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COVID-19 and Employment Administration Delivery Systems*

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I. Introduction

Changes in a nation's policies in response to a national or transnational crisis can also be seen as a demand for changes in public administration and service delivery. In this process, Korea has witnessed how broadly and rapidly the health administration system has changed. Assuming that the crisis will affect almost the entirety of society and the economy, predicted changes must go beyond health administration systems to other public administration delivery systems. This also applies to employment, where individuals find it difficult to retain employment and seek for new jobs. The government has already introduced a number of employment and labor policies in response to COVID-related crises, with more policies likely to be announced depending on the employment situation (Ministry of Employment and Labor, 2020; Ministry of Econ-

omy and Finance, 2020). Such changes in employment policy is highly likely to have a direct impact on employment administration, which is made up of diverse actors, from central ministries (eg. Ministry of Employment and Labor), local authorities (eg. city, county, district authorities), local offices (eg. Employment-Welfare + Center), semi-government agencies (eg. Korea Workers' Compensation and Welfare Service), and private contractors (eg. operators of direct job creation program). This paper provides an assessment on the changes that are occurring today in relation to employment administration delivery systems and offer desirable reform directions and principles in delivery systems in response to the COVID-19 crisis. From the suggested direction of reform, this paper intends to contribute to effective implementation of employment and labor policies.

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II. Understanding Changes in Employment Administration Delivery System : What Will Change ?

Predicting the direction of change in employment administration must begin with an observation of the characteristics of COVID-19 crisis. Among the many characteristics, two must be taken into consideration in regard to employment administration. The first is that COVID-19 causes fear of face-to-face contact; second, it poses rapid and direct risk of downturn in domestic demand and the economy in general.

These two factors are likely to affect employment administration in the following ways. First, it will create a need for quantitative and qualitative adjustment of employment administration systems. Based on the type of benefit, social policies can be classified into the following: cash benefits, in-kind benefits, service benefits, voucher (certificate) benefits, opportunity benefits and rights benefits (Song & Kim, 1995). Policies that require face-to-face services are likely to be reformed or reduced out of fear of infection. Korea's employment policies based on budget category can be classified into the following: vocational training, employment services, employment incentive, direct job creation, unemployment benefit and start-up support (Ministry of Employment and Labor, 2019). Among these areas, vocational training, employment services and unemployment benefits, face-to-face services are crucial, and some face-to-face services are being used for services such as support for start-up companies. A considerable amount of face-to-face services will inevitably be transformed or reduced to non-face-to-face services.

In addition, it is expected that there will be a considerable increase in policies that provide cash benefits and voucher benefits. Assuming that the economic recession for a certain period of time from COVID-19 is inevitable, there is a high probability that those applying for Employment Retention Subsidies or Unemployment Benefits will

increase. Also there is a possibility that cash benefit coverage will increase from changes in the existing scheme or programs such as modifying requirements or broadening applicability. Especially, with the adoption of a new program, there is an increased possibility of expanding recipients of cash benefits (Ministry of Finance and Economy, 2020). The recently announced Emergency Employment Security Support program which announced that cash benefits will be provided to 930,000 dependent self-employed workers, freelancers, employees on unpaid leave and the self-employed can be an example of this (Ministry of Finance and Economy, 2020). This will increase demand for employment administration on the ground for cash benefit claims, registration and payment. In other words, while face-to-face services decrease overall, demand for cash benefit administration either through face-to-face or non-face-to-face are expected to increase. It is expected that there will be an increase in inquiries and claims from new potential beneficiaries who are unfamiliar with employment administration.

Considering the possibility of increased unemployment over a short-period of time from the shortage of jobs, and given the path dependency of Korea's employment policies in the past times of crisis (Lee, 2009a), another potential policy change that can be expected is substantial increase in direct job creation programs that can be classified as opportunity benefits. In such situations, it will increase the demand for the selection process of direct job creation program, and administration demand for face-to-face and non-face-to-face services with corresponding increase of inquiries from potential clients. In addition, there will be growing administrative demand for infectious disease monitoring, out of fear in face-to-face contacts in the course of performing direct job creation programs.

Moreover, there will be growing demand for timely employment administration. As mentioned, COVID-19 is expected to have an almost immediate and direct negative

impact on domestic demand. Korea's domestic businesses and workers are set to experience the negative impact from economic downturn, which will increase demand for timely implementation of employment administration. In particular, business owners and workers will have more immediate need for cash benefits or voucher provision services that will directly affect business operations and individual's livelihood security. Also as seen in the case of the Elderly Work Program where the benefits were paid in advance, there will also be a growing demand for advance payout of benefits in direct job creation programs (Ministry of Employment and Labor, 2020).

Finally, there will also be increasing demand for better accessibility to employment administration. Since most of the employment administration services today are provided through a street-level delivery system that is much less accessible than the citizen's center, it requires most users to travel a distance either by driving or taking public transportation. For example, the Employment Center which is at the core of street-level public employment administration, only have 100 locations nationwide (www.workplus.go.kr). Therefore, more than 30% of all cities/counties/districts are over 1 hour away from the Employment Center via public transportation (71 cities/counties/districts, Joint Ministerial Issue, 2019a). This situation inevitably increases the demand for better accessibility to employment administration during this pandemic.

III. The Directions and Principles of Change in the Employment Administration System : What Kind of Reforms Should be Made?

If these changes do occur, the following principles or direction of reforms should be considered in improving employment administration and its delivery system. First, a strong quarantine system must be established and com-

plied with in the process of employment administration delivery. The central government should create a guideline on infectious disease prevention for both providers and users of employment administration and provide necessary resources such as hand sanitizers, facial masks and disinfectants in response to the demand of the region. Leaders and mid-level managers at Employment and Welfare + Centers must ensure that these guidelines are adhered to while adding agency-specific guidelines based on the patterns of contact tracing or face-to-face contacts that are unique to the agency so as to minimize the risk of infection. In addition a feedback system should be in place to identify innovative epidemic control ideas and provide them timely nationwide. Naturally, such principles should apply equally to establishing a safe working environment for direct job creation programs.

In addition, there should be efforts to transform from face-to-face services to non-face-to-face services. Programs such as the Employment Success Package, employment service for the unemployed (i.e., unemployment benefit recipients) or vocation training that were delivered as face-to-face services should turn to alternative methods. Active use of phone or video counseling can be one alternative. In addition, administration for cash benefit claims and direct job creation program selection process, where demand is expected to increase, non-face-to-face registration systems need to be established. Active use of existing non-contact mechanisms like online, post and fax, encouraging applicants to use computer registration even when they are visiting on site, or using non-face-to-face services for filing could be an alternative. Some of these approaches will require the establishment of additional infrastructure. These changes will have a positive impact on accessibility to employment administration. The central government should actively encourage discovery of innovative non-face-to-face administration, or provide institutional support for active administration execution.

In addition, human resource allocation within an em-

ployment administration agency should be immediate in order to respond to increased demand of cash benefits and direct job creation programs. The central government should analyze the overall administrative delivery system for employment programs and devise standards on human resource management on reallocation of human resources depending on the shifting demand in today's crisis situation. In the current situation, there is a possibility of falling demand for face-to-face employment services, therefore a reallocation of the human resources in employment services through benefit claim filing, registration or phone inquiries could be an example. Such adjustments would to a certain extent improve timeliness of employment administration at the same time.

Although there are several limitations, another alternative that can be considered would be reallocation of street-level organizations that carry out employment administration. Nationwide today, there are organizations that are directly managed by the public sector such as the Employment Welfare + Center and the Korea Workers' Compensation and Welfare, and organizations that are contracted-out such as the Employment Center for Women and Employment Center for the Elderly. Not only are contracts based on rules of organizational role, but labor-management consultation may be necessary depending on the organization. Thus, although it may not be feasible in everyday situations. However in times of crisis, for the purpose of community building or social cooperation, an alternative that could be considered is to temporarily allocate surplus infrastructure to one employment administration to perform duties of another which has increased demand in order to achieve administrative efficiency. The government should make the proposal to relevant organizations about utilizing the administrative system related to inter-agency reallocation of responsibilities and review the feasibility. If such reallocation of duties can be done, it would be helpful in improving accessibility to employment administration in general, depending on

the situation of the participating organizations.

And if such approach can become a realistic option, it would also be worthwhile in the longer term to consider building up a broader system that allows realignment or reallocation of public administration infrastructure at times of national emergencies so that the nation can be better ready for other potential crises after COVID-19. For example, depending on the nature of the crisis, demand for certain public social services could plummet, in which case its infrastructure can be reallocated to other administrative services that require urgent reinforcement. It would improve the efficiency of the public administration delivery system.

Along with the reallocation of infrastructure, work to simplify the administrative procedure for cash/voucher benefits or direct job creation programs should be carried out at the same time. Everyone involved, from the central government to on-site mid-level managers and street-level employees must all try to reduce the unnecessary steps in the filing/registration process, document requirements and the review process. This would necessitate multi-dimensional use of the active feedback loop between the on-site administration and the central government, as well as active administration and the associated immunity. Such attempts would also directly help speed up the execution of employment administration.

But if, even after the aforementioned reallocation and administrative simplification are undertaken, there is still not enough infrastructure in some areas of employment administration, the last resort can be additional staffing. If the assumption is that employment administration will go back to pre-COVID level, the immediate spike in demand could be met with temporary staff by utilizing public sector internship or fixed-term contracts. Youth internship can be an alternative at times of economic crisis, and it would also help young people interested in the public sector jobs gain administrative experience (Lee, 2009b).

If the delivery system is run by private contractors,

for the purpose of budgetary allocation, expanding the administrative infrastructure in response to growing demand should also be considered. Also, if additional staffing is planned after this crisis, it would be possible to implement the plan earlier so that the new resources can be allocated for emergency administrative work now. For example, the current President Moon's government has been consistently pushing for a Korea-type unemployment assistance, and if it is finally approved (Joint Ministerial issue, 2019b), the human resources necessary for its administration can be hired earlier to help out with more urgent tasks today, then allocated back to their original duties afterwards. In such a case, the staffing should be carried out based on the HR planning for the original program, not on the current need.

In relation to staffing, any change that is so drastic as to shake the existing principles of human resource operation should be avoided. Unlike other administrative areas where bolder changes are feasible, human resource is directly related to people who would continue to provide administrative service even after the crisis is over and thus would determine the success or failure of administrative service itself. For example, currently at the Employment and Welfare + Center, both civil servants and civilians serve together, with different sets of human resource principles being applied to the two groups in terms of status, promotion, compensation and assignments (Kil et al., 2018). Radically changing existing principles, either explicit or tacit, for reasons of emergency could lead to confusion or conflict on the field after the crisis recedes, which in the long run will negatively affect the performance of employment administration.

Assuming that the current crisis is not conducive to deliberating on how to change these fundamental principles, it is necessary for the central government to select the existing HR principles that must be fulfilled in the course of resource reallocation and make sure that the resources are managed under those principles. One way of ensuring this

is to assign responsibilities by the criticality of the task. In the process of applying for cash allowances there would be administrative tasks that involve viewing personal details or making decisions as well as supporting tasks such as paperwork. Resources can be allocated depending such type of task.

In regard to new programs that have been introduced as a response to the COVID-related economic crisis, it is also necessary to determine the type of delivery system to be used. If there are several options (for example, utilizing one or more out of the Employment and Welfare + Center, local authorities or private organizations), the most important decision-making criteria should be the know-how or experience. As the current crisis requires speedy policy execution above all else, it would be most appropriate for organizations with similar experience in either the program or target clients to be put in charge of the delivery.

Furthermore, building a prompt information check system should be considered, in active and broad data network among public administration information systems. The situation now will drive up business or individual filings to employment administration, which will increase the need to check information to confirm eligibility. Maintaining the existing process will require considerable time simply to check information for some programs, which will hinder the timeliness of administrative work. The government should provide the support needed to enable prompt policy execution by building an expansive online-offline system that allows view of not only internal data at employment organizations (such as Korea Workers' Compensation and Welfare Corporation data) but also data from other related agencies like the Ministry Health and Welfare and the National Tax Service. It may also be necessary to build an information system to provide a quick, one-look view on the COVID-19 benefits status by business, household and individual, although this could be beyond the scope of this paper as it is not limited to employment administration. But given the

likelihood that the crisis is prolonged, it could also merit further administrative efficiency.

Finally, it is also necessary to consider operation of additional employment administration agencies as one way of enhancing accessibility. However expanding permanent administrative organizations will consume too much time, and without the assurance of continued need after the crisis passes in the status quo it cannot be said that this is a feasible option. In times of crisis, it might be more realistic to install more temporary agencies in the forms of branch offices by utilizing the idle space in existing public institutions to handle to the temporary spike in demand. If there is a plan to expand employment administration agencies after the crisis, as is the case for human resources, it would be worth considering early execution of the plan to improve accessibility of administrative services. For example, if the so-called Korea-type unemployment assistance is to be introduced and the Employment Welfare + Center, as part of the plan, is to be expanded accordingly (joint Ministerial issue, 2019a), the timeline of this plan could be pulled up. In such a case, the locations should be determined based on the existing expansion guideline, and the administrative procedure for opening up new locations must be streamlined to speed up the process, so that they can be put to use during the time of crisis.

IV. Summary

This paper examines the changes that occurred in employment administration delivery systems and suggest directions and principles for improvement in the system. First, considering the nature of the COVID crisis, some changes in employment administration are likely to occur. Changes such as increased demand of reforms from face-to-face services to non-face-to-face services, increase in claimants of cash benefits by those unfamiliar with employment administration, expansion of the selection pro-

cess for direct job creation programs and growing need to control infection in the process of work performance, rising calls for speedy processing in employment administration and better accessibility to employment administration are most likely to take place. Considering these changes, implementing and following strict infection control guidelines on work sites, transforms from face-to-face employment services to non-face-to-face, human resource reallocation at on-site employment agencies and adjustment of duties between relevant agencies, simplifying the employment administration process from filing to decision making and execution, expanding administrative infrastructure by additional staffing as last resort and utilizing temporary branch offices to improve accessibility should be further considered. Furthermore, this paper emphasizes human resource management to be implemented to an extent that it does not undermine the existing fundamental principles even in the current crisis, the organization's experience in similar programs or clients should be considered as an important requirement when building the delivery system for new employment policies; and that from a longer term perspective, it is necessary to establish a plan for administrative delivery system in times of emergency that allows realignment or reallocation of public administrative duties.

Suggestions for improvement of the employment administration presented in this paper are based on the inherent value that administrative operations should be tolerated to the extent that it does not undermine the fundamental principles and that active administration should be adopted. Therefore, apart from domains like human resource management principles where the impact of what should be done persists after the crisis, active administration such as transition of face-to-face services to non-face-to-face services, simplification of the administration process, expansion of information network and processing should be encouraged and exempt of responsibility. Such values are in line with President Moon's im-

[Figure 1] Characteristics of the COVID-19 Crisis, Changes in Employment Administration and Improvement of Employment Administration

Characteristics of the COVID-19 Crisis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty/fear of face-to-face contact • Possibility of rapid and direct recession
Changes in Employment Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reform from face-to-face to non-face-to-face services • Rapid expansion in cash (voucher) benefit administration • Expansion of direct job creation program • Growing demand for timeliness of and accessibility to employment administration
Improvement of Employment Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strict implementation of infection control guidelines in workplaces • Transition from face-to-face service/ administration to non-face-to-face • Human resource reallocation within or between organizations • Simplification of employment administration procedures • Building up administrative infrastructure by more hiring more people • Extending data network of information among employment-related agencies • Active use of temporary on-site offices

plied directive for public administration, which he stated at the Extraordinary Economic Meeting that civil servants would not be held liable even when mistakes are made in the course of dispensing loans to ensure livelihood security of small merchants and self-employed workers (Gang, 2020). If such values of active administration can be put into practice on the site of employment administration, it would be able to establish a more effective employment administration delivery system in times of crisis.

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