

Research of Current Status and Solutions of the U.S. Government :A Case study of El Cajon City Hall

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Abstract— This study explores the administrative challenges and organizational structure of the U.S. government, focusing on El Cajon City Hall, derived from an internship experience. It assesses tasks such as invoice processing, revenue from rent, claims, and basic city facility operations, identifying key inefficiencies related to analog methods and slow digitization. The paper highlights issues such as internal bottlenecks and the impact of retiring experienced staff. Proposed solutions include rapid digitization and outsourcing specific tasks to enhance efficiency. These findings are relevant to both U.S. and Korean government agencies, emphasizing the need for practical solutions to administrative challenges based on direct experience and comprehensive analysis.

Index Terms— U.S. Government, Government Agency Organizational Structure, Government System.

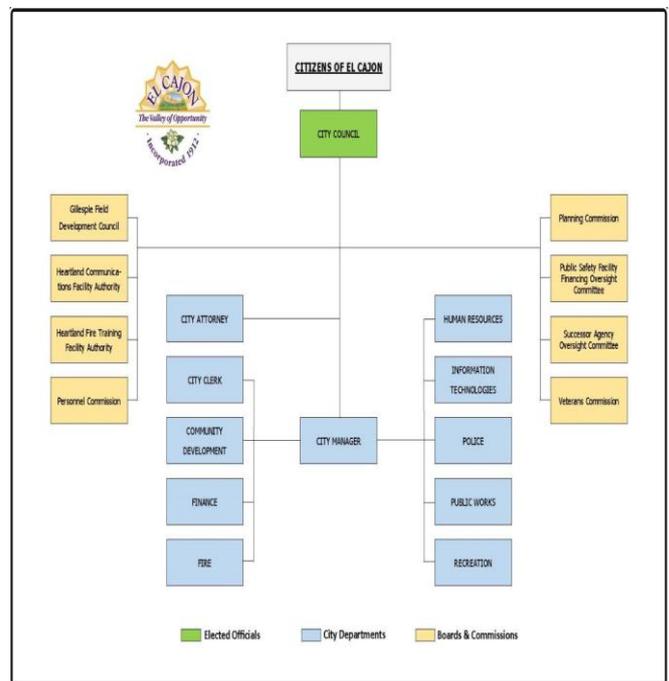
I. INTRODUCTION

This study aims to analyze the realities and challenges of the U.S. government from various perspectives based on the experiences gained during an internship at the City of El Cajon, a participant organization in the Work English Study Travel (WEST) program for Korean students. The researcher, who visited the United States to experience new cultures and ways of thinking, chose this topic to investigate how these differences manifest in practice. Through engagement in work tasks and projects, it was observed that some U.S. projects outpace or lag behind those in Korea. Particularly intriguing was the analog process still prevalent in handling invoices. However, these issues were found to be phenomena stemming from the cultural background of the United States, prompting a search for appropriate solutions. This paper aims to discuss the differences and challenges encountered during a six-month experience and explore potential solutions.

II. STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION OF CITY HALL

Most of California adopts the Council-Manager system, including El Cajon. The Council-Manager system involves

the selection of a City Manager by the elected council members and the subsequent appointment of department heads by the City Manager. The role of the City Manager is akin to that of a deputy mayor in Korea but differs in that it is appointed by the council rather than promoted as a civil servant.



[Figure 1: Organizational Chart of El Cajon City Hall]

Source: City of El Cajon Website

The existence of a separate City Attorney is similar to Korea, where legal support is provided through a department responsible for litigation, consultation, and contract review. Although the titles and statuses may differ, the tasks performed are largely similar. Additionally, the composition of public facilities, accounting departments, Human resources departments, IT departments, police, and fire departments is similar, but instead of a mayor-centered administrative committee, U.S. teams are organized around the City Manager. This organizational structure helps better understand and respond to the characteristics and demands of specific areas during the city's operations.¹

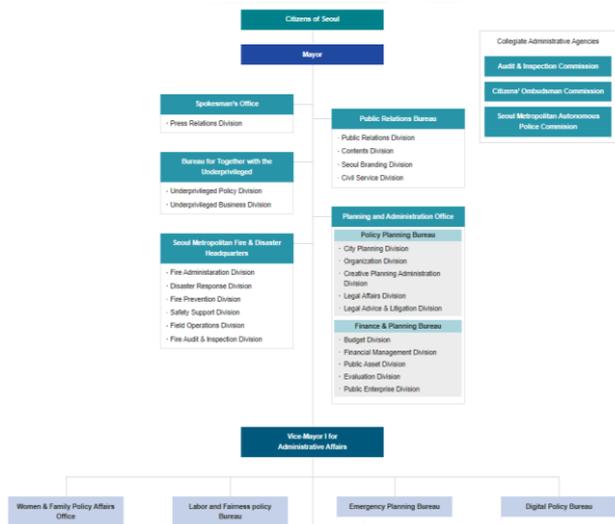
¹League of California Cities, "Understanding Your City's Departments" .

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Graham Mitchell, City Manager for the City of El Cajon since 2018. Main focusing policies are homelessness policies.





[Figure 2: Organizational Chart of Seoul City Hall]

Source: Seoul Metropolitan Government Website

III. TYPES OF ADMINISTRATIVE TASKS – PROCEDURES AND CHALLENGES

A. Invoices

Upon receiving goods, prices are specified, and each department processes receipts electronically. The accounting team verifies them, and any discrepancies or errors result in rejection and revision. Once completed, checks are issued and mailed to the respective companies. However, the reliance on physical paper receipts and checks poses challenges to swift processing.

B. Revenue from Rent

The city earns revenue from monopolistic business expenses or leases. While various projects generate income, the lack of a dedicated program or personnel to manage these revenues led to inconsistent record-keeping in Excel. Irregular payments made managing all of interactions efficiently more challenging. After risk manager started this project with the writer, new standardized form were now made.

C. Claims

Claims received via phone, documents, or the new city app, My El Cajon, and are classified by claims handlers, forwarded to the respective departments, and resolved. However, as new insurance company required new classification, previous classification were making analysis difficult, prompting the writer the manual categorization of ten years' worth of claims.

D. Operation of Basic City Facilities

Management of public parks, sewage systems, road facilities, etc. is essential. A new city app, My El Cajon, allows for the rapid reporting and response to damaged roads or sidewalks. Unlike Korea, where the fire department and police station

are separate, in the United States, the city and county manage fire and police services, allowing for direct recruitment of firefighters by the city or can also have private fire fighters and ambulances. This is contrasted to have a combined fire and police departments within the city, unlike Korea, where they operate separately.

IV. DEFICIENCIES IN ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESSES

A. Freedom of Information Act (FOIA Acts)²

Transparency in the U.S. government is achieved through responses under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). This act covers public records, First Amendment rights, and open meetings. The U.S. has implemented this law to redress past corruption.³ Values such as the Sunshine Law emphasize transparency, allowing citizens to access government information and supervise it. However, the right to access government information can sometimes be abused, leading to excessive or irrelevant requests, hampering productivity.

B. Homelessness Issue

The United States faces a homelessness problem of a different dimension from Korea. It is not just a matter of financial deprivation but a socio-structural issue. Legalization of drugs has led to addiction, and individuals spend large sums on drugs, leading to homelessness. Moreover, some choose homelessness due to a sense of despair, feeling that there is no way to improve their lives. Consequently, there is little willingness among the homeless to utilize government policies to improve their situation.

C. Digitization

The biggest hindrance to administrative efficiency is ongoing digitization. The vast amount of analog information makes it challenging to keep up with digitization efforts. Moreover, there is resistance to digitization due to concerns about data privacy and distrust of the government and computers. This resistance stems from a desire for greater certainty in handling information. Establishing a clear, standardized system for digitization remains a challenge.

V. PROS AND CONS OF ADMINISTRATIVE METHODS

The advantage of such procedures lies in the ability to handle even a single task with great care. Each document is reviewed multiple times by different individuals, serving as an internal audit and showcasing thoroughness to external observers. This is evident even during city council hearings, where policymaking and legislation involve not only internal scrutiny but also direct interaction with the public, allowing for active and practical governance in the United States.

However, this meticulousness can also lead to bottlenecks. As experienced veterans retire, and new recruits take time to learn, there is a risk of certain individuals becoming

²FOIA Act is a federal law. Each state usually has its own law; California has 'Public Records Act'

³Alexandru Grigorescu, 『International Organizations and Government Transparency: Linking the International and Domestic Realms 』, International Studies Quarterly, 2003, 644p.

overloaded with work due to inadequate succession planning. Another hindrance to work efficiency is the ongoing transition to digital systems. As systems are still being organized, employees must balance their regular duties with learning and adapting to new systems, leading to a sense of urgency to catch up rather than progress steadily. It is crucial to establish a comprehensive system swiftly to address these challenges.

Moreover, the reliance on physical receipts without electronic documentation makes it difficult to track payments when receipts are lost or misplaced. The transition to digital processes, under the guise of scanning, data entry, physical delivery to accounting, verification, and check issuance, introduces unnecessary delays. Additionally, manual data entry increases the risk of errors despite multiple verification steps, requiring further time and effort to rectify mistakes.

VI. SOLUTIONS AND CONCLUSION

In the case of payment processing, rapid digitization and outsourcing of tasks are considered as prompt solutions. This entails delegating some tasks that the city hall can handle to external entities. For instance, outsourcing receipt scanning or organizing related data into Excel and sending it within the stipulated deadline would expedite the review process by departments, facilitating quicker transfer to the accounting department, thus significantly reducing the time associated with payment processing.

Regarding data organization, since it is still in its nascent stage, it appears that swift implementation through trial and error is the best approach. If data can be structured in a format desired by the city hall, containing only relevant information, it is believed that in the future, a substantial amount of information can be exchanged rapidly without confusion.

This study has explored and described various issues discovered based on working experience in US government agencies. However, these issues are not confined solely to the United States but also hold the potential to occur in Korean government agencies. Given that these problems primarily arise within the respective institutions, they may be challenging to comprehend without direct experience. In comparison between Korean and US government agencies, it was observed that in many cases, only superficial aspects of Korean agencies are disclosed. Therefore, it is concluded that in-depth research and additional analysis based on experience are necessary for Korean government agencies to identify issues and seek improvement, as highlighted in the study.

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