

A FRAMEWORK FOR CHANGE

A checklist for sustainable public service reform programmes emerges from Commonwealth experience:

1. *Does the programme have strong political commitment?*
2. *Does the programme set a credible pace?*
3. *Is there a focal point for change?*
4. *Is there adequate ownership across the public service?*
5. *Does the reform balance increased consumer expectations with managerial performance?*
6. *Will it result in the public service feeling the consequences of good, or poor, services?*
7. *Is there sufficient institutional support outside the public service?*
8. *Does the programme balance immediate goals with open-ended continuous change?*
9. *Does the programme embody practical strategies for action?*

POLITICAL COMMITMENT

The importance of securing the highest level of political authority to an administrative reform programme, the commitment of ministers and senior officials, is identified consistently as a major influence on implementing successful public service reform.

As well as high-level political support, encompassing the Prime Minister, President and Cabinet, reforms also require the support of the chief executives at the organisation level. Examples of such reforms that were politically driven at the highest level include the U.K., Malaysia, Singapore and New Zealand.

- Such support was evident when the Hon. P.J. Patterson, Prime Minister of Jamaica stated that "...I do not envisage that the new role of government is minimalist or will result in its eventual disappearance. Rather, it suggests government of a somewhat different nature and better kind. It certainly implies movement towards catalytic government: One that concentrates on facilitation, regulating, and monitoring; one that focuses more on 'steering than rowing'."
- The Canadian Government initiated in the late 1980s a programme of public service reforms and restructuring called Public Service 2000 (PS 2000). It was announced by the then Prime Minister, Brian Mulroney, in the autumn of 1989. A co-ordinating secretariat was set up in the office of

the Privy Council, the equivalent of the Cabinet Office in other countries. Ten task forces composed of very senior government officials (deputy ministries, and equivalent) were established to look at aspects of reform programme. An overall policy document was written on the basis of the reports of the task forces and published as a government white paper.

The challenge of securing commitment is profound, particularly at a time when the rhetoric of public service performance improvement is as prevalent as the reality. Commonwealth experiences suggest sustainable commitment has three elements at both political and managerial levels. First, commitment to change involves a willingness to indicate a clear preference for the future; to say what an improved public service would look like and what it is in the past that must be left behind. Second, it also entails a willingness to take responsibility for, to own and to accept praise and blame, for the process that will lead to that future. Finally, commitment requires a preparedness to describe and repeat, as often as possible, both that preference for the future and the process for getting there.

In Trinidad and Tobago, the change in public service was envisaged as a set of processes. Three important roles were identified in the management of this process. The first was a **change sponsor** where the individual or group uses organisational power and influence to legitimate the change. Given the nature of the government transactions, the Cabinet or key minister played the role of the change sponsor. In Trinidad & Tobago, a Cabinet Minister was appointed in 1991 for the first time and given a mandate to implement public service reform.

The second role was that of **change agent**. This individual is responsible for implementing or helping to implement the change. Such a person must possess a range of skills and competencies and should have the trust of the organisation. A core of change agents therefore needs to be identified, some from within the government circles and some working as consultants from outside.

The process needs to ensure the involvement of the trade union and other associations representing the workers. In Trinidad & Tobago, this has been pursued through involvement of various representatives in planning committees and task forces at every stage of the reform process.

A CREDIBLE PACE FOR REFORM

Successful reform programmes have been incremental as often as they have been dramatic. Broad front, big push reforms are not the only model, selective and opportunistic approaches have led to significant improvements in many settings. It is credibility, to the public, to the political leadership, and above all to the public service itself, which is the determinant of success. The reform programme in New Zealand has been radical and fast-moving. Some aspects of reform in Mauritius have been longer-term. Both have worked within the constraints of the support

available to them, and neither have promised more than they could realistically deliver.

- In 1984, the newly elected Government of New Zealand felt that the state cost too much and contributed too little to wealth-generating activities. By 1989, legislation had been passed which converted trading departments and corporations into businesses along private sector lines, which passed hire and fire responsibilities from the government to the chief executives of ministries, and which comprehensively restructured financial management systems.
- Performance management is being introduced in Mauritius on a cautious timescale, with considerable emphasis placed on piloting all systems in different public service settings, to ensure that all steps towards the delegation of remuneration and recognition carry the support of all involved.

The Government of Malta appointed a Public Service Reform Commission when it initiated a radical reform of its public service in 1987. The role of the Commission was to "examine the organisation of the public service, and recommend means by which the Service can efficiently respond to the changing needs for effective government".

At the same time an Operations Review was undertaken with a view to examining the structures of government in order to determine the extent to which these were conducive to the effective delivery of public services, and to make suitable recommendations for their improvement. The two initiatives, the Reform Commission and Operation Review were closely linked by sharing a common research team and the Secretariat to ensure complementarity of their outcomes.

The changes proposed as a result of this reform exercise included the setting up of a Management and Personnel Office within the Department of the Prime Minister, which also included a Staff Development Organisation for the development and nurturing of the human resources within the civil service. A Management Systems Unit was also set up to facilitate the bulk of changes proposed by the Reform Commission and Operation Review.

A FOCAL POINT FOR CHANGE

Comprehensive reform programmes require a strategically placed central unit, able to monitor progress and where necessary, to drive progress.

- In Uganda, a public service review and re-organisation commission was appointed in 1989 with the major objectives of re-defining the role of government in meeting the development needs of Uganda and raising the efficiency and effectiveness of the public sector.

- In Zimbabwe, public service reforms involved setting up institutional machineries to implement and monitor the reform programme. In this regard, a number of units were created. These included the Monitoring and Implementation Unit in the Office of the President and Cabinet, the Human Resource and Management Services Directorate and Efficiency Unit in the Public Service Commission, and the Training Directorate in the Ministry of the Public Service.

OWNERSHIP ACROSS THE PUBLIC SERVICE

The management of change requires that public servants at all levels feel a sense of involvement in the process, and that they share the vision and want the change. Involving staff in change from the beginning makes it more probable that those who will have to live with the changes feel some commitment to the new order.

- In Trinidad and Tobago, a series of departmental retreats were held to facilitate this process of staff involvement. Over a period of one year approximately, fifty per cent of the public service participated in these retreats. Retreats have also been popular in other Commonwealth countries – recently a retreat was organised in Barbados and attended by the Prime Minister and ministers.
- In New Zealand, during the period of major restructuring of government functions, there was a concerted attempt to input “change managers” into key departments to meet responsibility for restructuring. Some of these were deliberately quite short-term appointments.

BALANCING CONSUMER EXPECTATIONS

At their core, public service performance improvements are pushed by increasing expectations from consumers as much as they are pulled by increased managerial expectations. Successful reform programmes require a balance between these two forces.

- In the Singapore public service, year-on-year efficiency savings are required from departments. At the same time, public expectations of service standards are encouraged to rise, with complaints comprehensively detailed.
- The Prime Minister of Namibia has noted that, at the same time that performance evaluation and accountability mechanisms are to be

strengthened within the service, "we must make sure that everyone is told what kind of service they can expect to receive".

The recent U.K. White Paper, *Continuity and Change*, indicated that the delegation to agencies and to departments will continue, with individual units increasingly responsible for their own management structures. Restructuring and de-layering will reduce the size of the civil service from 533,000 at April 1994 to significantly below 500,000. Control and co-ordination of departments and agencies will be undertaken by strengthened performance contracts and more demanding performance standards.

At the same time, the Citizen's Charter initiative is ensuring that consumers are aware of the standards expected from public services, and have full access to complaints mechanisms and to redress if the standards are not met.

FEELING THE CONSEQUENCES OF GOOD, OR POOR, SERVICES

The traditional model for the public service has been criticised for its remarkable resistance to productive change. In focusing on process rather than product, it remains aloof from the disappointments of both its funders and its consumers. That criticism is double-edged. The public service is also insulated from the rewards of a job well done. Little positive feedback is offered to the public service for areas in which, perhaps despite major resource constraints, it has delivered an effective service.

Reform programmes are finding avenues for feedback to the public service, to ensure that improvements, or deteriorations, are recognised. Performance management systems are providing some approaches for linking assessing achievements against organisational goals. More radically, in some settings, budget allocations are being increased to high-performing organisations at the expense of those which are seen to be under-performing.

- In Zambia, performance targets are being introduced at all levels of the public service.
- In the U.K., funding for schools is increasingly determined by the popularity of the school with parents.

BUILDING INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT OUTSIDE OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE

An effective public service is not an isolated, autonomous body. It relies on an interconnected network of civic society organisations and interest groups, whose specific concerns are harnessed to support public service performance. Many

managerial options proposed for inclusion within public service reform programmes rest on the capacity of external civic, professional and political institutions. Contracting out of services, for example, presupposes that there is a legal profession and a judicial structure capable of policing agreed contracts, and a political structure with the capacity to manage the trade-off between short-term job losses and long-term efficiency gains.

Secure financial management regimes presuppose technical and professional capacity in financial managers, and presuppose the existence of professional groups capable of policing a professional code of conduct. Coherent remuneration negotiations in the public service assume that representative staff bodies are in place which can negotiate on behalf of public servants without undue fragmentation. Sustainable reform programmes themselves, entailing delicate balances between long- and short-term gains, require mature political structures able to focus on a broad manifesto. Without such supporting institutional capacity, such managerial options are more illusory than real.

- The National Institutional Renewal Programme in Ghana is designed to strengthen the capacity of all public sector institutions, locating public service improvement as one stream of a larger programme.
- The development of local government structures in South Africa, particularly in rural areas where previously no formal local structures existed previously, forms part of a strategy to ensure that services can be provided with secure political backing.

OPEN-ENDED CONTINUOUS CHANGE

Public service reform programmes must contain specific targets if they are to have focus. The targets must be specified and achievable. Equally, however, reform programmes must note that reforms will be continuous. There is no final point and the pace of change is likely to increase significantly.

The reforms instituted in Malta clearly noted that there were specific aspects of the service which must be improved urgently. Equally, they recognised that there was a long-term, open-ended process of reform ahead.

In its recommendations for the public service, the Public Service Reform Commission in Malta reported that:

"In essence, the changes being proposed should:

i. restore the institutional fabric of the public service

The public service is part of the institutional framework of government; it has a distinct identity and value system which has been obscured. The Commission wishes to see the distinction made once more, with the public service recognised and respected in its own right.

ii. build its organisational structure

Measures are needed to enable the service to meet the targets that are set for it and to help it adapt to new needs and circumstances.

iii. safeguard employee rights

The exercise is premised on fair treatment of staff, which goes beyond the adoption of fair standards of selection, compensation and reward; it includes staff development, and the establishment of mechanisms to settle matters affecting individual and collective rights of employees,

These over-arching objectives are inseparable and must be recognised as such. Progress towards the attainment of each depends on progress towards the attainment of the others."

PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR ACTION

A series of seven practical strategies can be identified within reform programmes. These practical strategies are set out in the following chapters:

1. *Improving policy development and co-ordination*
2. *Restructuring the organisation*
3. *Re-orienting the organisational culture*
4. *Managing human resources*
5. *Commercialising and developing partnerships*
6. *Improving financial planning and control systems*
7. *Harnessing information technology*