

Chapter 7:

Conclusions: Experiences and Models

This book commenced with the observation that many of the bureaucratic models used in small states were originally designed for much larger states. Although these models have functioned in small states for some time, they have not always operated well. In many situations basic models should be modified to fit the circumstances of small states. The book has also highlighted management procedures which may be particularly useful in small ministries and highly personalised societies.

Of course many organisational and management procedures are common to both small and large ministries. These common features have not been examined in this book. Discussion on these topics is readily available in the standard literature, of which some key works have noted in the Further Reading sections of the relevant chapters.

This final chapter pulls together the threads of preceding discussion. It begins with some comments on diversity and commonality among small states before moving to the need for stronger adaptation of models for public administration. The chapter then summarises discussion on grouping of functions, setting of priorities, and management issues. The concluding section notes some implications for research and training.

1. Diversity and Commonality

Among the first matters addressed during preparation of the Commonwealth project was the definition of 'small'. As noted in the Introduction, the project adopted population as its main criterion, setting an upper limit of 1.5 million. However, it is recognised that this cut-off point is entirely arbitrary, and that it is often more appropriate to think of a continuum of size and its associated implications. It is also recognised that states with small populations display enormous geographic, cultural, political and economic diversity.

Yet small states also have much in common. In the field of public administration this partly results from:

- the spread of Western bureaucratic models during the colonial era, and
- global economic and political linkages, both historical and contemporary.

Although most former colonies have now attained political independence, they retain the basic models which they inherited from the past. Moreover even countries which were not colonies have adopted bureaucratic models based on the Western prototype.

Global models also exist within education systems. School systems throughout the world are divided into separate stages labelled primary, secondary and tertiary. Within each stage, pupils are divided into grades through which pupils pass in sequence one year at a time. Within the schools pupils are grouped into classes and attend lessons taught by one teacher at a time, generally using a combination of textbooks, exercise books and blackboard work. Teachers are also appointed and supervised on comparable patterns. They undergo comparable forms of training, are periodically evaluated by inspectors, and require similar types of bureaucracy for promotion, transfer, payment of salaries, and so on.

One implication concerning ministries of education arises from the linkages between objectives and structures. Chapter 3 did note some variations according to the priorities of individual governments. For example not all governments stress kindergartens or adult education, and some authorities are more anxious than others to have school broadcasts, nutrition programmes and textbook-production units. In general, however, the similarities among ministries of education are much greater than the differences. This is chiefly because they share similar objectives and needs.

Another implication of the commonalities is that although this book has concentrated on Commonwealth countries which share a common British colonial heritage, many points are also relevant to other countries. Differences certainly exist for example between British and French colonial legacies and administrative styles. French administrators placed more emphasis on staff training and qualifications, for instance, and on standardisation between territories. But the similarities between the objectives and methods of administration were much greater than the differences. Many points in this book certainly require modification to fit specific countries, but the book probably has relevance to French-speaking and to other small states as well as to English-speaking ones.

Finally, although this book has focused on Ministries of Education, many of its findings are applicable to other ministries. However, in most countries Education is among the larger ministries. This implies that the impact of smallness may be felt even more strongly in some other ministries.

2. The Need for Stronger Adaptation

The Commonwealth project showed some ways in which the bureaucracies of small states have been adapted to fit the advantages and limitations of small size. However, it also showed that most countries need much clearer thinking about the implications of their bureaucratic structures, and about the alternatives. Although the last decade has brought a general growth of interest in the ways that bureaucratic structures inherited from large states should be modified to fit small states, the case studies showed that many Ministries of Education are restructured in an *ad hoc* way. For example, the Maldives case study indicated that:

Although it might seem obvious, it has sometimes been forgotten that serious consideration has to be given to manpower constraints before any new function is undertaken by the Ministry. Experience shows that when new functions are incorporated hastily, manpower is difficult to obtain and existing human resources have to be spread more thinly.

The Dominica case study made a slightly different, but related point:

Tasks may be allocated simply to people who are capable of undertaking them, with the result that jobs are gradually established that expect the postholders to perform unrelated duties. Likewise, new staff may be appointed to posts that require performance of very eclectic tasks.... The multi-faceted nature of such duties can lead to difficulties. Most serious are the problems of inefficiency and ineffectiveness which arise from overwork.

And the Jersey case study described the Department of Education as resembling:

a hatstand on which various pressure groups and interests have lodged a variety of headgear!

These types of comment could be echoed in many other contexts. They apply both to countries covered by the Commonwealth project and to other countries. Some of the case studies showed clear and imaginative ways in which structures had been adapted or reshaped to meet small-state circumstances; but others showed structures which are unwieldy, inefficient and wasteful of scarce manpower resources.

3. Grouping of Functions

The question is then how *should* small ministries be organised. And, leading on from this, what guidelines can be presented on what functions should be grouped in order to maximise efficiency and effectiveness. It is impossible to lay out firm rules which should be followed all over the world. Decision-makers in individual states must take into account their own specific circumstances, including the macro- and micro- political frameworks, and the availability of individuals with specific combinations of expertise. However, one may at least highlight some models which embody instructive experiences and insights.

(a) Macro-Level Grouping

Chapter 3 noted a strong tendency for small states to group several functions in one ministry. It is not suggested that this does not also happen in larger states; but it does seem more common in small states, and especially among the smallest of the small. Grouping of functions permits ministries to be larger than they would otherwise be, and thereby to gain economies of scale. For example the Ministry of Education in Malta employs a pool of administrative personnel to serve not just the Department of Education but also the Departments of Culture & Environment, Museums and Libraries. The common pool services needs in transport, maintenance and minor staff.

The type of functional grouping in Malta, with education, culture, environment, museums and libraries in a single ministry, is not uncommon. It is a logical grouping, for the functions are all related. Other functions widely grouped with education are sports, youth, and community affairs.

Some ministries also group less closely-related functions. This is particularly the case in the smallest of the small countries. Table 3 showed seven ministries in which education was grouped with health, and one in which it was grouped with postal services. In addition, although it is not apparent in the title, the Ministry of Education &

Culture in Barbados is also responsible for ecclesiastical affairs.

In these instances it might be argued that there remains a strong case for multi-functional grouping, for such ministries can still share personnel at all levels. At the top they can share ministers and permanent secretaries, and at the bottom they can share drivers and handymen. Such arrangements improve utilisation of the scarce human resources of small states.

However, some multi-functional ministries fail to make full use of the potential advantages of this form of organisation. Chapter 2 presented example of Montserrat, in which the component parts of the Ministry of Education, Health & Community Services have largely operated independently of each other. They have not shared resources as effectively as they might, and linkages within the ministry have been little stronger than those between ministries. Similar observations might be made in other countries. They arise in part because traditions have been inherited from larger ministries where closer integration is less easy. A conscious effort is sometimes needed to overcome these traditions.

(b) Micro-Level Grouping

In small states, the specifics of micro-state grouping often depend on who is actually available with particular skills and interests. It is obviously desirable as far as possible to group tasks which are related, but sometimes it is necessary to group unrelated tasks. The quotation above from Dominica stressed that unrelated grouping can lead to problems. However, the difficulties are not always insuperable.

Many examples of multi-functional grouping were given in the case studies, and some have already been cited in previous chapters. Examples include:

- in St. Lucia a single officer has to take charge of both statistics and examinations;
- in Jersey an Assistant Director has to take responsibility for both libraries and sports & recreation;
- in Maldives the Under Secretary in charge of administration of schools also engages in policy research, and interviews candidates for teaching posts;
- in Montserrat head teachers are also responsible for curriculum formulation and in-service training;
- in Malta Education Officers are responsible for curriculum development, teaching methods, selection of textbooks, extra-

- curricular activities, the use of apparatus, and the utilisation of facilities;
- in Solomon Islands the Chief Education Officers in the divisions of both primary and secondary education are required also to be planners, project officers, recruiting officers, and supplies officers; and



In small states, officers often have to be multi-functional, taking on a wide variety of activities.

- in Guyana Education Officers are responsible for the curriculum process, physical facilities and equipment, school welfare, absenteeism, co-curricular activities, and school-community relations.

Senior administrators need to ensure that their multi-functional officers have some sort of training and support. They must also pay attention to supervision, without which there is a danger, in the words of the Solomon Islands case study, that multi-functionalism:

allows a lot to be ignored, especially in areas in which officers lack expertise. The officers tend to perform best in their professional areas and simply try to make do in others.

Moreover, there may be the additional danger that:

Sometimes officers are so preoccupied with meetings relating to their many tasks that in the end they have little time to implement anything.

Finally, it is worth repeating a point from Chapter 3 that although many ministries divide their staffs into professional and administrative wings, in small states this may be less appropriate than in large ones. Such division risks excessive compartmentalisation, which in turn may restrict opportunities for combining jobs to make reasonable workloads, and therefore may obstruct efficient use of talents.

4. Setting Priorities

It is essential for ministries to set priorities. Chapter 3 suggested that the basic questions for senior administrators and policy-makers concern:

- which tasks will be undertaken by the Ministry of Education;
- which tasks will be undertaken by other ministries and government agencies;
- which tasks will be delegated to non-government agencies; and
- which tasks will not be undertaken at all.

Examples from each category have already been presented, and do not need repetition. The main point is that senior administrators should identify what they will not undertake, as well as what they will undertake. The answers will vary from state to state. For instance the

Gambian case study shows that the Ministry undertakes many tasks that are not attempted in the smaller countries; but officials in The Gambia have also recognised the value of contracting curriculum development to teachers and others, rather than trying to do everything in the Ministry itself. The result of such initiatives is often much more efficient operation, and a much better product.

5. Management Issues

Management issues were a particular focus of Chapter 4. Perhaps the most obvious and most important matter is the extent to which management procedures must take account of the highly strongly personalised environments of small states. Although it might be assumed that small states can operate with greater informality, in practice many administrators in small states prefer to stick closely to official rules and regulations. They do this in order to protect themselves and others in an environment which is strongly susceptible to accusations of favouritism.

The chapter also noted the importance of formal channels for dissemination of information. The case studies presented several examples in which senior administrators simply assumed that information had been disseminated when in fact it had not. Small states may not be able to spare manpower for the sorts of sophisticated newsletters or other information channels found in many large states; but administrators can still ensure that circulars are distributed and that meetings are held.

Chapter 4 also discussed ways to manage staff absence. It highlighted the importance of ensuring that:

- even if one individual is primarily responsible for a specific task, at least one other individual is aware of basic procedures, and can take over if necessary;
- officers are required to prepare clear instructions for work which they expect to arise while they are away;
- more than one individual has authority to sign financial and other documents;
- records are orderly, complete and accessible; and
- individuals are discouraged from interpreting their duty statements too narrowly.

A subsequent section of Chapter 4 pointed out that difficulties of staff absence may also be alleviated through development of teams.

Management issues were also discussed in Chapters 5 and 6. Chapter 5 focused on personnel matters, and included discussion of job definition, sources of personnel, career paths, staff appraisal and training. Chapter 6 focused on international linkages, highlighting the need for both structures and management procedures for liaison with external agencies. One specific aspect concerned management of external requests for information; and another concerned management of incoming publications.

6. Implications for Research and Training

Finally, it is clear that more research is needed into the special needs of small states and into ways to meet those needs. Ideally, such research will be linked with training in order to strengthen its impact on actual practice. Small states have many positive features not found in large states; but the full benefit of these advantages is not always realised.

Some points about training for small states were raised in Chapter 5. The chapter noted five main strategies through which small states may acquire training, and highlighted associated management issues. The chapter mentioned universities and other institutions of higher education in small states. Of course, these institutions may also be focal points for research.

At the same time, it must be recognised that in some ways small states are handicapped in research. Very few small states have good research libraries, for even if the governments are rich enough buy the books, they can rarely find the specialised personnel to manage and use such libraries. While material on individual small states is of course best found in those small states, extensive comparative material can only be found in large states.

Two partial exceptions to these points are embodied in the Universities of the West Indies (UWI) and the South Pacific (USP). Yet even in these institutions the amount of research which examines small states as small states (as opposed to states which merely happen to be small) has so far been disappointing. The bulk of the literature on small-state issues has not come from these universities but instead from such organisations as the Commonwealth Secretariat and Unesco, and from universities in such countries as the USA, and the United Kingdom. This observation should not be taken to imply that the staff of UWI and USP have not been doing their jobs, for they have certainly done a great deal of other research and teaching. However, the lack of research on the special features of small states remains disappointing.

The Commonwealth project which led to production of this book might be considered a valuable step forward. The case studies which formed the basis for this book were themselves important research exercises which the authors as well as the readers found very illuminating. Also the project is helping to strengthen training capacity, particularly in UWI and USP but also at the University of Malta and at a number of other institutions. Expertise is also made available through the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation (CFTC).

Nevertheless, there remains a need for much greater sharing of expertise among small states. While individual small states may feel limitations in human resources, as a group their expertise is both deep and wide. As noted in Chapter 6, it would be desirable in many small states for civil service regulations to be relaxed to allow staff to undertake consultancy work in other small (and perhaps also large) states. As well as benefitting the recipient countries, such arrangements would benefit the sending countries because the consultants would broaden their own perspectives and gain professional stimulus. Similar points apply to the staff of universities and colleges in small states.

On a final positive note, there is considerable evidence of openness to ideas and willingness to change. The organisers of the Commonwealth project were considerably encouraged by one case-study author, who wrote that:

Many of the questions asked and issues raised led me to seek out and discover new and interesting information. I also drew heavily on my 15 years' experience continuously in the Ministry. Writing the study has whetted my appetite for further work in this area.

It is hoped that others will also feel inspired to respond to the challenge.

Further Reading

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