

**SECTION 9: IMPROVING PARTNERSHIPS WITH ORGANISATIONS/AGENCIES OUTSIDE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT**

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## **9.1 Tripartism**

The Tripartite System in Singapore is the way the government, trade unions and employers work together in institutions, committees and other forums for the economic well-being of Singapore.

### **The context for change**

The government has always played an active role in the industrial relations system in Singapore. In the 1960s, it laid the legal foundation which would foster industrial peace and co-operation between management and the unions.

The presence of government representatives in the tripartite National Wages Council (NWC) and other organisations ensures employers and unions that there are ample opportunities for government representatives to explain policies and provide information about the economy, and for all to work together on reaching decisions or solutions.

### **Implementing change**

The Trade Unions Act outlines the main objectives of the unions as:

- to promote good industrial relations between workers and employers;
- to improve the working conditions of workers or enhance their economic and social status;
- to achieve the raising of productivity for the benefit of workers, employers and the economy of Singapore.

In contrast to the narrowly-defined traditional objectives in the 1970s, the role of the trade unions is now broad-based. In addition to their collective bargaining role, unions are involved in social, educational and recreational activities.

In playing their social role, unions now manage child-care centres for working mothers. They also maintain recreational facilities such as clubs and holiday bungalows. In playing its economic role, the NTUC is involved in supermarkets, life insurance and the taxi business. In strengthening their bond with management, unions encourage workers to participate in productivity programmes for their own benefit and that of the company.

Employers in Singapore are represented by the Singapore National Employers' Federation (SNEF), chambers of commerce and trade associations. Their main concern is to ensure that the cost of doing business in Singapore remains affordable in order to remain competitive in the world market. They appreciate the importance of supporting the productivity movement in order to maintain international competitiveness. With encouragement from the Skills Development Fund, many employers are actively training their workers.

For the past two decades, the National Wages Council has played an important role in the tripartite industrial relations system. In the 1970s, the success of industrial development had created many jobs. Unemployment became a historical feature. In a tight labour market, wages began to rise. This became a major concern for employers and the government.

In 1972, a tripartite body was formed with representatives from the unions, employers and the government. The role of this National Wages Council was:

- to monitor wage trends;
- to advise the government on wage adjustments;
- to develop a wage system consistent with long-term economic and social development.

The main objective of the NWC was to bring about orderly wage increases without undermining Singapore's competitiveness, and without taking away the fundamental right of unions and employers to decide individually on wage changes as they deem fit. Since 1972, the NWC has made annual wage increase recommendations. The government's endorsement has given the NWC such credibility and moral authority that its recommendations are widely implemented. The most important feature is that the NWC has proven to be an elective forum for the tripartite representatives to work together and to understand one another's views. The NWC's recommendations, which have been thoroughly discussed, are readily accepted by employers and unions alike.

Tripartism will continue to be part of Singapore's economic and social working philosophy and practice.

## **9.2 A specific initiative in deregulation: The Registry of Companies and Businesses**

As an example of an initiative taken by the Registry of Companies and Businesses to improve, through deregulation, its partnership with the companies and businesses which are its clients is the rectification of errors.

### **The context for change**

The Companies Act (Cap 50) provides for any particular recorded in a register which is erroneous or defective to be rectified by an order of court. To make it more convenient for members of the public to correct minor errors in their records, the Registry initiated a practice which allowed such minor clerical or typographical errors to be corrected by the public lodging with the Registry a statutory declaration instead of through their seeking a court order.

### **Implementing change**

A circular was sent to professional firms to inform them of the new practice in 1991 (Annex 1). Companies and businesses which wish to correct errors in their records were instructed to submit their request in writing, together with a draft statutory declaration for the Registrar's approval.

The statutory declaration has to set out:

- the type and date of the document which contained the error;
- the nature of the error and the correct information;
- the cause of the error.

Lodgement of the statutory declaration is only effected after the statutory declaration has been approved by the Registrar. This initiative is appreciated by the department's clients.

**Circular**

**CLARIFICATION OF CLERICAL OR TYPOGRAPHICAL ERRORS  
BY STATUTORY DECLARATION**

Section 12B of the Companies Act, Cap 50, provides that if any particular recorded in a register is erroneous or defective, the court may, by order, direct the Registrar to rectify the register.

In practice, where the error is obviously minor in nature and which resulted from clerical or typographical mistakes, the Registrar may allow for clarification by way of a Statutory Declaration.

Any person who proposes to lodge such a Declaration must submit their request in writing together with a draft declaration for the Registrar's approval. Lodgement can only be effected after approval has been given.

The request should set out the relevant facts and attach documentary proofs, if any. The draft declaration must contain pertinent facts and be clear as it will be on public record. In cases where the errors are of a substantial nature, the Registrar will not allow clarification by way of a Statutory Declaration and a Court Order will be required.

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### **9.3 Developing partnerships with academic institutions: a specific initiative – Ministry of Trade and Industry**

The Ministry of Trade and Industry and its statutory boards have commissioned academics from the National University of Singapore and the Nanyang Technological University to undertake studies on specific issues. In general, these collaborative projects cover micro- and macro-economic issues, the impact of domestic policies, and international issues relevant to the ministry and its statutory boards.

Such collaborative partnerships are also geared towards the private sector. One example is the establishment of the National University of Singapore – National Productivity Board (NUS-NPB) Productivity and Quality Research Centre (PQRC) in NUS' Faculty of Business Administration in November 1993. Previously known as the Productivity Research Centre (PRC), it officially began operations in July 1995.

#### **The context for change**

The PQRC's objective is to provide a focused, multi-disciplinary effort towards research into productivity and quality matters critical to Singapore's competitiveness. The PQRC, in collaboration with the public and private sectors, undertakes research and consultancy projects. In addition, based on the changing needs of employers and society, the PQRC is also involved in educational curriculum development in the Faculty of Business Administration and the School of Postgraduate Management Studies. All these pertain specifically to the areas of productivity and quality improvement.

In general, such collaboration with academic institutions is undertaken:

- to tap the research expertise of academics who have specialised knowledge;
- to supplement the work undertaken by government agencies;
- to provide an external perspective on issues.

The specific objectives of the PQRC are:

- to establish close contacts with government and industry, and network with foreign institutions conducting research in productivity related topics;

- to provide research in collaboration with government institutions and industry;
- to conduct executive development courses and client-centred studies on a wide spectrum of managerial and policy concerns;
- to disseminate information on productivity research through seminars, forums etc.

### **Implementing change**

The PQRC is managed by a Director who is assisted by research and administrative staff members. In addition, an International Advisory Board comprising eminent scholars in productivity and quality research provides counsel and advice on its research agenda and directions.

Existing projects are categorised under the following fields:

- Productivity and Quality in Information Technology
- Human Resource Quality
- Productivity and Quality in Industries and Operations
- Total Quality Management in Education
- Productivity and Quality Measurement in National Economics
- Using Internet for Productivity and Quality.

The Centre is currently expanding the range of project areas to fulfill the needs of the private and public sectors.

There are also plans to expand the composition of the International Advisory Board, and to constitute a sponsoring council called "Partners in Performance and Excellence", or the PIPE Scheme. This body will be a conduit and forum for knowledge-sharing in productivity and quality, and will be open to the private and public sectors.