service is aimed at meeting the needs and expectations of citizens by providing them with quality services and public goods.

Serving the interests of society: Public servants are obliged to serve the interests of society and ensure its welfare.

Compliance with laws and regulations: The public service must operate within the framework of laws and regulations, respect the principles of the rule of law and ensure fairness and equality.

Efficiency and results: Public servants must strive for efficiency and results in their work to provide quality services and benefits.

Transparency and openness: The public service must act openly and transparently, providing access to information and feedback from citizens.

Commitment to Improvement: Public servants must continually strive to improve processes and the quality of services and respond to the changing needs of society.

The public service mission is an important guideline that helps government agencies and officials focus on achieving their goals and objectives related to serving citizens and society. This mission emphasizes the commitment of public servants to the public and upholds the important values of responsibility and service to the public interest.

Thus, the new model of public service development is distinguished by the following qualitative characteristics: open, accountable, effective, result-oriented, based on evidence-based policies and broad civic participation, service-oriented, people-centric, decentralized, based on a matrix structure, limited to the policy-making function, mobile, using modern digital technologies.

The concept for the development of civil society, approved by the Decree of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan on August 27, 2020 [9], provides for the development of unified regulations for public hearings based on international standards and recommendations, in particular those contained in the UN Economic Commission for Europe Convention “On Access to Information, Public Participation in the Decision-Making Process and access to justice in environmental matters” [10].

The adoption of the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On Public Control” [11] and the creation of the information system “E-Otinish” will contribute to the development of the institution of petitions in electronic form for citizens to initiate reforms and proposals to improve public administration.

It is advisable to turn the “Natzhe” centers, created on the basis of the NJSC “Government for Citizens”, which receive requests from citizens, into full-fledged consultation centers, attracting non-governmental organizations and volunteer lawyers for this purpose. As an example, we can cite the experience of Great Britain, where a network of citizen advice bureaus played a major role in expanding civic participation and improving the social well-being of the population.

■ CONCLUSION

In conclusion, our research underscores the critical importance of aligning the civil service of the Republic of Kazakhstan with the principles of the “public interest” and the strategic goals outlined in the Concept for the Development of Public Administration until 2030 [12].

To achieve this transformation successfully, it is imperative to focus on key tasks: guiding government direction, facilitating multi-stakeholder governance, promoting innovation, disrupting unsustainable practices, and enhancing internal structures and capacities.

Additionally, the development of a new civil service model should be guided by specific target indicators of a “Hearing state,” including citizen-centric focus, proactive engagement in key areas, transparency standards, global recognition for government openness, and the utilization of public initiatives through collaborative partnerships.

Acknowledgement

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МЕМЛЕКЕТТІК ҚЫЗМЕТТІҢ ҚОҒАМДЫҚ МҮДДЕГЕ ӨКІЛДІК ЕТУДЕГІ РӨЛІ ЖӨНІНДЕГІ МӘСЕЛЕ ТУРАЛЫ

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Аңдатпа. Мақалада «қоғамдық мүдделерді» ескере отырып, мемлекеттік қызметті дамытудың факторлары мен шарттары талданады.

Мақалада Жаңа Қазақстанның объективті қажеттіліктеріне жауап беретін мемлекеттіліктің жаңа түрін қалыптастыру үшін мемлекеттік басқару жүйесіне «адам келбеті бар мемлекеттік қызметті» біріктіру қажет деген гипотеза сыналған. ЖТН BR18574203 «Мемлекеттік қызметті дамыту процестерін ғылыми-әдіснамалық негіздеу және Жаңа Қазақстанды құру аясында мемлекеттік органдардың қызметін трансформациялау» жобасы аясындағы социологиялық сауалнама және әдеби шолу нәтижелері бойынша авторлар «қоғамдық мүдделерді» ескеру үшін Қазақстанның мемлекеттік қызметі коммуникация мәдениетін, басқарудың ашықтығы мен жариялылығын дамыту бағытында трансформациялануы, сондай-ақ қоғамның ортақ шешім қабылдауға қолжетімділігі үшін инфрақұрылымды дамытуға күш салуы керек деген қорытындыға келеді.

Түйін сөздері: есеп берушілік, мемлекеттік қызмет, инновация, «естуші мемлекет», қоғамдық мүдде, мемлекеттік басқару, ашықтық.

К ВОПРОСУ О РОЛИ ГОСУДАРСТВЕННОЙ СЛУЖБЫ
КАК ПРОВОДНИКА ОБЩЕСТВЕННЫХ ИНТЕРЕСОВ

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***Аннотация.** В статье анализируются факторы и условия развития государственной службы с учетом «общественных интересов».*

В статье тестируется гипотеза о том, что для формирования нового типа государственности, отвечающей объективным потребностям Нового Казахстана, необходимо интегрировать «госслужбу с человеческим лицом» в систему государственного управления. По результатам обзора литературы, а также социологического опроса в рамках проекта ИРН BR18574203 «Научно-методическое обоснование процессов развития государственной службы и трансформации деятельности органов государственной власти в условиях строительства Нового Казахстана» авторы приходят к выводу, что для учета «общественных интересов» государственная служба Казахстана должна трансформироваться в направлении развития культуры общения, открытости и прозрачности управления, а также прилагать усилия к развитию инфраструктуры для доступа общественности к совместному принятию решений.

***Ключевые слова:** подотчетность, государственная служба, инновации, «слышащее государство», общественный интерес, государственное управление, прозрачность.*