

SECTION 1 MAKING THE MOST OF STAFF

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1.1 Ensuring non-discrimination in employment practices

There is no legislation that deals specifically with non-discrimination in employment practices. However, the current legislation for the public service as embodied in the Public Service Commission's regulations attempts to ensure that appointments to the public service are made in an equitable manner through selection "on the basis of written competitive examinations and interviews".

The Human Resource Philosophy and Policy Framework states unequivocally as follows:

"Given the Government's belief that its human resources are the key elements in the goal achievement process, the Public Service Organisation must at all times seek to attract and retain persons of the highest calibre regardless of class, creed, race, sex, colour, marital status, age or political affiliation. It must therefore establish and maintain recruitment, selection and placement procedures that promote equity, fairplay, justice and consistency."

1.2 Enhancing management training and development

The thrust of Public Service Reform initiatives in respect of training of managers is to develop a cadre of managers in the public service capable of managing in an environment that will demand from them an entrepreneurial spirit and a greater degree of autonomy.

Two levels of training and orientation are undertaken:

- (i) training for new Permanent Secretaries and those about to take up this position was initiated in 1992;
- (ii) training for middle managers in the Civil and Protective Services was re-designed and strengthened at that time.

A separate entry provides details of customer service training (see 3.3).

The context for change

The new vision for the public service sees it as an organisation that among other things:

- demonstrates a sense of caring for its members and its clients;
- is client-driven;
- produces prompt results;
- is results-oriented;
- provides for the growth and development of its members;
- is highly flexible and adaptable to a changing external environment.

This new vision is synonymous with the new thrust of the Government to transform Trinidad and Tobago into a more "efficient, market-oriented and internationally competitive economy".

The public service has been largely perceived by the public as an overweight bureaucracy unresponsive to the needs of its clients, while the internal view was that the public service has been generally uncaring of its staff and their working conditions, growth and development. In this scenario, it was imperative that some

mechanisms be put in place to deal with both internal and external perceptions. Training was seen as one such initiative.

Implementing change

The Public Service Training Committee was established in 1992 to rationalise training efforts being undertaken throughout the public service.

This Committee:

- (i) considers training programmes submitted by ministries/departments/statutory authorities for courses of study of any duration;
- (ii) submits proposals to Cabinet for its approval regarding such courses.

Training for Permanent Secretaries is typically conducted over four weeks, totalling 50 contact hours. The course content covers self-management, including stress management; transition and change management in large complex organisations; financial management; strategic management; and human resource management, balancing people, systems, and technology.

At middle management level, programmes are extended over several weeks and total some 400 contact hours. The content is extended to include a human interaction laboratory, human resource management, and development and implementation of a change management project.

Within the first year of training it is anticipated that this training programme will lead to:

- the implementation of a change management project in the respective ministries and departments; and
- a group of trained middle managers from whom Permanent Secretaries could be chosen.

Within two years this training will produce improvements in the strategic planning process, as indicated by the development of implementable annual plans providing a benchmark for the assessment of the achievements of the ministry/department.

1.3 Achieving a mission orientation

Retreats and *change teams* have been major elements in the process of developing "buy-in" by all the stakeholders in the process of change development and more particularly in respect of developing a mission and vision for the organisation.

The process is intended to solicit the views and ideas of all levels of staff in ministries and departments, with a view to developing a mission and objectives shaped by staff who would therefore be likely to have a vested interest in putting them into operation.

The context for change

In a bureaucracy in which the style of communication is generally top-down, the involvement of junior level staff in shaping the organisation may be frightening to managers. This fear needs to be managed both at the stage of the *retreat* and in the stages that follow since it may be exhibited by non-implementation of the group decisions – behaviour which may sabotage the effectiveness of the process.

Implementing change

In an effort to involve rank and file employees in the strategic planning exercise, *retreats* were held for entire ministries and departments. At these retreats, employees were encouraged to vision for their organisations.

Ministries were introduced to the idea of *retreats* by holding information-sharing sessions. At these sessions, staff were sensitised about the changes that were envisaged for the public service and were provided with the opportunity to ask questions, seek clarification and express fears and concerns about the change process. They were also informed about the approach that was being used to evolve a mission statement for their ministries/departments.

The first retreats were held in February 1992, and by November 1994 some 31,000 public servants had participated. Thereafter, teams were set up to collate the findings/suggestions of each group and to synthesise the various inputs.

The process leads to:

- a statement of vision for the ministry/department;

- a mission statement;
- strategic objectives and strategies for achieving those objectives;
- staff buy-in to the mission/vision of the organisation.

It also contributes to the establishment of *change teams*. A change team is a standing committee in a ministry/department headed by the Permanent Secretary or head of department and comprises elected members of every job family.

The change team is an agent of empowerment of employees in the ministry. Its purpose is to:

- (i) identify items to be placed on the agenda for reform, relative to the ministry/department achieving its mission and objectives; and
- (ii) to facilitate the development and constant review of the ministry's strategic plan.

1.4 Improving recruitment and retention practices

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago intends to create a new organisation structure for the overall direction and control of human resource management (HRM). This structure will include the decentralisation of the HRM function with the aim, inter alia, of improving the recruitment of staff.

The context of change

The recruitment process is centralised in the office of the Director of Public Administration. Recruitment has been generic and thus, has often led to inappropriate personnel being assigned to ministries. Decentralisation of the HRM function will help managers to make more effective human resource decisions, including on the issue of recruitment.

Implementing change

A Task Force was established in 1992 to rationalise the HRM function and the central HRM agencies and to establish HRM Units in ministries. The Task Force made proposals to Cabinet in 1994.

It is anticipated that the new HRM organisation structure will be established by December 1995.

This new HRM organisation structure will lead to:

- (i) more effective recruitment practices;
- (ii) more effective management of human resources; and
- (iii) a more effective match between employee skill, experience, training and jobs.

1.5 Utilising performance appraisal

A new system of performance appraisal was introduced to the public service on a pilot basis in the Ministry of Agriculture. The features of the new system are:

- (i) the establishment of performance standards at the start of the appraisal process;
- (ii) a process of continuous monitoring, appraisal and feedback, designed to guide the employee during the appraisal process; and
- (iii) joint completion of the appraisal form by supervisor and employee.

A series of training sessions is under way to facilitate the understanding of the new system, the performance management concepts which guide it, the relevant procedures, and to help departments in developing departmental objectives and standards as a precursor to identifying individual objectives and standards of performance. It should be noted that the system was demonstrated and discussed at the level of the Cabinet.

The context for change

The existing system of performance appraisal does not by and large take cognisance of the development of employees. Successive reports over the last 30 years have pointed to the need to review the system in order to bring it more in line with current HRM principles. The new system responds to this need.

Implementing change

A pilot programme has been tested in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. The results are being evaluated for implementation across the wider public service.

Training programmes to orient managers and their staff to the new system and the procedures are being undertaken.

It is estimated that the system will be in operation in all ministries and departments by 1995. It will lead to:

- established standards of performance for jobs throughout the public service;
- greater efficiency as indicated by higher processing capacity;
- more effective systems through which to reward efficient performance.

The system will be monitored and evaluated.

Supporting material

Performance Appraisal Manual

1.6 Utilising performance incentives

In keeping with the new performance management thrust, annual merit increases will be tied to performance standards as described in 1.5. These will commence once the new system of appraisal is introduced.

The context for change

Prior to 1987, there was an almost automatic annual increase in salary on the anniversary of the employee's appointment to the public service called an increment. Persons who attained standard performance and above were eligible for increments. There was, and continues to be, a predisposition by supervisors to mark everyone in the middle of the grading scale. In consequence, by and large, there has been no recognition or reward for excellence in performance and, at the level of the Service Commissions where the final decision is made regarding promotion, the only distinguishing criteria is seniority. It is not surprising therefore that there has not always been a match between person and job, particularly at management level.

The Medium-Term Policy Framework (MTPF) 1994-1996 makes explicit the policy direction of the Government in respect of public service reform viz:

"Improvement in the administrative capacity of the public service is an important element in the country's process of transformation to a more efficient, market-oriented and internationally competitive economy."

This policy is further expanded in respect of human resources thus:

"Human resource development is a critical element in the effective and efficient operations of the public service. In this regard Government will continue to take the necessary steps to maximise this inherent human resource potential through motivation, training and incentive-based remuneration."

Implementing change

The implementation of a new system of performance appraisal will provide a framework for the identification of outstanding performance. Negotiations with the unions regarding the reinstatement of the performance merit increase are under way

and a system is being developed with an anticipated commencement date of March 1995.

1.7 Improving human resource information systems

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago is assessing options for a fully integrated Human Resource Management Information System which will underpin the following functional areas:

- payroll;
- personnel administration;
- industrial relations;
- manpower planning and development;
- health and safety.

A pilot project is under way at the Ministry of Finance, and aims to carry out the following:

- determine the basic system design;
- data capture;
- data entry;
- programming and testing;
- system testing;
- system implementation.

The pilot project will be evaluated for wider application by June 1995. Implementation of an HRIS will result in:

- quick access to human resource data;
- more effective human resource management decisions, e.g. manpower planning and development.

1.8 Improving work performance

A particular initiative in improving work performance: upgrading accommodation

The Office of the Prime Minister (Public Administration) has been actively engaged in upgrading accommodation for public servants throughout Trinidad and Tobago. A special budget allocation was made to address the numerous outstanding demands for improvements to the physical spaces in which public servants were forced to operate.

In discussions with the Public Services Association, it was agreed that accommodation would be a priority reform area. The belief was held that the existing working conditions were, in several cases, totally undesirable and in fact acted as demotivators to staff performance. It was thought that this was a means by which the morale of staff could be boosted, and the spin off effect was expected to be an increase in worker performance.

This ongoing process began in 1992 and involves five steps:

- (i) discussions with the Union – agree on areas of priority;
- (ii) prioritise the list of offices to be refurbished;
- (iii) visit offices to get first hand account of the problems;
- (iv) engage a quasi-government organisation with a track record for efficacy to carry out agreed repairs and in some instances relocation of offices; and
- (v) visit offices after repairs or relocation has been completed to check current status and perceptions of staff.

It should be noted that visits were made to the offices not only to establish the existing working conditions and the inadequacies but also to demonstrate to the staff, particularly those in outlying districts, an interest and concern for them.

Major repairs and relocation of all priority projects were completed within a year.

This programme has led to:

- more habitable accommodation for public servants;

- increased work morale; and
- improved work performance.

A particular initiative in improving work performance: Rationalisation of Temporary and Acting Arrangements

A programme has been initiated to reduce the number of persons acting in or holding temporary posts in vacant posts.

Many public officers had been either temporary or acting in vacant posts for many years. This was one of the first complaints addressed to the Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister as one of the factors which heavily influenced people's motivation to work. This status – temporary or acting – had been the lot of individuals for as many as ten years; some individuals were in fact close to retirement. There was consensus that it needed to be addressed as a pressing reform initiative.

This programme has required close liaison with the Service Commissions in and has led to:

- the identification of the number of staff in this position; and
- the identification of a priority list for programme implementation.

A particular initiative in improving work performance: The Employee Assistance Programme

An Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) has been implemented, on a pilot basis at the Ministry of Education. The programme provides professional counselling services to employees and their families.

The establishment of an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) relates to the understanding that employees have personal and work-related problems which may affect their performance on the job which in turn has a cost to the employer. The EAP essentially provides professional services which are geared to treating these problems and which aim to return the employee to full productivity and well being. The Ministry of Education, with some initiation from the Teachers' Union, agreed to test the programme as the need for such a programme seemed most apparent in that Ministry.

The pilot project commenced in October 1993 and full implementation of the programme in the Ministry of Education was achieved by April 1994. An end-of-year evaluation resulted in the decision to introduce the programme to the rest of the public service, beginning with the Ministry of National Security.

It is anticipated that the programme will lead to:

- reduced absenteeism rates, planned and unplanned;
- reduced use of sick leave benefit;
- reduced accidents and/or damage to equipment; and
- reduced diversion of supervisory time in treating the personal problems of employees.