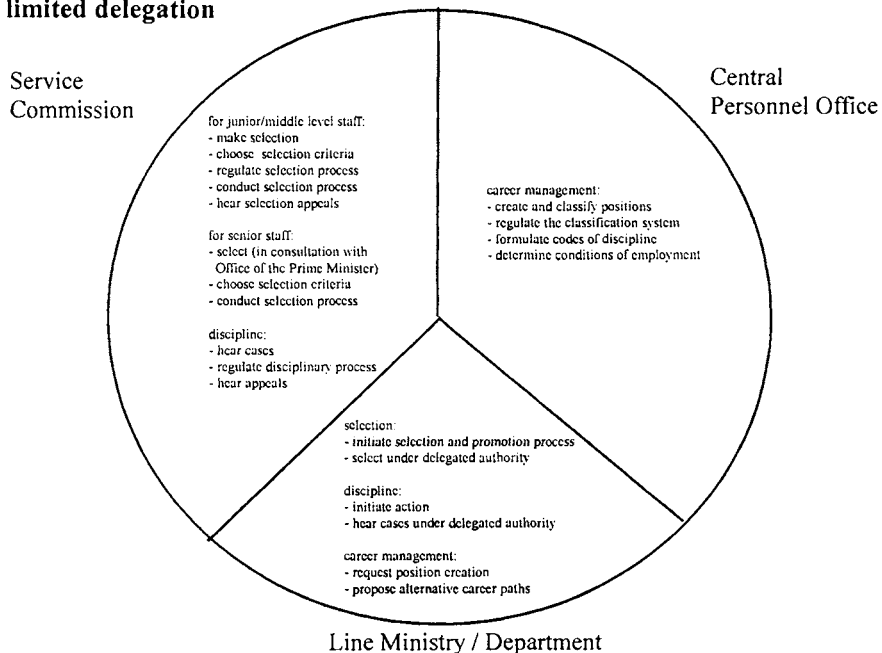


DELEGATION OF PERSONNEL RESPONSIBILITIES

DELEGATION HAPPENS

Delegation refers to the re-allocation of responsibilities within the central agencies, from the Service Commissions to the central personnel office, and from the centre to the line ministries and departments.¹⁴ Despite the difficulties, there is very significant delegation in personnel management responsibilities in many settings in the Commonwealth. The diagrams below reflect the observation that successful arrangements have been made in diverse settings for very significant delegation of key aspects of personnel management.¹⁵

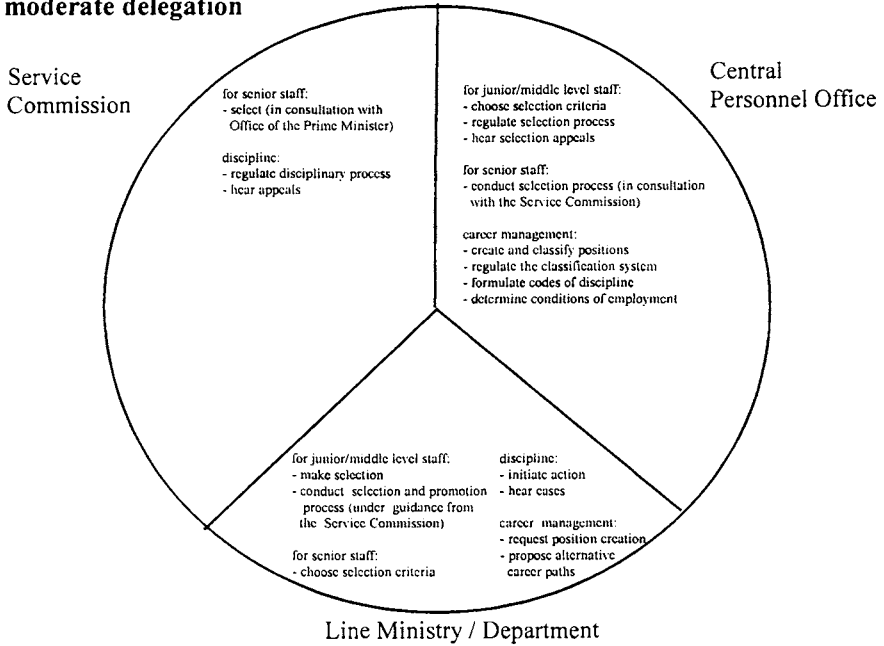
Distribution of Personnel Functions: limited delegation



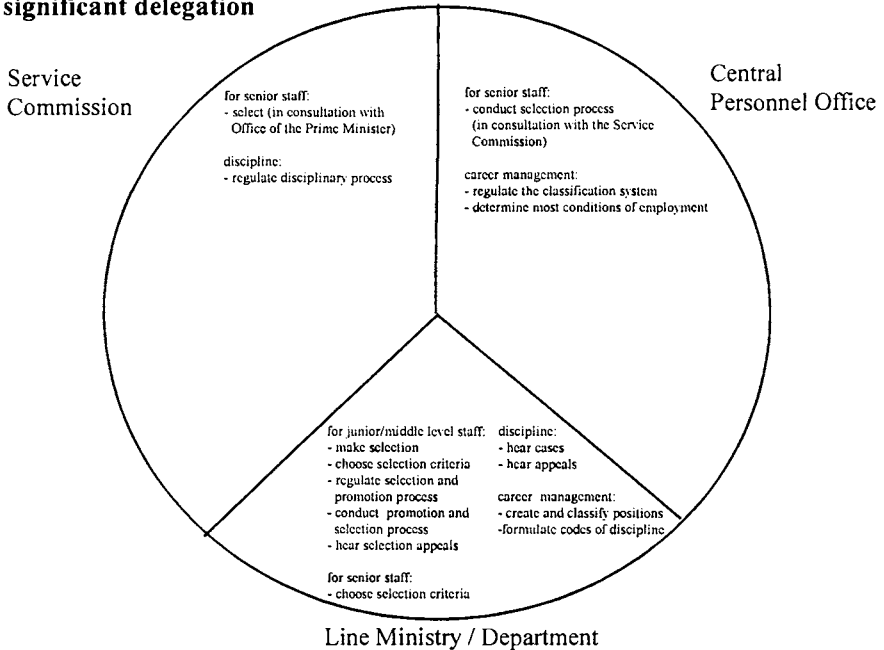
¹⁴ A more limited form of delegation occurs *within* the Service Commissions when they establish sub-committees or delegate authority to the chairperson.

¹⁵ Appendix B provides the data which underpins these diagrams, drawing on the countries described in Appendix A. Note that in the Commonwealth Caribbean, Service Commissions do not hear disciplinary appeals. The Constitutions of all Commonwealth Caribbean countries have established separate appellate tribunals. Accordingly, under the current constitutional framework, the references on the summary charts to the delegation of disciplinary appeals to line ministries and departments do not apply in the Commonwealth Caribbean.

**Distribution of Personnel Functions:
moderate delegation**



**Distribution of Personnel Functions:
significant delegation**



Broadly, there are three sources of pressure for delegation: operational efficiency; transparency; and strategic change. These three areas are considered in more detail below.

DELEGATING FOR OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY

The first operational pressure for delegation stems from the need for a single focus for personnel management responsibilities. *Centralised* personnel management is not synonymous with *co-ordinated* personnel management. Large and growing public services have produced large and growing centres. Central personnel management offices and Service Commissions may have many departments and working units.¹⁶ An enquiry to the centre may require contact with many disparate units. Fragmentation of responsibilities is quite compatible with centralisation.

Delegation can be a short-cut to the unification of responsibilities by bringing them together within the ministry or departmental personnel management office.

Second, against the background of a general re-orientation of the public service – away from an over-riding concern with process and towards a concern for results – there is a growing need to strengthen the accountability of managers. Managers can only reasonably be held accountable for results over which they had control. If control over their staff, estimated frequently to amount to some 80 per cent in cash terms of the total resources of the public service, is held elsewhere it is unreasonable to hold managers fully to account. Perhaps more significantly, it is implausible that managers will themselves feel fully motivated to succeed.

Third, there is the increasing need for local flexibility. The overall pressures for change in the public service were noted above. Within those broad pressures, there are several reasons why local conditions are increasingly significant in staffing decisions:

- many national labour markets are increasingly complex, with significant variations in skill availability and remuneration rates throughout the country;
- the nature of work within the public service is increasingly diverse, with many highly specialist functions being carried out by small units;

¹⁶ For example, Mauritius and Canada both have autonomous bodies other than the Service Commissions with responsibility for some aspects of staffing and of discipline.

- the nature of organisations in the public service is increasingly fragmented, with organisational design tailored to suit local conditions and the needs of the specific task; and
- the workforce is increasingly appraised at local level, providing local managers with a more reliable assessment of the skills and competencies of individual workers.

Locally-specific labour markets, diverse and highly specialist functions, one-off organisational design, and locally-monitored staff competencies all point towards the need for managers at local level to be able to make key appointment, promotion and reward decisions.

DELEGATING FOR TRANSPARENCY

To some extent, delegation of public service personnel management responsibilities is unavoidable. This can be seen by looking beyond constitutional and legal provisions, and examining selection processes in more detail.

Clearly, a handful of commissioners cannot personally involve themselves in all the selections that take place within a large and diverse public service.¹⁷ A Commission can seek to overcome this constraint in two ways: first, by holding service-wide selections for grades common to several departments; and second, by appointing *ad hoc* selection boards for specialist grades (which far outnumber the common service grades). The key questions become who sits on the *ad hoc* selection boards, by whom they are nominated, and what rules they follow.

It is frequently the case that staff from the relevant line department or ministry dominate the board. They may be nominated by their department or ministry, with the Commission having little realistic opportunity to vet nominations. Because the boards are *ad hoc*, members may have little idea of how to conduct selections professionally. The selection criteria employed may be vague and loosely defined, ensuring that an inexperienced board has maximum opportunity to interpret the criteria idiosyncratically.

Additionally, although the selection board would be formally accountable to the Commission, board members may remain fully open to influence from their

¹⁷ It would be easier for a Teaching or a Police Service Commission to keep up with selections than a Public Service Commission dealing with the bulk of the public service. But cross-membership would limit even the specialised Commission's capacity.

minister. It may be fully within the minister's competence in the first place to give directions about the board membership. Subsequently, the Commission may be required to vet the board's selection decision solely on the basis of a list of candidates with a score next to each name and very little, if anything, by way of written information explaining how the board arrived at that score.

In this way, *de facto* decentralisation can develop within a system that is, at face value, highly centralised. However, the development of a system by default rather than by design establishes an erratic system in which decision-making is devolved with inadequate quality assurance mechanisms – authority over selection boards, the development of selection criteria, reporting requirements and audit mechanisms will not have received adequate attention. Unintentional delegation also fundamentally incorporates duplication of effort within the process as verification of vacancies, approval of recruitment, and preparation of job descriptions will almost inevitably remain subject to central controls.

Above all else, delegation by default is opaque as it obscures responsibility for quality in recruitment and promotion.

DELEGATING TO ASSIST STRATEGIC CHANGE

Driving major change in the public service requires a focal point, an organisational centre with the capacity and determination to undertake several key tasks:

- to co-ordinate related reform initiatives while maintaining a credible pace of change;
- to monitor the sense of ownership of large reforms by those who must implement them;
- to ensure that developments are not seen as an end point, ensuring that they allow for further changes; and
- to respond to, and to encourage, strong political commitment.

The constitutional entrenchment of the Service Commissions makes this a difficult role for them to fill. Their constitutional position, with their emphasis on protecting systems from the unwanted attentions of politicians and others, orientates them towards stability rather than towards change. The inevitable political involvement in major reform programmes sits uneasily with the enshrined constitutional independence of the Commissions.

However, Service Commissions cannot sit back and watch as major reform programmes are developed. Such programmes require them to make some profound changes in order to fulfil their overarching mandate of protecting the principles of merit, probity and integrity in the service. In essence, the Commissions must give up some responsibilities in order to assume others.

The pattern of delegation described above, can be summarised as a movement of operational responsibilities from the Commission to the central personnel office, and to the line ministries. Delegation to the line ministries is the consequence of the operational pressures already examined. Delegation to the central personnel office can be partly an interim step, a stopping point en route to full delegation to the line, and partly a deliberate change to ensure that the focal point for reform has access to some key levers of change.

To create that focal point for public service reform a special agency may be established, generally with the title of Reform Co-ordinating Unit or similar, or it may be created by adding responsibilities to an existing department such as the Ministry for the Public Service or Prime Minister's Office. In either case, the focal point for change is most commonly found in, or adjacent to, the central personnel office as both need close linkages with the political drivers or supporters of reform programmes. Delegating to the central personnel office some selection responsibilities for junior and senior staff and some responsibilities for career management, provides that focal point with some controls during a period when it must assist in driving managerial and structural change.

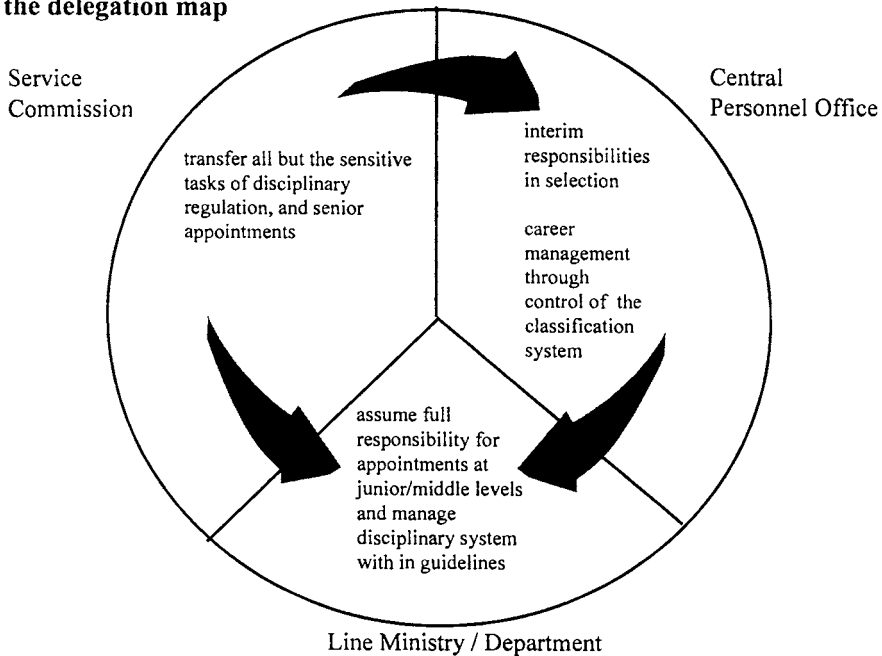
In the longer term, the central personnel office is subject to the same operational pressures to delegate as the Service Commissions. For this reason, delegation to the central personnel office is likely to be an interim position, particularly appropriate during a period of major reform, in the longer term movement towards providing comprehensive delegated authority to line ministries.

The delegation of personnel management responsibilities from the Service Commissions also assists strategic change over the longer term. Sustained performance improvements in the public service rest on two foundations:

- a strategic professional lead to which public servants can look for guidance at a time of continuing open-ended change.
- modernised regulatory frameworks for personnel management which are kept under constant review.

The Service Commissions are ideally placed to provide the professional lead, issuing guidance, hosting seminars and leading discussions on new developments,

**Distribution of Personnel Functions:
the delegation map**



and to keep the regulations under constant review. This will, however, only be possible if they have delegated many of their operational tasks.

THE LONG VIEW

Delegation from the centre to the line is about empowering managers, enabling them to achieve results within a framework of public service values. In this sense, delegation is about the line taking on more responsibility. Delegation is, however, more about the centre doing something *different* than it is about it doing *less*.

Underneath the practical discussions about the location of particular responsibilities and the constitutional possibilities, the outlines of a new policy theme for the public service can be seen emerging across the Commonwealth. That policy theme is the development of *trust*. The public service of the 21st century must:

- inspire trust in the public that it will always deliver quality services – rising consumer expectations will allow no less;
- ensure that its managers can trust their staff – organisational efficiency is limited by the need to police staff; and

- trust its suppliers as it moves from a producer of services to a co-ordinator and purchaser – tight contract management can only go so far in ensuring compliance.

Managerial delegation is part of that process of developing trust. Behind the technical debate, there is a need to clear a strategic space at the centre of the public service to develop the excellence of the future, by looking for emerging trends, by correcting identified professional weaknesses, and by constantly nurturing public service values. These tasks will not be achieved by a centre which is preoccupied with detailed management.

Delegation in personnel management is a particularly important strand within this policy theme. Delegation to line ministries and departments is the organisational expression of a more profound delegation which is beginning – the delegation of responsibility to the individual. Public servants of the future will:

- want to work to the best of their abilities;
- take pride in their achievements;
- identify personally with organisational goals;
- be strongly self-disciplined;
- respond to opportunities to develop an understanding of the part which they play in the organisation;
- take responsibility for improving organisational performance; and
- be willing to be held accountable for their actions.¹⁸

Organisational delegation is a precursor of the larger movements to come.

THE LOGIC OF DELEGATION

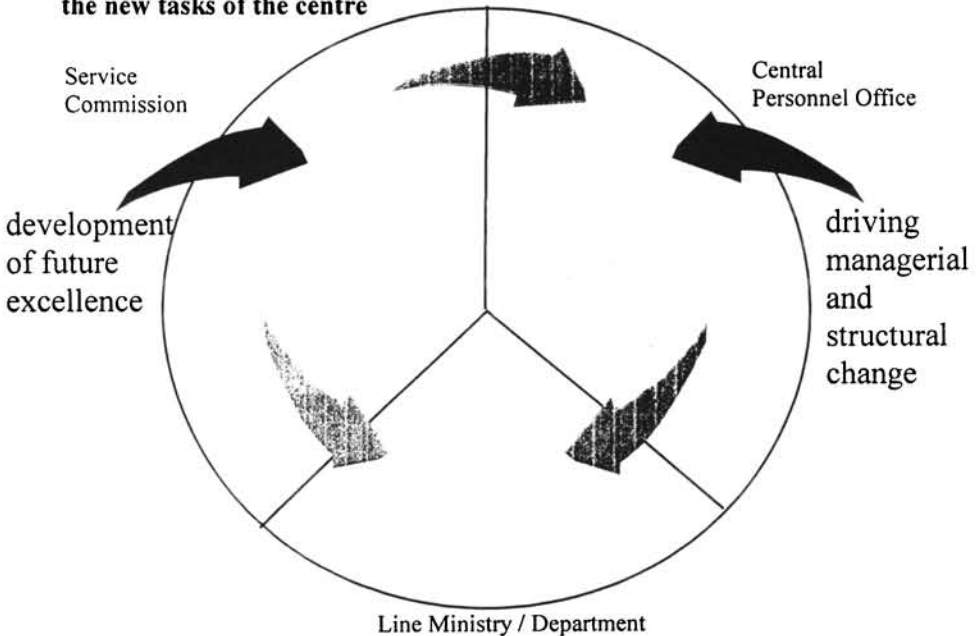
In summary, the delegation of personnel management responsibilities from the Service Commissions to the central personnel office in some specific areas, and to the line ministries and departments more generally, serves several purposes:

¹⁸ This characterisation owes considerably to material prepared by the Public Service Commission of Australia.

- it relieves operational pressures in the line ministries;
- it provides line managers with more control over their human resources, providing the basis for holding them more accountable for results;
- it renders a *de facto* delegation more transparent;
- it provides the focal point for public service reform with access to key levers of change during a period of major development; and
- it allows the Service Commissions themselves to assume the more strategic responsibilities which must be undertaken if performance improvements in the public service are to be maintained.

Delegation can be seen as the means by which the space is created at the centre for two important new tasks. In moving operational pressures away from the Service Commission, it provides an opportunity for the Commission to adopt a more strategic role concerned with the long-term improvement of professional standards and the development of future excellence. In delegating some powers to the central personnel office, it provides an opportunity for the central focal point for public service reform to operate the levers which drive managerial and structural change.

**Distribution of Personnel Functions:
the new tasks of the centre**



There is, however, an important caveat. The overall logic pointing towards delegation does not remove the constitutional duty of the Service Commissions to maintain the principles of merit, probity and integrity in the service. Delegation requires the creation of secure systems outside the Service Commissions prior to the transfer of personnel management responsibilities. Delegation does not, of itself, create such systems. The challenge for all three key players, the Service Commissions, the central personnel office, and the line ministries and departments, is to ensure the development of systems which are sufficiently robust before, rather than after, the pressures for delegation have become overwhelming.