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IMF staff: Missing link in fund reform proposals

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Abstract Current IMF reform proposals are preoccupied with changing governance structures by reallocating Executive Board chairs and quota shares and with expanding and altering the Fund's surveillance role, but not enough attention has been paid to whether organizational change at the staff level is also needed. IMF staff have intellectual dominance and discretion in the design of loan conditionality, writing of surveillance reports, and provision of technical and policy advice. There are also clear internal and external criticisms of how the Fund's organizational culture—that is perceived to be hierarchical, technical/economistic, bureaucratic, and homogeneous/conforming—negatively affects the Fund's policy output and relationship with borrowing members. This article suggests altering 'how things are done' at the IMF by making changes to recruitment and organizational structure.

Keywords IMF · Organizational culture · Reform · IMF staff

JEL Codes D73 · F33 · F34 · O19

1 Introduction

Calls to reform the International Monetary Fund (IMF) continue to intensify in the past decade, despite the IMF withstanding a series of financial crises. While many developing countries and non-governmental organizations had cried against IMF policies during the debt crisis and the era of structural adjustment, the Washington policy community started to pay attention to the Fund's loss of legitimacy when the "model" Asian tigers and other emerging market economies joined the chorus of criticism against the Fund. The financial crises that hit Asia (dubbed the 'IMF crisis'

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by Asian countries), Russia, Turkey, and Argentina, also sparked a crisis of confidence in the IMF among its members. The Washington policy community also started to question the soundness of IMF policy advice and to critique the IMF's inability to predict and warn of looming financial crises. Although many of the affected emerging market economies have since recovered financially, they have also chosen to steer away from the IMF. Many Fund members have stopped borrowing from the IMF, sought alternative regional arrangements to finance future balance of payments, or publicly stated their intention to avoid future Fund borrowing. This has led several prominent policymakers to argue that without IMF reforms to restore the confidence of emerging market economies, the IMF may prove to become irrelevant to the future of the international monetary and financial system (See Dodge, 2006; King, 2006).

The notion that the IMF may prove irrelevant stems from members' perception that the Fund today is inadequately governed and has lost its focus. Consequently, the concerned policy community have argued for democratizing the IMF in order to enhance its legitimacy in the eyes of emerging market economies and low-income countries. They have also argued for refocusing the IMF back to its traditional role of monitoring exchange rates and multilateral surveillance-services where the IMF historically had a comparative advantage over the World Bank and other smaller institutional nodes of the international financial architecture. On governance reforms, current IMF reform proposals suggest changing the composition of the Executive Board through a combination of minimizing the number of Executive Directors from the European Union and Euro zone and expanding the number of Executive Directors from Africa and emerging market economies (See Bini Smaghi, 2006; Buira, 2002). Another key element of raising the clout of emerging market economies at the Executive Board has been the proposal to increase the IMF quotas of members deemed underrepresented, particularly China, Mexico, Turkey, and South Korea. Others call for changing how the Executive Board operates, either through divorcing the board from members' political interference by professionalizing its representatives and increasing board transparency, enhancing board accountability to constituency members, or decreasing the board's involvement in the IMF's daily affairs by making it a non-resident board (See De Gregorio, Eichengreen, Ito, & Wyplosz, 1999; King, 2006; Lombardi & Woods, 2006). Moreover, many have called on the Fund to give up its tradition of selecting a European Managing Director in favour of an open, competitive process guided by an election (See Kahler, 2002; Ostry & Zettelmeyer, 2005: 17). On the issue of refocusing the IMF, significant emphasis has been placed on expanding Fund multilateral surveillance through added monitoring of systemically important countries, 'naming and shaming' bad behaviour of emerging market economies, and expanding exchange rate monitoring of Fund members (De Rato, 2006; Goldstein, 2006; Truman, 2006).

These governance and functional reforms, however, do not address the role of the IMF staff and their effect on both Fund policy output and Fund relations with borrowing countries. Policymakers, think-tanks, and academics have dominated the current debate on IMF reforms, but have overlooked a key point: on many daily issues that affect borrowing members, the IMF staff has intellectual dominance in the organization.

Principal-agent modelling and delegation theory highlight that international organizations' staff can have autonomy and independence from their principal masters (See Hawkins et al., 2006). Moreover, powerful members delegate authority to international organizations, like the IMF, insofar as powerful members are satisfied with the organization's policies which gives staff a 'zone of discretion' from which to model autonomous policies (See Thatcher & Stone Sweet, 2002: 5). This 'zone of discretion' has indeed created depoliticized space for the IMF staff to develop ideas, policies, and programs, albeit on a short leash from powerful Fund shareholders.

The early organizational design of the IMF intended to keep the technocratic Fund staff away from the potentially politicized Executive Board, to ensure that loan agreements, conditionality, and technical advice would remain sterile from political interference (See Gold, 1983). Over the years the Fund has experienced considerable 'organizational slippage' where the IMF has developed functions and mandates that transcended the institution's original raison d'être and its shareholders' intentions (Babb, 2003). Leiteritz (2005), for example, found that the IMF staff pressed members to remove capital controls—a policy idea that was deeply embedded in the Fund's modern bureaucratic culture—despite the absence of a mandate in the Fund's Articles of Agreement and the lack of powerful members' support for capital controls. Momani (2005a) also found that former Managing Director Kohler's efforts to 'streamline and refocus' conditionality resulted in Fund staff, in effect, entrenching their need for 'mission creep' in the Fund's official guidelines on conditionality. These recent studies exemplified how the IMF staff have played a lead role in expanding the Fund's mandate and functional scope.

Fund staff are chiefly responsible for key aspects of IMF functions: loan negotiations, program monitoring, designing conditionality, and communicating Fund policies. The IMF staff compose and shape many of the decisions at the Executive Board, and are arguably powerful shapers of Fund policies (See Babb, 2003: 19; for an elaborated debate see Fratianni & Pattison, 2005). But as Evans and Finnemore (2001: 23) note, the Fund staff's ingenuity in policy design is limited by "intellectual monocropping:" hiring like-minded individuals that operate in a conforming organization. That said, the Fund staff are specifically responsible for loan agreements that are negotiated first between the IMF staff and country officials, and then the Executive Board decides to approve or disapprove financing. Similarly, bilateral surveillance reports are written after Fund staff consult with member officials and collect country data. There may be an effort by IMF staff to design agreements and reports that meet the interests of powerful Executive Board members to avoid stonewalling and expedite the approval process. That said, although external politicization of loan conditionality and staff reports can occur in exceptional cases, there are simply too many documents before the relatively small organ of the Executive Board (and its support staff) to suggest that the Board intervenes in most country's loan design and staff reports (see Momani, 2004). Reform proposals focussing on Fund governance issues have overlooked the issue of whether there is need for reform of the IMF staff.

While it may be that the IMF is facing a legitimacy crisis that has resulted in a loss of clients and perhaps the urgency of governance reforms is rightly directed at returning the faith of would-be borrowing countries. However, the reform proposals offered by the concerned policy community today are (politically difficult) short-term fixes that may not solve many of the problems originating at the IMF staff level. Again, it is the IMF staff that are chiefly responsible for shaping many of the IMF's day-to-day outcomes. Clearly, the Fund's legitimacy problems are intertwined with members' criticism of the IMF for being a 'runaway agency' with 'intrusive' conditionality characterized by mission creep and for intellectual failure in predicting, warning, and understanding financial crises and contagion. These issues, at their very core, are criticisms of the work of the IMF staff. The IMF staff are then key to why members are losing faith in the institution. To better understand the IMF staff and their behaviour, moreover, one needs to understand the IMF's organizational culture. Hence, IMF organizational culture matters because it shapes the IMF staff and, as argued in this article, the problematic policy outcomes of the institution.

The reform proposals offered in this paper are arguably difficult to implement and perhaps deemed less pressing than governance reforms, but without addressing reforms at the staff level, a newly devised Executive Board or a respected non-European Managing Director and a reformed IMF with refocused functions will face repeated problems with failed policy implementation and strained relations with its borrowing members. Organizational cultural change is half-hearted without many of the governance and functional reform proposals offered by the concerned policy community; but, changing the Fund's structure and function without addressing some of the problems and criticism of the Fund staff can produce cosmetic changes to the Fund while substantive policies remain the same. The feasibility of the proposed reforms offered in this paper would be higher when done in conjunction with changing the Fund's governance structure and mandate. The proposed organizational reforms will require a new way of thinking at the IMF, while perhaps providing relief for disaffected staff members and borrowing countries.

The Fund's existing organizational culture is hierarchical, technocratic, officious, and conformist. These cultural characteristics have, respectively, resulted in: poor IMF staff reward structure and silo thinking in Fund departments; staff prescribing policies that are weak on implementation; self-censorship of staff criticism; and, insularity from hearing new ideas. To reform IMF organizational culture, I suggest two avenues of change: altering Fund staff recruitment practices and loosening the Fund's organizational structure. It is posited that by changing the Fund's organizational culture as proposed, this will improve Fund policy output and staff relations with its borrowing members.

2 What is Wrong with Aspects of the IMF's Organizational Culture?

Organizational culture, in its most simplistic and classical definition, is "how things are done" in an organization (Ouchi & Johnson, 1978). Traditionally, international organizations (IO) were viewed in the prism of interstate relations, material interests, or functional attributes. In many ways international organizations were believed to be "culture-neutral" (See Finnemore, 1996a: 328–329). Recent studies of international organizations, however, have placed more focus on how organizational culture affects and shapes IO policies and behaviour (Barnett & Finnemore, 1999; 2004; Finnemore, 1996b).

How has the IMF's organizational culture been characterized? Several academic studies have characterized the IMF's organizational culture as 'technocratic' (See Drazen, 2002; Martin, 2006; Momani, 2005b). This view stems from the Fund staff's use of macroeconomic models that are proclaimed to be apolitical, econometric, rational, and scientific. Recently, the IMF's Independent Evaluation Office surveyed 621 IMF staff members (of 2,700 total) about their views of Fund organizational culture. They were asked how do the following describe the current organizational culture of the IMF?" (Independent Evaluations Office (IEO), 2006: 49). The survey results are shown in Table 1 and reveal a lot about staff views of how things are done at the Fund.[1]

The following sections will elaborate on the four cultural aspects found to be significant in the survey findings: hierarchical, technical/economistic, bureaucratic, and homogenous/conforming. Based on internal Fund studies (some acquired from the Fund Archives), external academic studies, and personal interviews with Fund staff, this article will demonstrate how these cultural aspects have also negatively affected IMF policies and Fund relations with borrowing countries.

2.1 Hierarchical

The IMF arguably has a flat organizational structure, characterized by few organizational levels and shallow vertical integration (See Clark, 1996b: 175). Ideally, this is meant to promote intra-organizational dialogue and give staff access to managers and decision-makers. In the case of the IMF, however, this flat organizational structure is complicated by a staff ranking-system used to note seniority and experience adding layers of hierarchy within particular departments/ units.

IMF staff are assigned a file ranking based on seniority and experience that is then used throughout their career at the Fund to climb the organizational ladder. For example, entry-level economists can begin at level A9 and work their way up to senior department positions of level A15, and then achieve managerial levels of B1 thru to B5. In addition to the financial benefits of moving up this ranking ladder system, IMF staff often feel that success and prestige in the organization is denoted by their letter-number ranking. The hierarchical nature of the ranking system creates a competitive element to the workplace, but promotions are often rewarded for technical skill set and years of service rather than for working effectively with country officials.[2]

The rigid, hierarchical structure rewards staff promotion in area departments based on tenure of service and less on working effectively with client states. The problem the hierarchical ranking system creates is the pressure to promote individual staff members despite being poor negotiators. This is further compounded by a

[1] Survey results were based "on a 5-point scale where '5' means 'describes completely' and '1' means 'does not describe at all'. After careful review of the IEO report it appears that the survey results corresponded to those who reported '5' or 'describes completely'. However, the IEO did not respond to email requests for verifying this inference.

[2] Based on personal interviews with former senior Fund officials conducted in Washington, DC on May 3 and 5, 2006.

Table 1 Select staff views of IMF organizational culture

Organizational culture	Surveyed (621)	Entry level Staff (234)	Senior level (164)
Hierarchical	87.9%	90.4%	87.7%
Technical/economistic	74.9%	76.1%	75%
Bureaucratic	74.2%	78.7%	66.3%
Homogeneous/ conforming	60.5%	62.1%	66.3%
Secretive	35.5%	40.8%	27.3%
Individualistic	22.9%	26.5%	19.6%
Apolitical	21.6%	18%	23%
Mover of money	9.8%	9.6%	7.6%

Adapted from: Independent Evaluations Office (IEO), 2006: 49

well-organized Staff Association Committee (SAC) and multiple channels for staff redress on promotion issues (starting with the IMF's Ombudsperson, the Administrative Review, the Grievance Committee, and ultimately the Administrative Tribunal) (See IMF, 2002). The multiple channels for staff redress are infrequently used; in fact the IMF's external panel on human resource issues found staff grievances surprisingly low. In its report, the panel noted that:

> [T]he Fund's formal [dispute resolution] systems have very low rates of utilization, and this raises the question whether the present structure or the procedures have features that discourage their use. Alternatively, the low usage may suggest that either the cultural background of Fund staff or aspects of the Fund's own institutional culture may inhibit formal complaints about employment issues. Despite our numerous emails and meetings with Fund employees, and after reviewing the tally of confidential meetings reported by the Ombudsperson and the data on exit questionnaires of staff members leaving the Fund, we still do not have a fully satisfactory answer to these questions. (IMF, 2002: 22)

While the report goes on to suggest that staff may be unaware of the various tools of redress at their disposal, personal interviews with former senior Fund staff members suggest that an organizational culture that emphasizes hierarchy as part of its internal reward system puts great pressure on senior staff to continuously promote and advance staff members that do not have strong negotiation skills and are mediocre in dealing with country officials. Moreover, the litigious nature of IMF-staff relations discourages senior Fund staff from pursuing the dismissal of these ineffective communicators.[3]

This staff ranking-system negatively affects Fund policies and its relations with borrowing members when country officials must deal with mission chiefs, working their way up the organizational ladder, who are weak on persuasiveness. Although, the Fund implicitly expects mission chiefs who lead Fund teams' loan negotiations to have excellent communication and negotiation skills. There is a tendency to promote individuals who may have excellent technical skills but less than optimal

[3] Based on personal interviews with former senior Fund officials conducted in Washington, DC on May 3 and 5, 2006.

communication skills to the level of mission chief because of the staff ranking-system. Senior staff members report that this situation is avoided at all costs, but again the litigious nature of the Fund-staff relations can inhibit senior staff judgment.[4]

The hierarchical nature of the IMF also created a silo-mentality in IMF departments that inhibited both internal coordination and lateral communication across departments. Indeed, as Fund documents released through the Archives identify, the Fund staff had "...a sense of allegiance to an individual department, which rewarded loyal service and was protective of its staff. [This] produced a situation in which departments were reluctant to explicitly identify or address performance problems, or sought to arrange for the transfer of weak performers to other less influential departments which tended to become repositories for problem cases." (IMF, 1991: 4–5). This silo-mentality in IMF departments has also made various departments focus their efforts and attention to communicating vertically, at the expense of horizontal communication. According to the IMF, this silo-mentality has been slowly eroding throughout the years (Ibid.). For example, the Fund notes that "Changes have also been occurring in the values and goals of the Fund's staff. [There is] less willingness than in the past to accept traditional hierarchical structures, and a greater interest in participating in the decision-making process..." (Ibid.:2). But recently, staff have noted that problems existed between the Research Department and Area Departments and argued that this may have precipitated failures, such as in the 1998 South Korean case (IMF, 1999: 32). Much of the problem, according to current and past staff members, is the 'unconstructive,' 'adversarial,' and 'distant' interdepartmental relations (Ibid.). It seems that Fund department's silo thinking remains, invariably affecting lateral organizational communication and coordination.

Member states have noted the IMF's problems with intradepartmental communication. As reported in a commissioned external study of the Fund, "among many close observers of the institution, knowledge transfer across departments is seen as deficient. In the surveillance context, this manifests itself in an inadequate cross-fertilization between multilateral and bilateral surveillance, and insufficient use of what is learned in different countries." (Ibid.:13). Member states have complained that staff do not pass on knowledge vertically to other staff members.

The hierarchical nature of the Fund places great burden on select offices to be the last stop in a chain of command before reporting staff findings. In the case of dealing with borrowing members, burden is placed on area department's Front Office (consisting of senior staff, senior advisors, and a director) to transfer knowledge and country information within the department. This, however, has not always worked as efficiently as it should. Front offices have had to focus more on managing bilateral surveillances and loan negotiations than on administrating inter-departmental knowledge (IMF, 1999: 73). The Fund argues that inter-departmental knowledge is transferred by having staff rotate from country to country, even in the midst of three-year agreements. It is believed that by giving staff exposure to various countries and

[4] Based on personal interviews with former senior Fund officials conducted in Washington, DC on May 3 and 5, 2006.

economies, staff will learn by doing and take that added knowledge on to the next country they examine.

2.2 Technical/Economistic

An IMF organizational culture that is technical and economistic puts greater emphasis on prescriptive policies that are academically convincing, but not necessarily policies that can be politically implemented. The problem is that Fund staff rely on a textbook approach because they have weaker understandings of the application of their theoretical paradigms. Country member officials have further echoed these complaints, arguing that "...Fund advice fails to take into account existing political constraints, or is so optimistic about the ability of the government to overcome them that it does not consider second-best policy choices that would be consistent both with the maintenance of macroeconomic stability and country-specific *political realities*." (IMF, 2004: 12; emphasis added). The political viability of the Fund staff's policy advice can be, in many cases, weak.

Fund staff are frequently challenged by member policymakers to explain how the technical advice would be implemented in light of the political and institutional particulars of the country in question. Fund staff "...are apparently not as good at suggesting how the first-best [policy] might actually be implemented" (IMF, 1999: 65). This lack of understanding on policy implementation stems from both the absence of policy training for staff and, in turning to another organizational weakness, high rate of staff turnover on country programs which inhibit on the job training about member countries' domestic political systems and their inherent constraints.

Country officials have long complained that IMF policy advice is limited at bringing in new ideas on policy implementation because policy prescriptions tend to be heavily technical and less practical. Even country officials in developed, democratic countries, like in Canada, have argued that the IMF staff suggest policy advice that is not congruent with the countries' domestic political situation (See Momani, 2006). In the Fund's own internal assessment, country officials had documented similar complaints: "Some criticized the Fund's policy advice for relying too heavily on academic, mostly theoretical, knowledge, without drawing sufficiently on practical experiences" (IMF, 2004: 12). The Fund staff's reliance on hiring individuals with macroeconomic modelling and theoretical training, limits bringing in new ideas about how to improve implementation of policy prescriptions.

This policy inexperience has produced difficulty for Fund staff and country officials, but it has also produced a public affairs problem. As former IMF External Affairs spokesperson and US Executive Director Thomas Dawson noted:

> There's a cultural issue in the institution that has never really been solved. Of our 2,700 staff members, 1,500 are economists. There's still too much of a tendency for the economists to talk to each other and their counterparts in governments but not to the rest of the world. If we think we have good advice to offer we ought to pay more attention to how it's communicated. The world isn't run by economists. Before the age of transparency, when our documents were read largely by Ph.D.s, it didn't seem to matter quite as much. But now,

> when our advice and our work are subject to public scrutiny, we need to make sure that it's convincing and comprehensible. That remains a challenge. Part of the answer may lie in breaking down the 'silo mentality' within the institution—the cultural divide between those who are economists and those who are not. That would help both internal and external communication. (Dawson, 2006: 23)

Self-selection in the IMF's recruitment process brings in policy-inexperienced macroeconomists to deal with country officials, but the Fund staff are at times ill-equipped to suggest how to implement policy prescriptions. If the IMF's main mission is, as Woods (2006: 65) argues, "...not just to produce and propose ideas but to persuade borrowing countries to implement them," then the IMF staff have sub-optimal results in this regard. Without the stick of conditionality, there is less persuasive value to IMF staff's policy prescriptions.

Fund critics from the right of the political spectrum also point to 'IMF clientism' where IMF staff have been arguably quiet on members' policy slippages during loan negotiations (Bordo & James, 1999: 7). This has been interpreted as a 'lack of frankness' in staff-member negotiations that produce watered-down documents that stick to technical and quantitative issues and shy away from members' political concerns (See, IMF, 1999: 65). Perhaps 'clientism' can be better explained by IMF staff that shied away from discussing how to better implement Fund prescriptions because of inadequate hiring of both policy experienced individuals and those with policy sciences training. Bringing in more policy experienced and cultivating political-economy trained staff will encourage Fund missions to further discuss politically sensitive policies. The point here is that Fund staff can be more candid about 'swallowing the tough medicine pill' if they had better understanding and knowledge about their members' political body. In short, in the staff's 'zone of discretion' there is insufficient practical knowledge and debate about policy implementation. While Fund staff may be trained and encouraged to tell member countries 'what to do,' they have insufficient training and are discouraged from telling member countries 'how to do it.'

2.3 Bureaucratic

The bureaucratic nature of the IMF, noted by the high pervasiveness of rules, internal red tape, and the officious watch of the Policy Development and Review (PDR) department, leads to self-censorship as staff withhold their criticism of potential policy failures.

Using ethnography of documents, Richard Harper perhaps best documented the high level of bureaucratization and regulation of Fund procedures. Part of the Fund's explicit functions is surveillance, but to manage and collate the large amounts of both member state supplied and in-house assessments of countries, this requires Fund staff to meticulously and efficiently document information up through the Fund's hierarchy. For most country reports emanating from the staff (including staff studies in response to request for funds and Article IV Consultations), documents travel through the area department to the Executive Board. Documents start with one desk officer, to division chiefs, to the responsible area department's senior staff, and then cleared at the PDR department before going from the Managing Director to the

Executive Board. The Fund argues that documentation is necessary for coherence and uniformity of treatment among members (Harper, 1998: 108–109).

The PDR further divides staff reports for review by various individuals representing different departments. Consequently, say a 'trade division' PDR staff member may be reviewing several staff reports per day (estimated at 300/year) and comments on how to bring coherence to these staff reports regarding trade policy from the PDR perspective (Harper, 1998: 238). The PDR argues that this is necessary to make the staff reports more objective and less influenced by the personal opinions and views of staff missions. As one PDR staff reflected on their task: "At first it is difficult, but after a while you cannot help but see the general picture [within the division's frame of reference]. You get to know what is the standard, the Fund way of dealing with things. The missions don't really get that perspective. They are too close to their own countries." (quoted in Harper, 1998: 238). The problem this produces is carbon-copy documentation of member country information. The other problem is that staff will have less incentive to discuss or debate policy ideas and country problems knowing that the PDR will remove subjective references, particularly about staff perceptions of government commitments to reform. Finally, staff will be less apt to discuss what they see as a potential policy failure in prescribed conditionality due to things such as corrupted officials, geopolitical problems, election cycles, social values, or individual personalities. These types of staff ideas would be edited out by the PDR. It is little wonder then that staff have referred to the PDR as the "thought police" (See Momani, 2005b).

The urgency demanded on Fund staff for proper documentation of all meetings, activities, and internal thinking, puts further pressure on staff to conform to standard reporting, discouraging individual reflection. The Fund staff pressure for "...need for speed against need for local knowledge" is brought on by the bureaucratic culture of the Fund staff (Evans & Finnemore, 2001: 19). Anecdotally speaking, for example, Harper (1998) documents how staff must at times switch country focus mid-stream in negotiations to attend a different country mission; at times this literally involves getting on an airplane before the back-to-office country reports are complete. Staff are not given enough time to really understand the nuances of countries—and therefore not adequately learning local circumstances—but staff are also under pressure to report their findings fast which leads to the same language, words, phrases, and ideas in staff reports. This might explain why Martin (1991: 28) found several sub-Saharan African states' correspondences with the IMF to be of exact copy, short of changed letterheads. Bureaucratic pressure to get the reports done quickly comes at the sacrifice of acquiring local knowledge and in staff ability and desire to inject individual observations and reflections.

On the receiving end of staff rotating around musical chairs are country officials who have repeatedly complained to the Fund that high staff turnover is disheartening and frustrating.[5] Staff members tend to stay focussed on one country for 2 years while loan packages, for example, tend to expire in 3–4 years. Based on IMF internal audit of its bilateral surveillance exercises, country member officials had "...the

[5] That said, IMF staff have similarly complained that government cabinet-shuffles and changes in government can also be frustrating. As noted in a personal interview with a former staff member, 'musical chairs' can work both ways.

strongly held views that high turnover of staff on country teams undermined the establishment of rapport based on trust" (IMF, 2004: 19). However, the Fund has maintained that its high staff turnover is meant to bring "...fresh perspectives to country work" (IMF, 2004: 20) and to avoid staff cynicism and demoralized attitudes about country commitments to reform. It is questionable how fresh these new perspectives and ideas are, seeing that staff are often not given time and space to ponder about new approaches and ideas that affect their work. More cynically, staff rotation is a way the Fund avoids its IMF staff from "going native and overly sympathizing with locals" (See Woods, 2006: 207). The Fund argues that the high turnover in staff assignments ensures depoliticised, technocratic, and therefore 'objective' economic assessments. High staff rotation may prove useful to having the IMF staff remain from going soft on debtors, but on the downside this will result in untailored policy advice and in the long term debtors' implementation slippages.

2.4 Homogenous/ Conforming

The homogenization of Fund staff work-exhibited in the pressures to conform to standard models, forms, and ways of communication—creates an 'insular' Fund staff that is myopic to new ideas and internal debate. A former IMF staff on secondment once stated in a personal interview: "your success at the Fund was determined by your ability to adapt to the Fund." Former IMF Executive Director Ian Clark went as far to characterize the Fund as a military organization which expected rank and file to conform to official party line at all costs (Clark, 1996a).

The limitation of having a conforming organizational culture is one that inhibits internal debate and discourse, remaining rigid and incapable of adapting to new ideas. The Fund's long-time fixation on capital account liberalization, for example, is one such policy area where the Fund was myopic to new ideas and arguments against capital controls because the Fund's conforming culture expected staff rank and file to not cross against Fund dictum (See Leiteritz, 2005). Had internal debate, external consultation, and encouragement of internal disagreement been allowed, we might have seen the Fund coming around on the issue of capital controls much earlier. As Joseph Stiglitz reminds us: "The institution has a hierarchical structure, not uncommon among organizations that are designed to deal with crises; one cannot have intellectual debates on the best way to fight a fire in the midst of a fire. But whatever its merits in dealing with crises, such a structure often leads to organizations that do not adapt quickly" (Stiglitz, 2001). Fund staff are aware of this common and loud external criticism of their 'insularity.' The staff have reported, however, that they are often "...preoccupied with getting their analysis agreed and accepted internally rather than listening or learning from outside" (IMF, 1999: 33). It is indeed striking at how little the IMF listens to 'like-minded' organizations, particularly academia and think-tanks, on similar topics and issues of concerns; for example, Fund staff papers are often prepared with little to no references to existing academic and policy-related publications and works (IMF, 1999: 74).

Officious review processes that demand internal departmental homogenization have also hampered inter- and intra-departmental communication. Staff complained to the external Fund evaluators that "...the process [of internal departmental reviews] hinders innovation and flexibility; departments are inhibited from trying to do things differently" (IMF, 1999: 33). Similarly, in staff responses to Fund surveys on workplace concerns, staff noted "...poor support for staff satisfaction, well-being, and *risk taking*" (IMF, 2005: 23; emphasis added). Demands on staff to perpetuate how things are done are high.

The Fund has mildly acknowledged this *perceived* problem. Van Houtven (2002: 18), former Fund secretary, in an official Fund publication wrote "the view is sometimes expressed that the IMF's system of oversight of staff work and internal clearance of papers stifles dissent and that papers have been homogenized before they reach management or the board." However, in the same publication Van Houtven adds that the IMF staff will challenge the PDR and Executive Board if there is an issue they feel strongly against/for despite homogenization (Ibid). Again, the PDR which is responsible for this 'homogenization' "...has a central role in the clearance process in order to secure conformity with standards and policies and to ensure evenhanded treatment in exercise of IMF surveillance and in the application of IMF policies on the use of its resources" (Van Houtven, 2002: 18). Similarly in a report of independent experts commissioned by the Fund on surveillance, the report highlighted that "the interdepartmental review process for surveillance documents, while necessary, has become excessively formalized and time-consuming, adding to an already significant problem of overwork for many staff involved in surveillance" (IMF, 1999: 13). Staff have clearly felt stunted by the bureaucratic red-tape of internal reporting procedures in surveillance and presumably the same could be said in loan negotiations.

Similarly stunting IMF staff internal and external debate, have been the homogenization of staff reports before the Board. The Fund requires that internal communication, particularly with the Executive Board, conform to accepted style manuals. Staff reports must be communicated first through the Fund Secretary who then standardizes the documents for the Executive Board (See Clark, 1996b: 168). Again, the Fund argues that its standardization of internal communication is meant to ensure uniformity of treatment, however, there a number of drawbacks with the current system. First, the staff reports are written as a team and therefore the potential for groupthink at the staff level increases. The current system would not give individual staff members with their own concerns an opportunity to voice their comments. Second, a critical Fund staff report that is edited by the Fund secretary might be watered-down during 'standardization'. This has been observed, for example, in the Fund secretary's taking of Executive Board minutes where passionate criticism of an Executive Director is toned-down when paraphrased by the Secretary.[6] Opening staff reports to internal and external debate, free of Fund secretary standardization, would create more fruitful debate at the Executive Board. Similarly, former Managing Director Camdessus suggested "...submitting the staff's preliminary conclusions to a broader debate before transmission to the Executive Board. With due precautions, this consultation could be open to academic observers

[6] Based on personal comparisons made between Executive Director statements (acquired from former EDs) and Fund Secretary's documentation of Executive Board minutes (later acquired through the Archives). It should be noted that this is in no way to suggest a doctoring of ED statements, but a toning down of criticism where words chosen, perhaps even subconsciously, are less passionate, expressive, and confrontational.

and regional partners" (quoted in Wallace, 2004: 27). Increasing internal and external debate on staff reports before presentation to the IMF Executive Board would also put less focus and pressure on the IMF staff to produce conforming reports. Moreover, many Executive Directors have argued that it would "be healthy" to have the staff present their internal disagreements and views before the Board, rather than a sterilized, homogenized staff report (IMF, 1999: 34).

3 How to Improve Fund Organizational Culture?

In the IMF, particularly as perceived and experienced at the staff level, 'how things are done' can be highly hierarchical, technical, bureaucratized, and conforming. The IMF staff have intellectual dominance, in their delegated 'zone of discretion', to effectively shape many of the IMF's substantive policies. The problem, however, is that Fund cultural attributes negatively affect policy output and relations with borrowing members. To get at the negative attributes, this paper suggests two areas of reform: broaden staff recruitment and loosen the organizational structure.

3.1 Broaden Staff Recruitment

The Fund staff recruits predominantly young, male, Anglo-American educated PhDs, and policy inexperienced individuals (Momani, 2005b). There have been calls for diversifying Fund recruitment at the Executive Board to bring in new ideas, but this was reinterpreted at senior IMF staff levels to result in regional and gender diversification. Consequently, a monoculture at the IMF has been created because of self-selection biases in recruitment. As former Managing Director, Michel Camdessus noted:

> A change that is needed...is to broaden and deepen the culture of the staff and to reduce its 'cloning syndrome'. The two central institutions [IMF and World Bank] would benefit greatly in selecting for their dialogues with officials facing the complexities of political life, staff members with national experience, or a broader culture in social studies than the one that is generally required for their recruitment. I would suggest that those in charge today of recruiting these staffs—which 15 years from now will form the backbone of the institutions—keep this high on their agenda (Camdessus, 2005).

The call to diversify Fund recruitment by hiring individuals with stronger policy experience and social science training to bring in new ideas was also championed by Camdessus successor, former Managing Director Horst Kohler. Kohler reportedly wanted to hire less macroeconomists who he believed were "unimaginative" and "did not think outside the box," and instead to include more individuals with MBAs, political-economy degrees, and most importantly former policy practitioners (Momani, 2005b). Ironically, however, the very same technocratic organizational culture, that Kohler had issues with, had also inhibited implementation of Kohler's vision of diversifying Fund staff thought through recruitment (Ibid). This tells us that organizational culture can be resistant to change, morphing top-down reform measures to ones palatable to the staff's existing culture. Vigilance and external accountability of reform efforts are warranted.

First, to deal with the overly technical and economistic aspect of Fund advice, it is proposed that the Fund hire even less staff using the Economist Program (EP) who are recruited straight from academic institutions while expand recruitment from mid-career positions and those temporarily placed from national secondment (also see Evans & Finnemore, 2001: 25). In 2005, approximately 38% of incoming staff were recruited from the EP, who after a 2-year probationary term, become key front line economists placed on missions. Mid-career hires are more likely than EP hires to challenge technical and conforming aspects of Fund organizational culture for two reasons. First, EP recruits who tend to be 30 years of age and fresh out of graduate school, have less practical knowledge to offer the Fund and have more in the way of theoretically-heavy, textbook analysis. Second, new EP recruits, who have just left a hierarchical academic environment where their subordinate position required deference to supervisors and faculty members, will not challenge conforming aspects of Fund culture to bring in new ideas about Fund work.

Mid-career hires will be more apt to have policy-related experience, bring in new ideas from their previous organizations and government offices, and tend to be less willing to withhold alternative ways of doing things to their work at the Fund. In addition to reducing the number of EP positions, the Fund should consider seeking EP candidates who have policy-related work experience. Moreover, those hired on-secondment or mid-career should come from Finance Ministries and less from the current emphasis on central banks. The former civil servants are more apt to be politically astute, whereas the latter tend to be more insulated and too focussed on technical analysis.[7] Finally, separation rates for mid-career professionals are higher than EP recruits because of the conforming Fund cultural environment and difficult living situation in Washington, DC. The Fund needs to address these mid-career staff's discontentment with Fund life in order to improve retention rates. In general these proposed changes to increasing mid-career recruitment have few tradeoffs, but as noted in Fund reports excellent mid-career candidates are harder to attract because they excel and advance in their own institutions and are less interested in moving to a new organization (IMF, 2001: 11).

Second, to enhance learning of policy implementation, those who are recruited through the EP should have some policy science training, pass equivalency exams (perhaps like those used in recruitment of diplomatic service), take seminars and conferences examining political-economy issues of concern, or pass interview screenings that look for understanding nuances in policy sciences. It would also be useful to recruit individuals with degrees in public policy to complement the economists hired. At the same time, the Fund should cast a wider net for economists, away from the usual set of preferred US and European universities, in order to help infuse alternative economic ideas into the Fund.[8] Moreover, area departments need

[7] A former senior staff member in a personal interview dated May 5, 2006 provided this idea.

[8] While the Fund can proclaim it achieves 'passport diversity' in that staff have varied national backgrounds, it fails to hire staff with varied economic training. In both 1999 and 2000 (latest information released through the Fund archives), for example, none of the 37 and 48 incoming EP staff obtained their final degrees outside of Europe and North America (IMF, 2000: 9; IMF, 2001: 10).

to have latitude in separating staff for failure to excel and advance their communication and negotiation skills. Similarly, providing policy implementation ideas needs to be a part of meeting Fund performance requirements. As it stands, it is difficult to both let staff go or prevent promotions for failing to meet this non-technical skill set due to the Fund's highly legalized and complex dismissal and grievances process.

Third, to address the Fund tendency to self censor staff criticism, the Fund should open staff reports to external assessment, particularly to contracted political-economy specialists, before reports are raised at the board. Similarly, the Fund should consider contracting out political assessment to country experts to assess feasibility and offer advice on policy implementation of staff advice. This point may be of the most contested reform ideas at the Executive Board. Executive Directors, particularly from non-democratic polities, tend to be very guarded of their role as evaluators of staff reports' political feasibility. Moreover, Fund staff should incorporate external country-specific studies as part of their staff reports. This will help bring in new ideas about policy implementation and enhance country-specific knowledge.

Fourth, to improve on the Fund's hierarchical nature, the Fund needs to make note of the issue that a skewed staff promotion system is created by the Fund's hierarchical culture and litigious resolution system. This can lead to the misallocation of staff resources and expertise. For effective loan negotiations, the mission chief needs to have excellent negotiation and communication skills with borrowing members. Implicit expectations of strong communication skills are needed to have staff occupy this role. Monitoring advancement of this skill set needs to make its way into staff annual review reports, to trace staff progress and to use for staff promotion. Moreover, policy implementation expertise needs to be both harnessed and rewarded as part of the internal promotion system.

Fifth, to bring in new ideas that are country-specific and intellectually diverse, the IMF needs to better incorporate borrowing states' local knowledge into staff reports. This can be achieved through hiring more economists from the developing world and expanding the number of Fund staff in the local resident representative offices (See Evans & Finnemore, 2001). The Fund has been reluctant to hire individuals from the developing world, as some senior officials noted that their technical skills were deemed lacking in comparison to US and European educated professionals.[9] However, the local knowledge brought by developing world economists can be more useful to also assessing and improving policy implementation.

Sixth, to breakdown silo-thinking in Fund departments, the Fund needs to encourage lateral departmental hiring and exchanges, particularly between the Research Department and Policy Development and Review Department with Area Departments. This serves to ensure that the theoretical and practical departments communicate with one another and most importantly help discover policy shortcomings, stir internal debate, and breakdown silo-thinking in Fund departments.

[9] Based on personal interviews with former senior Fund officials conducted in Toronto in February, 2004.

3.2 Remould the Fund's Organizational Structure

In an effort to remould the Fund's organizational structure to improve Fund policies and improve relations with borrowing members, the following recommendations are offered. First, to foster internal debate and invite new ideas into Fund work, the reign of the Policy Development and Review Department needs to be significantly loosened. One immediate fix can be to remove the overly segmented division of labour in the PDR, where one individual focussed on a particular issue/division examines all staff reports. Instead, the PDR could develop a team approach to checking the soundness of staff reports, with the presence of area department staff.

Second, to harness local knowledge as a way of ushering in new ideas into Fund work, IMF staff should not rotate from country to country until loan packages have ended and there should be implicit preference for keeping the same pool of staff on the same countries. This will help officials build rapport and trust with IMF staff and help IMF staff develop on the job-training about the political capacity of its members. Local knowledge can be better stimulated if staff rotation is minimized (Woods, 2006: 207). The potential downside of this proposal is increased staff 'clientism,' but timely publication of staff reports that are scrutinized by private market actors will keep staff critical in its reports. To guard against 'clientism,' all staff reports should be released to the public and not based on members' own volition.

Third, to go beyond the economistic nature of the Fund's organizational culture, policy implementation needs to be a part of measuring individual and department successes. As it stands, IMF area departments are rewarded for the number and amount of loan agreements, but are not implicitly penalized for waivers of loan conditionality and non-compliance. Hence, there is pressure to have Fund staff 'over-optimistic' at the signing of an agreement, but little recourse for failed implementation (Bird, 2005). Fund staff need to be rewarded for devising loan programs that are implemented. This will push staff to prescribe conditions that are politically feasible and not theoretically impressive. One could argue that the downside of staff prescribing only politically feasible policies is that economically-sound prescriptive fail to get proposed by IMF staff and hence fail to get tried by debtors. Another possible downside to this reform proposal, one could argue, is that staff may be more inclined to then devise lenient loan programmes to augment their stature. These are valid concerns. I argue, however, that we will see less conditionality, but more potent and effective ones. Fund staff, moreover, are mindful of their professional integrity and tend to want to be seen by the economist profession as effective (Dreher, 2004: 447), so it is questionable that the IMF staff would purposely devise either insignificant or lenient agreements.

4 Conclusion

Fund reform today is sorely needed. Fund staff morale is at an all time low with prospects of benefits and salaries diminishing and heightened external criticism of the Fund's role in the international financial system. At the same time, the Fund's external critics, now empowered by country access to market financing, are mounting the call for governance and functional Fund changes. These efforts to reform the Fund through governance and functional reforms—reconfiguring the Executive Board, altering the Managing Director selection process, and refocusing IMF activities—would be better complemented by reforms at the staff level.

The Fund's existing organizational culture, 'how things are done,' is characterized as hierarchical, technocratic, bureaucratic, and conformist. This has produced a problematic IMF staff reward structure and silo thinking in Fund departments; policies weak on implementation; self-censorship of staff criticism; and, insularity. By reforming Fund staff recruitment practices and loosening the Fund's organizational structure as proposed, Fund policy output and staff relations with its borrowing members will improve. Without "re-engineering organizational culture" institutions can invoke reform proposals with little in substantive policy change (Nielson et al., 2006).

Organizational cultural change can, of course, have a downside. For the IMF, and its staff, there is a visible and constant reminder of what can happen when the organization loses its centralized, cohesive, and technical core: the World Bank. Many IMF staff worry that the IMF's 'high walls,' narrow recruitment base, and centralized nature distinguishes them, *for the better*, from the World Bank. The Bank, to many in the Fund, has become porous to outside views, recruited much too broadly, and has generally lost its way. The reforms offered in this article are not meant to make the Fund look more like the Bank; indeed, this would make many Fund staff critical of cultural reform. But, the IMF is losing legitimacy and clients and it no longer has the luxury of saying that things work well at the Fund. Proposals for reform need to be heard and tried.

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