

AN OVERVIEW

This publication has examined the new pressures facing the public service, and suggested that the logic of the changes is to encourage a movement of responsibilities between the key actors in personnel management.

There is no iron law at work, and there will always be reasons why specific situations require distinctive approaches, but the overall movement can be summarised for each of those actors.

- **Line ministries and departments** will increasingly take responsibility for selection, appointment and discipline within a framework set by the central personnel office and the Service Commission.
- **The central personnel office**, where this is separate from the Service Commission, will increasingly set that framework, translating broad directions from the Service Commission into detailed guidelines, and will take a lead role in driving managerial and structural change.
- **The Service Commission** will use a lighter touch in setting the overall regulatory framework, but will increasingly focus its attention on the longer term issues of professional standards and commitment.

This movement of responsibilities is, at the very least, challenging for all involved and will inevitably bring with it the full diversity of organisational reactions to change ranging from enthusiasm to determined resistance. However, the changing climate created by rising public expectations and labour mobility is forcing a new look at traditional personnel management practices throughout the public sector and some change is all but inevitable in all settings.

There can be no better conclusion than to recap the lessons learnt from the experiences of the seven countries whose contributions to a unique meeting hosted by the Government of Malta have underpinned this publication. As explored in the previous chapter, there are ten lessons:

1. The only hope of minimising sterile win/lose debates is to ensure that **the big picture is clear** – there must be a sense of direction and some strategic targets which all can recognise.
2. Incremental change is more probable than revolution, and even if the revolution happens that will not be the end of the story – **dialogue must be established between the three key players.**

3. **Start sooner rather than later** – some movement can be achieved despite the complexity of constitutional entrenchment.
4. Change will be extremely difficult and support will be hard to find – **build a constituency for change** from the public, from politicians, and from within the public service.
5. No one wants to build in failure, but it is against all experience to assume inevitable and continuous success; given the significance of the public service to national development, some attention must be focused on refining the changes and even on the **possibility of retreat** where major problems are emerging.
6. Create some sense of safety for all involved by **introducing a positive framework** in advance of the changes, guaranteeing that safeguards are in place.
7. **Build the line management capacities** – new tasks require new skills and new outlooks.
8. The changes imply new tasks requiring a new balance between powers and accountabilities – **develop the avenues of accountability** in step with the reforms.
9. Training is no panacea, but all must understand the new arrangements and the outlook it implies – **train the users of the system**.
10. Delegation does not leave a vacuum at the centre, there is a strategic gap and the Service Commissions are in the best position to fill it – **encourage the development of a new role for the Service Commissions** in which they are looking beyond the immediate horizon.

The Management and Training Services Division of the Commonwealth Secretariat is able to link senior public service managers who are focusing on similar issues within comparable settings, to share experiences and refine strategies. The Division welcomes comments on this publication and on the issues which it raises. Contact details are provided inside the back cover.