PUBLIC SECTOR REFORM PROGRAMMES AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

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1.0 Introduction

Trinidad and Tobago’s public service is made up of a very diverse workforce of approximately sixty thousand (60,000) monthly-paid employees. Additionally, there are approximately 20,000 daily rated employees and a substantial number of contract employees. There are approximately forty-eight (48) agencies to which these employees are attached, each with its own culture and core values. At present, the responsibility for the human resource management (HRM) function is fragmented among four (4) agencies:

- Personnel Department (Central Agency): has responsibility for determining and/or advising on pay and other terms and conditions for a wide spectrum of public sector employees. The Department is also responsible for policy formulation in the sphere of Human Resource Management and is the advisory, consultative and monitoring agency for Human Resource Management Units throughout the Public Service.
- Service Commissions Department (Central Agency): has responsibility for appointment, promotion, confirmation, transfers, discipline and removal from office.
- Public Management Consulting Division (A division under the Ministry of Public Administration and Information): advises on the creation of new positions, organizational design, development of systems and procedures for the efficient utilization of human and other resources.
- Pensions Branch, Treasury Division (A Branch within the Ministry of Finance): responsible for the general administration of pension matters.

Developed country status by the year 2020 is the guiding vision and mandate of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. Therefore, attempts to implement an integrated performance management system across the public service is seen as critical in achieving superior organizational performance towards the enhancement and delivery of quality
public services. This task however poses many challenges. The main challenge is the magnitude of the change management effort that is required. Historically, managing large-scale system change within the public service has proven to be an extremely complex and long-term undertaking. Another challenge lies in the dispersion of responsibility among a variety of agencies, an example being the fragmentation of responsibility for Human Resource Management, mentioned above. As a result of this dispersion, implementing change requires the investment of a great amount of time and effort in achieving ‘buy-in’ and coordinated action. Another challenge is the need to foster a culture that is performance oriented and that rewards excellence in individual, team and organization performance, while dissuading poor performance at all levels.

The Government recognizes that achieving this vision of developed country status demands rapid improvement in key macroeconomic and social development indicators between 2004 and 2020. It is understood that this vision will be largely driven by the public sector, hence the need to have an integrated performance management system that is fully utilized across the entire public service.

2.0 History of Public Sector Reform

Attempts at public sector reform, has been in existence since the early 1960s. The table on the following page outlines the history of public sector reform in Trinidad and Tobago.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>Reform initiatives focused on terms and conditions for public servants and in establishing career paths for employees.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>Reform efforts focused on institutional strengthening and streamlining of public service practices and procedures. Concerns over over-centralization, fear of change and the lack of effective disciplinary systems and performance appraisal systems.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1973 - 1975</td>
<td>Administrative Improvement Programme. This programme highlighted weaknesses in performance appraisals, as well as the need for training.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>Improvement of Efficiency in the Public Service. Reform called for delegation in financial and personnel matters. Primary focus on job evaluation, career development and training.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1984-1986</td>
<td>Reports of the Public Service Review Task Force (The Dumas Report). Research indicated that the appraisal system was inadequate across the public service.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>Administrative Reform Programme. This initiative called for institutional strengthening. Key components: Establishment of mission statements and strategic plans; optimization of organizational structures and processes; integrated financial management system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Transforming the Human Relations Management function in the Public Service. (Draper Report)</td>
</tr>
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</table>
3.0 Current Initiatives in Public Sector Reform

The Public Sector Reform Initiation Programme has been developed by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the Inter-American Development Bank to facilitate the development and implementation of a long-term strategy to reform the Public Sector. Government must improve its effectiveness and efficiency in the provision of goods and services to allow for greater resource allocation for investment on infrastructure and human development to increase productivity and competitiveness. This calls for holistic, focused and comprehensive reform of the public sector, including analysis and improvement of governance systems, institutional frameworks, processes, infrastructure and mindsets. The specific objectives of the Programme are:

- To identify the issues for the transformation of the Public Sector;
- Define a suitable, feasible and politically sensitive strategy for the transformation of the Public Sector;
- Facilitate the widespread agreement and support necessary to implement such a strategy; and
- Develop basic management instruments and capacity to manage the reform.

This attempt is somewhat different from the previous ones in that it represents an investment of resources into intensive planning for reform. “Enhancement of the quality and delivery of Public Services” is the overall strategic objective of the reform effort. Accordingly, to meet this objective the following initiatives have been developed to prepare for reform:

- **Opinion Leaders Panel:** A creative public service is pivotal to the achievement of ‘developed country status’ by 2020, therefore the public service must be equipped with the requisite systems, skills, knowledge and capacity to provide the highest quality services possible to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. It was envisaged that a system for providing consistent feedback from a representative sample of the population on government service delivery (efficiency, effectiveness, equity, relevance), would give
policy makers the necessary information to either modify their current service delivery approach or revise strategic objectives as required. Consequently, the Opinion Leaders Panel Survey was introduced as a feedback mechanism to foster a system of performance based management in the public service.

- **Public Service Employee Survey**: This survey was designed to gather the views and opinions of all persons employed in the public service. It addresses issues such as: employee perception of the public service; job satisfaction; core values of the public service; perceptions of senior management; internal communications systems, human resource management issues.

- **Prime Minister’s Innovating for Service Excellence Award Scheme**: It is understood that a creative and innovative public sector is the key component in achieving Vision 2020. As such, this award scheme encourages public sector agencies to submit their programmes towards the following (2) two categories:
  - **The Breaking New Ground – Award for Innovation.** This award will target any new policy, techniques, use of information and communications technology or delivery method that has generated significant organizational or service improvement or reduction in cost.
  - **Making a Difference to People - The Social Inclusion Award.** This award focuses on an outstanding example of delivering a policy, programme or project that has demonstrably made a difference to the lives and life chances of a group or community of disadvantaged people, either through improved accessibility or through the delivery of services not previously available.

- **Policy Networking Forum**: The Policy Networking Forum (PNF) was first launched between November 30th and the 1st December, 2000. The purpose of this forum was to target senior research, planning, policy and project personnel in the public service and was aimed at:
Providing a learning environment for research, planning, policy and project personnel in the public service to network and share information and experiences.

Improving participant’s capacity to formulate, implement and evaluate public policy and

Establishing a public service research agenda.

- **Monitoring and Evaluation Policy within the Public Service:** A policy on Monitoring and Evaluation in the Public Service is being developed as the first step to fostering a culture of managing for results. This policy is intended to be developed with the participation and collaboration of key stakeholders.

- **Development of a Policy for Change Management:** This is an emerging project which is geared towards developing a framework for continuous learning and management of change for improved organizational performance across the public service. This policy is intended to facilitate successful implementation of new programmes/projects.

- **fastforward (Trinidad & Tobago’s National Information & Communication Technology Strategy):** The Government together with the private sector has produced a roadmap that charts a clear and determined course to an online society and a knowledge-based economy. *fastforward* provides far-reaching strategies for the development of a connected country that will adapt, flourish and prosper in the new global information society.

- **The Public Sector Reform Initiation Programme:**
  1) **Component 1: Governance and Institutional Assessment and Development of a National Dialogue Strategy.** This component will comprise:
     - Study for the identification of issues and policy options;
     - The development and implementation of the first phase of a national dialogue strategy
     - The development and implementation of a communication strategy
     - Training for key decision makers in economic policy and national strategy
     - Establishment of a panel of experts to play a quality control role
2) Component 2: Strengthening the Structural Capacity. This component will comprise

- Information Gathering: Public Employment Data-Survey of Public Employees
- Information Gathering: Public Sector Data-Institutional Performance Data
- Information and Communication Readiness
  - Information Management Readiness Assessment
  - Strategic Vision of the New Information environment
  - Policy Framework for Government Information
  - Legal Framework for Government Information
  - Re-engineering of the Public Service Central Registry System
- Strengthening the HRM Systems at the Service Commissions Department to support the Integration of IHRIS
- Development of a Compensation Policy
- Optimization of the Organization Structure and Change Management Capacity of the Ministry of Public Administration and Information
- Optimization of the Central Statistical Office
- Development of a Policy Position and Implementation Plan for Financial Management Reform
- Optimization of the Organization Structure and Change Management Capacity of the Public Administration Division of the Tobago House of Assembly (THA)
- Improvement of the Cabinet Decision-Making Process
4.0 Performance Management within the Public Service

Traditionally, two activities have formed the hub of organizational performance management within the Public Service of Trinidad and Tobago, namely the process of developing and reviewing annual work programmes within individual Ministries and Departments and reporting on these to the Parliament; and the process whereby Ministries and Departments account to the relevant central agency (currently the Ministry of Planning and Development) for expenditure planned and incurred under the Public Sector Investment (or Development) Programme.

In recent times, there have been initiatives which point the way forward to the development of a unified system for the identification of excellent performance or otherwise on the part of Ministries and Departments. These initiatives include the development of a new system for financial management and the development of a policy for the conduct of HR audits.

The implementation of an overarching monitoring and evaluation policy within the Public Service is therefore critical. Such a system will include the setting of performance objectives and standards for the public service as a whole and will complement the initiative of the Ministry of Finance which requires that each Ministry and Department set objectives and standards for itself.

At present, the monitoring and evaluation process is fragmented since several agencies have specific monitoring functions including: Parliament, Office of the Prime Minister, Ministry of Planning and Development, Ministry of Finance, Auditor General, Office of the Ombudsman). However there is an expectation that Ministries and Departments will monitor their own progress aimed at achieving the objectives agreed to in the Social and Economic Policy Framework.
5.0 Employee Performance Management

The aspect of performance management which has received the most attention within the last decade has been employee performance. In January 1995, the Office of the Prime Minister published, “Shaping Performance: A Manual for Performance Management in the Public Service.” The manual was prepared in order to, “assist Reporting Officers to manage performance in the Public Service.” It heralded the introduction of a “New Performance Management System” which would effectively replace the old system of staff reporting.

An idea of the intent of the document is gleaned from the following excerpt:

The thrust of the system of performance appraisal which it embodies is to focus on the employee’s performance rather than on traits and characteristics. It is also concerned with mechanisms for reinforcing strengths, identifying deficiencies, and feeding such information back to employees in order that they may improve their performance. In essence, it is a tool for more effective management of a Ministry’s/Department’s human resources.

The three major processes comprising the new system were stated as:

1. Performance planning, involving the development or updating of position descriptions and associated standards of performance for each individual employee. The position descriptions are developed or updated in the context of the strategic plan of the Ministry or Department;
2. Performance support, whereby a supervisor ensures that a supervisee has the required tools and materials for successful performance, monitors and facilitates the achievement of standards of performance and provides coaching and feedback as required. In this process, emphasis is placed on the development of the employee; and
3. Performance review, during which the supervisor conducts the Appraisal Interview and supervisor and supervisee collaboratively compare, “results against standards which were originally established…” The supervisor completes the annual performance appraisal report, which includes provision for an employee development plan. Appraisals are reviewed by the supervisor of the officer conducting the appraisal and employees may appeal appraisal results by filing a written notice of appeal to the assessment appeal committee.

The new system required the introduction of new forms to replace the Staff Reporting forms that had been in use.

As a tool for managing performance, the new Employee Performance Management System represents a significant advance over the Staff Reporting System which it succeeded. Some advantages of the new system over the old include:

- A focus on continuous appraisal rather than on summative appraisal. The latter has inherent shortcomings, particularly the tendency of supervisors to rely on memory when appraising employee performance;

- An attempt to link employee performance to the strategic objectives of the organization; and

- A focus on actual job results as a means of appraising employee performance, rather than on presumed capability to perform on the basis of employee traits judged to exist.

There have been numerous challenges to be overcome in implementing the New Employee Performance Management System. However, a major hurdle was crossed when in September, 2001, the Union representing the majority of public officers signaled
its agreement to the introduction of a new Performance Management and Appraisal System throughout the Civil Service and in certain Statutory Authorities.

With the agreement secured, the new system came into effect from January 1, 2002. From that date, performance appraisals were to be conducted in accordance with the new system and appraisals conducted using the previous format of the confidential staff report were no longer accepted and did not confer eligibility for training, promotion or the award of increments.

One major setback was the need for continuous training. The Personnel Department embarked on a comprehensive training programme to ensure that the various agencies could effectively utilize the new system. During the period March 2002 to April 2004, continuous training was conducted, resulting in one thousand and seventy one (1,071) supervisors throughout the public service being trained in the use of the system. The training programme spanned either two or four days, and provided participants with the knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) to allow them to roll out the training to other officers. Currently, the system appears to be fairly well established. Future initiatives being planned include the conduct of visits to Ministries and Departments to monitor first hand the operations of the system and to provide support.

6.0 Current/Emerging Initiatives in Performance Management

‘A Guide to Corporate & Business Planning,’ published by the Ministry of Finance, Treasury Division in February 2003, sets out a comprehensive plan for the establishment of a system for managing organizational performance within the public service. The plan envisages that each Ministry or Department would:

- on the basis of Government policy statements, identify the outcomes which it will seek to achieve;
• develop corporate plans (3 – 5 years) which specify intended outcomes and critical success factors for their achievement; and

• develop annual business plans which specify outputs, resources, time lines, performance measures and targets, and which form the basis for the annual budget negotiations.

The new system contemplates the adoption of an outputs based budgeting and management approach, whereby the budget allocation of each Ministry and Department would be determined by its performance in the previous year.

Further to the above initiative, resources have been allocated to the Public Sector Reform Initiation Programme (PSRIP) for the development of a policy position and implementation plan for Financial Management Reform. Also on the planning board is the development of a performance management system for Permanent Secretaries and Heads of Departments, as well as the implementation of a system for conducting HR audits throughout the Public Service.

7.0 Conclusion

Performance management initiatives within the public service of Trinidad and Tobago have been in existence since the early 1960s. However, the implementation of an integrated performance management system (that is, integrating organization structure, human resources and technology towards superior public sector performance) is now at the forefront of the public service transformation agenda, as developed country status by year 2020 is the guiding vision and mandate of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. Although Trinidad and Tobago’s public sector has not yet established a fully integrated performance management system, the Government recognizes the importance of such a system as a means of achieving the country’s vision and is moving assiduously towards its implementation.