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Public Sector Reform in the Commonwealth Caribbean: A Review of Recent Experiences

PAUL SUTTON



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Abstract

The importance of an efficient and effective public service in the delivery of economic and social development is a long-standing theme of development policy. To this end, comprehensive public sector reform has become a major feature in many developing countries in recent years. This paper examines the recent experience of the Commonwealth Caribbean with a particular focus on the successes and failures of New Public Management (NPM) as a strategy for reform. It begins by briefly examining the institutional environment that has shaped public administration and public management in the Commonwealth Caribbean and then examines some of the principal ideas behind NPM, distinguishing it from the previous dominant paradigm of development administration. The paper then identifies three key issues that have emerged in the reform process: the political-administrative interface; the private sector as a model for the public sector; and the human resource dimension of managing change. In each case the background to reform is given along with the NPM solution to the problem and a case study exemplifying how it has worked out in practice. The paper concludes by discussing two key dimensions of the NPM experience: its internationalization and the importance of politics in promoting and sustaining a successful public sector reform program. The final section examines some of the main lessons of reform and what direction it might take in the future.

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Letter from the Executive Director

It is my pleasure to introduce *The Caribbean Papers*, a product of our major research project on Caribbean Economic Governance. CIGI is an independent, nonpartisan think tank that addresses international governance challenges. Led by a group of experienced practitioners and distinguished academics, CIGI supports research, forms networks, advances policy debates, builds capacity, and generates ideas for multilateral governance improvements.

This project convenes researchers and leaders within the private and public sectors to examine and provide substantive answers and policy prescription to current economic governance challenges facing the Caribbean region. The papers were initially presented at CIGI workshops, where their authors benefited from extensive comments and discussion on their work. Through this series, we hope to present and discuss policy issues pertaining to trade, investment, human capital, the fiscal outlook, and public sector management practices, among other issues relevant to the Caribbean region's economic future.

We encourage your commentary on these papers and welcome your thoughts. Please visit us online at www.cigionline.org to learn more about the Caribbean Economic Governance Project and CIGI's research program.

Thank you,

John English
Executive Director



Introduction

The focus on good governance as an essential element of development began about twenty years ago. Its initial concern was with Sub-Saharan Africa, and its early emphasis was on improving the public administration of developing countries. This had been a long-standing goal of many development programs, leading to various attempts to reclassify and restructure the public service in the 1960s and 1970s, either with or without external development assistance. The end of the Cold War, however, gave greater prominence to these efforts, and a broader, more systematic attempt to improve the capacity of states to manage development was initiated in the 1990s. The World Bank's key text, *The State in a Changing World* (1997), provided a detailed analysis of the state and a series of recommendations to make the state more central to the development process than the previous focus on the market had suggested. The report argued for a more effective state, to be achieved by pursuing a two-part strategy. The first part entailed matching a state's role to its capability, requiring a sharper focus on fundamentals, particularly on core public activities that were crucial to development. The second advocated raising state capability by reinvigorating its public institutions, through various measures, to (i) provide effective rules and restraints to check arbitrary state actions and corruption; (ii) promote greater competition among state institutions to increase their efficiency; (iii) improve performance of state institutions through better pay and incentives; and (iv) make the state more responsive to the needs of the people through broader participation and decentralization (World Bank, 1997: 3).

The second set of recommendations was very much concerned with improving the administration of the state. However, unlike the previous focus on public administration, the new focus sought to redefine the nature of the public sector through comprehensive programs of public sector reform. This included consolidating previous pro-

grams to reduce the size of the public sector in many developing countries, overseen by the IMF and World Bank, as well as new initiatives at public sector reform. At the core of many of these programs was a new approach to reform generally referred to as "new public management" (NPM). NPM sought to redefine the role of government through introducing an "entrepreneurial dynamic" into public administration, adopting management techniques borrowed from the private sector and pioneered in public service reforms in countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, and New Zealand. The result was the initiation of a new wave of public service reforms in many developing and former communist countries, incorporating the principles of NPM and leading to its internationalization (McCourt and Minogue, 2001). This was especially so in Commonwealth countries (Manning, 2001).

The states of the Commonwealth Caribbean were among the prime exemplars of this new movement. In the 1980s several of the major countries in the region underwent structural adjustment programs, which shaped and provided a rationale for subsequent public sector reform programs (Bissessar, 1998). While some of the impetus behind this came from the international development agencies and major bilateral donors, there was also a growing recognition within the region that reform of the public services was essential. This eventually took shape in the proceedings and report of the CARICOM Ministerial Roundtable on Public Management in the Caribbean, which noted that

the conventional processes of public administration have lost their relevance in the context of a dynamic region like the Caribbean. It is no longer possible to fine-tune the existing ministries and other agencies and their practices to superimpose a new management order on existing structures. The prescriptions have become more fundamental and call for a critical review lest the contradictions persist and add to systemic inefficiencies. (CARICAD, 1992)

Author Biography

Dr. Paul Sutton is a Research Professor in the Caribbean Studies Centre at London Metropolitan University, UK. He is the author and editor of many books and articles on the Caribbean, including most recently *Modernizing the State* (2006) and, with Anthony Payne, *Repositioning the Caribbean within Globalisation* (2007). He has acted as a consultant on

the Caribbean and on small states to various international organizations, including the Commonwealth Secretariat and the West Indian Commission. He is a former chair of the Society for Caribbean Studies and a former member of the Caribbean Advisory Group appointed by the UK Government to advise on policy in the Caribbean.

A Working Group on Public Sector Reform and Administrative Restructuring was established by the CARICOM Heads of Government in 1993 and reported to them in 1995. It proposed not only the promotion of public sector reform under the guidance of the principles on NPM but also “the strong commitment by the political directorate and senior public servants to public reform in a clearly articulated public sector reform programme, institutionalised in government and involving as ‘stakeholders’ public employees at all levels and their staff associations and trade unions” (CARICAD, 1995). The report was endorsed by the Heads, and programs of reform were either initiated, reinvigorated, or renewed in the majority of countries in the region.

This paper provides an overview of the main elements and outcomes of these reforms. It begins by briefly setting out the institutional environment that has shaped public administration and public management in the Commonwealth Caribbean. It then examines some of the principal ideas behind NPM as it has been practiced in the region, distinguishing it from the previous dominant paradigm of development administration. The paper then identifies three key issues that have emerged in the reform process: (i) the political-administrative interface; (ii) the private sector as a model for the public sector; and (iii) the human resource dimension of managing change. In each case the background to reform is given along with the NPM solution to the problem and a case study exemplifying how it has worked out in practice. The paper concludes by discussing two key dimensions of NPM. One is its internationalization, which has led to a complex process of policy transfer in many countries including those in the Commonwealth Caribbean. The other is the importance of politics in promoting and sustaining a successful public sector reform program. The final section examines some of the main lessons of reform and what direction it might take in the future.

The Westminster-Whitehall Model

The model of government throughout the Commonwealth Caribbean is an adaptation of the Westminster system now generally referred to throughout the region as the Westminster-Whitehall system. This combines key aspects of the Westminster system with changes inherited from British colonial practice as embedded in the various independence constitutions. The key element in the Westminster system is “the combination of legislative and executive power in the hands of the government party” as expressed

in the principle that the party that commands a majority in the lower House of Parliament “is entitled to form a government” (Wilson, 1994: 193, 191), while the constraining influence of Whitehall is shown in the powers given to the judiciary to safeguard and interpret constitutional practice in the region, diminishing the legislative supremacy of Parliament (Ghany, 1994: 34-49). The Westminster-Whitehall model has remained intact since independence with the exception of Grenada in the revolutionary period (1979-1983/4) and Guyana, which introduced a hybrid presidential/parliamentary system in 1980. The core elements of the Westminster-Whitehall system, as mapped by Tony Payne, are the convention of constitutionalism; the doctrine of civil supremacy; the presumption of bureaucratic and police neutrality; the habit of competitive elections; and the practice of pluralist representation (Payne, 1993: 57-73). The practice of politics in these various areas has led to innovations, adaptations, and departures from the original Westminster-Whitehall model, but (with the exceptions cited above) without seriously compromising the system in its day-to-day operations or calling into question its more general pattern of governance.

Within this system the public service occupies a central position. In very general terms, public administration has followed the traditional “Weberian” pattern as modified by British colonial practice. The characteristics of this system were (i) a permanent bureaucracy staffed by neutral and anonymous officials; (ii) centralized control exercised through hierarchical structures; (iii) the formal separation of policy making from policy implementation; (iv) the dominance of general administrators at the apex of the system; (v) an emphasis on following rules and procedures, which involved substantial paperwork; and (vi) recruitment and promotion notionally based on merit, but actually based on considerations of race, class, and connection. These were further compounded by general constraints emanating from the small size of most countries, which, among other things, have exaggerated personalism and provided opportunities for corruption through nepotism and patronage. Although the negative aspects of these characteristics were recognized in various reports on reform of the public service commissioned by governments following independence, they have remained largely in place and continue to shape the context in which any program of reform has to operate.

It is therefore appropriate to speak of a “Commonwealth Caribbean tradition” of public administration that shares much with the British colonial past but has also slowly evolved in accordance with the specific economic, social, and political environment in which it has operated. Two

examples demonstrate this situation. One is the issue of political neutrality. This has been much discussed over the years and is further considered below in the section on politics and administrators. The main argument focuses on the politicization of the public service in the region. G.E. Mills, one of the pioneers of public service studies in the Caribbean, points out that

in small highly personalised societies such as those of the Caribbean, the political sympathies and loyalties of individuals tend to be widely known. Those who hold public office have a 'high visibility quotient' so that anonymity and confidentiality are virtually impossible. Senior civil servants are over-exposed in the political arena. Ministers are virtually continuously breathing down their necks; and tension and conflict between politicians and civil servants are thereby intensified. (Mills, 1997: 13)

This has been further heightened by the deliberate politicization of the public service, as in Jamaica in the period of "democratic socialism" from 1974-1980 and in Guyana since the late 1960s. Various remedies, including the establishment of Public Service Commissions to insulate the public service from undue political interference, have been tried over the years, but the persistence of the problem suggests an altogether deeper "environmental" influence that is not easy to resolve.

The other example is the culture of the public service, which mirrors the class, racial, and ethnic divides of the various countries. In some countries, such as Trinidad and Guyana, the public service has been dominated historically by one ethnic group (in these cases those of African descent), and the delivery of service often reflects the perceived social standing of the individual as measured by class or racial characteristics. The attitude toward work has also been the subject of comment, with many analysts pointing to the reluctance to delegate by senior officials on the one hand and the reluctance to take responsibility by those lower down on the other. A poor work ethic expressed as low achievement and high absenteeism has also been identified as a persistent characteristic. Anne Marie Bissessar has described the combination of these factors as the "forgotten factor" that has held back reform in Trinidad and Tobago (Bissessar, 2001) as well as elsewhere in the Commonwealth Caribbean. As such, sensitivity to the particular "Caribbean context" is required when framing proposals for reform, as is an acknowledgement that reform practice borrowed from elsewhere may not work in the same way or provide the same outcomes.

From Development Administration to New Public Management

The major paradigm informing the theory and practice of development management from the 1950s through to the 1980s was "development administration." In essence, this drew on modernization theory to promote the bureaucracy as a core agent in delivering development through economic and social planning, supported by international donors and development aid. In the Commonwealth Caribbean development administration was favoured by the British in their colonial development programs and was adopted by the newly independent governments in their various development plans. In major countries such as Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago development administration permeated official development thinking, shaping economic and social programs and policies and remaining dominant until well into the 1980s (Walker, 2002).

This did not mean the approach was not contested. Regional academics from first the dependency-oriented left and then the neo-liberal-oriented right mounted critiques of Caribbean economy and the Caribbean state that cast doubt on the ability of development administration to deliver development. They were joined by those who worked for the most part within the paradigm but who were becoming increasingly conscious of its inability to deliver what it promised. Typical among them was Kempe Hope, who argued that the bureaucracy had become over politicized with the result that "administrative structures served as patronage institutions, not agents of change" (Hope, 1983: 50). He echoed others, such as Jones and Mills, who had earlier noted the difficulties of bureaucratically managed change and the inefficiencies that were becoming very evident in the delivery of effective and impartial administration (Jones and Mills, 1976). The stage was therefore being set for a radical rethinking of development administration, bolstered by the impact of structural adjustment programs that had begun to re-orient the leading Commonwealth Caribbean economies from development led by the public sector to development led by the private sector.

New Public Management (NPM) emerged as the new paradigm informing public sector reform programs throughout the region. The defining characteristics of NPM have been summarized as "its entrepreneurial dynamic, its restatement of the market as a potentially more efficient provider of public services than the state, and its proclaimed intention to reform managerial behaviour" (Minogue, 2001a: 6). Its implementation would necessitate

the following: restructuring and reducing the public sector, particularly through privatization; reorganizing and slimming down central services; introducing competition into remaining public services, especially through internal markets and the contracting of public services provision to the private sector; and improving efficiency and obtaining “value for money” through performance management and auditing” (Minogue, 2001b: 21). The effect of this would be “to transform the traditional public administration into a new species of public management” characterized by: a separation of strategic policy from operational management; a concern with results rather than process and procedure; an orientation to the needs of the citizens rather than the interests of the organization or bureaucrats; a withdrawal from direct service provision in favour of a steering or enabling role; and a changed, entrepreneurial management culture” (ibid).

Significant elements of the NPM package have informed major public sector reform exercises in Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica, St. Lucia, and Trinidad and Tobago (Sutton, 2006) and have been applied piecemeal to many other countries in the region such as The Bahamas, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, and St Vincent and the Grenadines (Ayeni, 2001). NPM has influenced regional public sector reform programs developed by the Caribbean Centre for Development Administration (CARICAD) and was recommended in a study by the World Bank as an approach to comprehensive public sector reform in the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS; World Bank, 2001). While NPM has been applied in different ways and with different intensities in various countries, three issues have emerged that have done much to shape the eventual outcomes of these programs. They are: (i) re-conceptualizing the relationship between politics and administration to deliver more effective and efficient government; (ii) the extent to which the private sector can influence change and deliver new forms of service provision; and (iii) the promotion of new attitudes to managing change through human resource development programs. Together they provide a commentary on both the successes and failures of NPM in delivering reform.

The Political-Administrative Interface

Overview

The Westminster-Whitehall model emphasizes the importance of neutrality in the public service. In the Commonwealth Caribbean this is recognized both constitutionally

in the creation of independent Public Service Commissions to provide for the appointment, promotion, and disciplining of public service officials and in various rules and regulations governing the activities of public servants in office. One important regulation is the proscription of public political activity on the part of higher-level public servants such as holding office in political parties or the public expression of personal views on government policy. Another is the expectation that a senior official will offer the best possible advice on policy to the minister he/she serves without any form of political bias, either toward or against the government, and carry a decision through to their best of their competence. In return, the official can expect to remain anonymous, with their policy advice remaining confidential and their exposure to subsequent criticism, if any, shielded by the convention that responsibility for policy ultimately lies in the hands of the minister.

The Westminster-Whitehall model also draws on the distinction in the Weberian model between the politician who decides policy and the administrator who administers it. Given the overlap between the two, it is recognized that this is difficult, if not impossible, to achieve in practice. It is therefore common to find that senior public officials, such as permanent secretaries and high-level diplomats, need the recommendation of the prime minister to be appointed to, or hold and retain, their particular offices. It is also common to find in various reports on the public services in the region a belief that senior officials should be engaged in policy formation not independently but in partnership with the elected or appointed ministerial official. This requires mutual understanding and respect between both parties and an appreciation of their separate but complementary skills and responsibilities. For politicians these are generally conceptualized as policy direction, oversight, political representation, and political and public accountability and for senior officials as the provision of impartial advice, efficient and effective policy implementation, and overall management (including financial accountability) of the respective department (or other executive branch).

These are optimum conditions; whereas in practice, as one senior Trinidadian public servant put it, ministers and permanent secretaries live in “an uncertain environment” (Dolly, 1970). One important structural reason that they do so is what another senior civil servant (from Malta) identifies as the particular problem of small size, which means that “senior public officials in small states” occupy a “special working environment.” They play, he argues, “crucial parts in the economic and social development of their countries” and “contribute significantly to make or

break the policies adopted by their political bosses.” He then goes on to note that senior officials “act in multifunctional roles”; that there is “a high degree of interpersonal communications,” which on the one hand brings politicians and public servants closer to the people but on the other opens opportunities for nepotism and corruption; that human and material resources are limited, imposing an “entrepreneurial role” on senior officials who have to “originate and lead projects and keep abreast of developments in other countries in order to adapt them to local needs”; and that the combination of such pressures leads officials “to develop special administrative styles and managerial strategies to cope with them.” Senior officials are, he concludes, “more than any other group” the one that has “the greatest impact on their country’s social, economic and political development” (Farrugia, 1993). This largely accurate description of the most able senior public servants is bound to conflict with the self-definition of the most egoistical politicians in many small states. Perhaps it is for this reason that the early years of independence in the smaller countries of the Eastern Caribbean were replete with examples of conflict between minister and civil servants, with ministers issuing “dire threats” and civil servants subtly or otherwise “sabotaging” programs entrusted to them (Mills, 1977).

Additional difficulties have arisen from particular circumstances. One is the election of governments with radically different ideological policies than their predecessor. The classic cases of this in the post-independence history of the Commonwealth Caribbean have been in Jamaica in the successive administrations of Michael Manley (1972-1980) and Edward Seaga (1981-1989) and the seizure of power by the New Jewel Movement in Grenada (1979-1983). The response in each case was a justification for the appointment of special advisers to senior positions in the public service. Manley based this decision on his distinction between politicians as “conceptualisers... who see their business as the interpretation of the people’s dreams” and public servants as “the master of the statistics, of the brutal facts [and] of the problems by exposure and experience.” The position of the special adviser, he argued, was the “pipeline” within the public service that gave force in new ways to the public’s and politicians’ “dreams” and offered “no threat” to the existing public service (Manley, 1972). In the case of Grenada, in a carefully reasoned appraisal of the role of the public service in a revolution, it was argued that “it will be necessary for public servants to liberate themselves from some of the formalistic trappings of the Westminster model inherited from the British” by setting aside the notion of neutrality and accepting the use of special advisers as leading forces for revolutionary

change (Eaton, 1979). The use of special advisers now attracts little controversy, in part because of familiarity, but also because ideological convergence in the region confines them to mainly technocratic roles as opposed to those more overtly political as was previously the case.

An analogous situation has arisen over the issues of race and ethnicity. The ethnic divide in Guyana and Trinidad between those of African and those of Indian descent is reflected in politics and in public administration. In both countries the public services, especially at the higher levels and especially in Guyana, were for many years dominated by those of African descent. This commonly led to allegations by opposition political groups of largely Indian descent of racial discrimination in public sector employment and the delivery of public services. When political parties largely supported by Indians eventually took office in Guyana (after 28 years) and Trinidad (30 years), the incoming governments claimed to detect bias against them in the higher ranks of the public services. In the case of the National Alliance for Reconciliation (NAR) government in Trinidad in 1987, the permanent secretaries denied that they were acting unprofessionally and claimed it was more adjusting to the regime change, after long familiarity with the political and administrative style of the previous governments, than bias as such. Nevertheless the NAR government reorganized ministries, changed permanent secretaries, and made sweeping changes to public boards and statutory corporations to give greater representation to their views and supporters (Ryan, 1992). In Guyana the previous practice of excluding Indians from power and patronage, developed under the regime of Forbes Burnham, was overturned with the election of the Indian-dominated Peoples Progressive Party (PPP) in 1992. It faced a public service predominantly staffed by those of African descent in which “there was no pretence of bureaucratic neutrality” (Brown, 1999: 374). In power, the PPP moved aggressively to remove officials across the public service, nearly all of whom were of African descent, replacing them with their own supporters and leading to charges by the public service unions of “political victimization” and “ethnic cleansing” – ones that continue to be made today (Sutton, 2006: 200). In the event, the consequence was a serious loss of skilled officials at the senior levels and a significant deterioration in the quality of administration at home and diplomatic representation abroad.

Lastly, the widespread phenomenon of “prime ministerial” dominance (in Guyana, presidential) has affected the practice of public administration in the region. The centralization of power in the hands of the prime minister is a much-commented-on feature of politics in the Common-

wealth Caribbean. It leads to the over-centralization of political decision making, in which the prime minister can become involved in the minutiae of decisions (including administrative follow-up). This is echoed further down with ministers also commonly involving themselves in making administrative decisions. One example of the dysfunctionality this can occasion has been shown by studies of the number of notes submitted to cabinet for consideration and/or decision. In the case of Trinidad and Tobago this amounted to several thousands per annum through the 1960s and 1970s, reaching a peak of 5,176 in 1981, most of which focused on relatively minor matters that could have been routinely delegated. As the Task Force charged with examining this problem in 1985 ironically commented: “The Task Force submits that matters such as the rental of portable chemical toilets, a request from Texaco Trinidad for permission to quarantine a dog in Pointe-a-Pierre, and an application for the release of children from St Mary’s Children Home should not be sent to Cabinet. In normal circumstances, they should not even trouble the attention of a Minister” (Trinidad and Tobago, 1985).

The reasons for such over-centralization in part relate to small size. In such countries prime ministerial dominance can be even more pronounced, with ministers or senior officials even more reluctant to make decisions on their own for fear of censure. But it also appears to have been a long-standing problem of Commonwealth Caribbean administration, rooted in the colonial past and repeated in contemporary practice. In Jamaica the number of cabinet notes from 1981-1983 was 1,571, well below the 13,208 submitted to the Trinidad and Tobago cabinet in the same period but well above the 139 submitted to the British cabinet (or even the 1,700 or so submitted to the Canadian cabinet (*ibid*: 308)). There would thus appear to be a habit of routine buck-passing within the public service at the most senior levels, which in turn encourages lower levels to pass paper for decision and action further up. The effect of this on the ability and capacity of senior and middle managers to act and innovate, as well as on their attitude to responsibility, has been the subject of frequent negative comment in various reviews of the public services of the region, all of which call for greater delegation. But the fact that it is so often repeated suggests deep-rooted cultural attitudes and practices that are difficult to change.

While there have been occasional calls to resolve some of the above problems through an overt politicization of the senior public service or the adoption of “presidential” models that see the regular replacement of top officials with the incoming regime, the general view is an acceptance

of the essentials of the Westminster-Whitehall model such as neutrality and a professional public service. Reforms therefore need to work within this understanding. Typical of this approach is the modest set of proposals advanced in a study by the Commonwealth Secretariat. It recommends structured dialogue between permanent secretaries and ministers in the Caribbean, particularly when new and inexperienced incoming governments are elected. These orientation programs should be followed by occasional “retreats” that bring together senior public servants and ministers to focus on specific problems, such as public service reform. The Commonwealth Secretariat has facilitated some of these meetings and concluded that they were generally beneficial in encouraging a greater understanding of the respective roles and responsibilities of both parties (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1999: 49-54).

New Public Management

However, an altogether more radical solution has been advanced by NPM. One of its intellectual foundations was public choice theory. This argued that people acted primarily out of self-interest, which meant that bureaucrats had every incentive to work for their own benefit and not that of their political boss (who had their own set of self-interests). Ways therefore had to be found to bring the two different agendas into play to produce better policy and implementation. The guiding principle in public choice theory was “that the ‘best’ outcome will involve a maximum role for market forces and a minimum role for government” (Hughes, 2003: 11), leading to solutions aimed at hiving-off to the market tasks previously performed by the bureaucracy. But it also meant adopting managerial methods developed in the market to the hitherto very different world of public administration.

One of the most important of these methods was the development of a strategic approach to government. This maintained the distinction between the politician as visionary and the administrator as implementer and even went beyond it, insisting that governments think differently about their administrative structures. This included establishing new agencies, which created a clear delineation between policy formulation and policy implementation as well as enhanced managerial authority for department managers and agency chief executives. Another approach borrowed from the private sector was the replacement of highly centralized hierarchical organizational structures with decentralized management environments closer to the point of delivery of services. This implied devolving budgets and financial controls and providing greater

opportunities for “managers to manage,” thereby hopefully improving both efficiency and accountability. Lastly, the private sector’s focus on results (as opposed to processes) was to be embodied in “performance contracting,” which would focus attention on results by specifying quantifiable targets to be achieved in a given period, the achievement of which would demonstrate enhanced efficiency and bring benefits to the person under contract.

The innovation that best represents this new thinking in Commonwealth Caribbean public administration was the promotion and adoption of “executive agencies.” An executive agency is an autonomous or semi-autonomous agency within the public sector. Its primary aim is to reduce the central control of government by delegating authority to managers who then become responsible for the management and performance of the agency. The agency is under the direction of a chief executive officer (CEO) who is appointed on contract and who is responsible for the delivery of designated services. The CEO is answerable to government but is free to run the affairs of the agency in a more flexible way than a government department might be. This includes the power to recruit staff and to monitor and reward performance. The CEO is also permitted to levy fees for the services of the agency and to retain some part of them for its own purposes. The principal benefits of using an executive agency are said to be its focus on results and its ability to provide more flexible, responsive, cost-effective, and “customer-friendly” services. In the philosophy of NPM it separates policy from implementation, allowing the agency to deliver services at “arm’s length” from government while still being accountable to the minister for its actions.

Case Study: Executive Agencies in Jamaica

The greatest use of executive agencies (EA) is in Jamaica, where ten have been established to date. They have drawn on the experience of EAs in the United Kingdom and have been a key element of the Public Sector Modernisation Programme (PSMP) launched in 1996. The PSMP has been strongly influenced by NPM and supported by external donors including the UK and the World Bank. The creation of EAs in Jamaica has been described by Carlton Davis, the Cabinet Secretary with overall responsibility for public sector reform, as “the *pièce de résistance* of the reform efforts... because it represents the most radical departure from the norms of public service organizations while still remaining a ‘classical’ department of government” (Davis, 2001).

The first four EAs were the Administrator General’s Department, Registrar General’s Department, Management Institute for National Development, and the Office of the Registrar of Companies, all created in April 1999. The second generation, created in April 2001, consisted of the National Works Agency, National Land Agency, National Environment and Planning Agency, and the Jamaica Information Service. They have been followed by the Child Development Agency in 2003 and the Passport, Immigration and Citizenship Agency in 2005. Some bodies were initially identified for agency status, such as the Customs Department, Jamaica Promotions, and the Planning Institute of Jamaica, but this was not proceeded with and they were “modernized” instead.

These EAs are mostly concerned with providing direct services to the public. They are also relatively focused in their activity and therefore not as much concerned with policy advice as some of the more central or core departments of government. Nevertheless, the Jamaican government in its various pronouncements on public sector reform, and particularly in its Ministry Paper on public sector reform published in 2003, makes much of them and seeks to generalize their experiences throughout the public service as part of its strategy of reform (Jamaica, 2003). An Executive Agencies Act was passed in 2002, setting out the rules and procedures under which they were to operate.

The EAs were to operate in a semi-autonomous way within their department. A minister remains responsible for their general area of work and continues to be advised by the permanent secretary. The CEO reports directly to the minister and is responsible for the delivery of services as set out in contractual arrangements, including specified targets for the agency. Other powers given to the CEO allow them “to operate under more or less the same rules and regulations as in the private sector” (CARICAD, 2003a: 9). CEOs are hired on fixed-term contracts (five years) in which the terms and conditions are set by a performance contract. In turn, the CEO has the power to appoint, reward, discipline and remove staff, and determine best how the agency will meet its targets, including discretion over the financial resources allocated to it. The CEO has to produce corporate and business plans on the delivery of services and is assisted in this regard by an advisory board.

The general view is that executive agencies have been a success. Some early customer satisfaction surveys have shown approval rates in excess of 90 percent and an increase in income through user fees. At the same time

there have been criticisms that they have eroded the “public service” aspect of the traditional public service model and have exposed employees to harassment and insecurity at their work. More tellingly, EAs seem to have introduced a two-level public service in Jamaica. One is “reformed,” as in the EAs, and able to operate more flexibly and with better outputs and outcomes, and the other is “unreformed,” operating according to the norms and procedures of the traditional model. The intention is to reform the entire service, but the slow rate of introduction of new EAs suggests that either they are suitable only for the provision of certain services or that they have their own limitations. Although the EAs remain a key element of reform they may thus remain marginal to the much larger task of the transformation of the entire public service.

The Public Sector and the Private Sector

Overview

The relationship between the public sector and the private sector in the Commonwealth Caribbean has undergone several shifts of emphasis since independence. In the 1960s the private sector was still seen as the main driver of development, with the role of the public sector identified in various national plans as largely supportive of it. In the 1970s this underwent radical change in many countries and the public sector was expanded, dramatically in some instances. In Jamaica, the Manley government announced it would be taking over the “commanding heights” of the economy, while in Guyana by the end of the decade, the output of state enterprises were contributing some 80 percent of gross domestic product and 90 percent of the country’s export revenue (Knight, 1997). Other countries such as Trinidad and Tobago and Grenada under its revolutionary government substantially increased state ownership and investment in various productive and service enterprises. In the 1980s, this was to change with the onset of stabilization and structural adjustment programs, which sought an immediate reduction of the size of the public sector prior to a more active role for the private sector. By the early 1990s, the West Indian Commission expressed an emerging regional consensus that saw the private sector once again as the main engine of economic growth with the public sector now facilitating a new model of export-led growth in support of it (West Indian Commission, 1992).

These shifts of emphasis and redefinition of the role of the state have clearly had major implications for the public

sector. The most immediate was its downsizing in the 1980s and 1990s. This had two main elements. The first was a cut in the overall size of the public sector in the face of a major fiscal crisis that saw across-the-board reductions in capital and recurrent expenditure programs and questions being raised about the appropriate size of the public sector in the Caribbean (Greenidge, 1997: 13). Central government expenditure as a share of GDP fell between the early 1980s and early 1990s to around 30 percent in most Commonwealth Caribbean countries. Within this figure there was considerable variation, with some countries such as Barbados spending close to 90 percent of expenditure on central government and others such as Trinidad and Tobago with its many public utilities and state-owned enterprises spending less than half (World Bank, 1996: 9). Reductions in public sector employment were in many countries an inevitable accompaniment of this contraction. In Trinidad and Tobago public sector employment fell from 30 percent of the total workforce to 22 percent, in Barbados from approximately 34 percent to under 20 percent, while in Jamaica central government employment fell from around 14 percent to 8 percent of the workforce (ibid: 17, 14, 16). In Guyana, total public sector employment fell by 15 percent between 1985 and 1991, with the decrease for central government alone amounting to some 36 percent (Scott, 2006: 114). The burden of such cuts everywhere fell more on the managerial and technical levels than on the lower ranks of the public sector, a fact that later raised serious questions of efficiency and effectiveness in delivering policy advice and public services.

The second was an extensive program of privatization. This had begun modestly in the early 1980s with selective divestment programs in Jamaica but only gathered strength at the end of the decade and into the 1990s as the fiscal crisis deepened and debt servicing became more problematic. The first significant privatization was the sale of the 51 percent government holding in the National Commercial Bank in Jamaica in 1986, followed quickly by others, such that by 1992 some two hundred entities and activities had been divested in a ten-year period. Thereafter the emphasis changed, with privatization “now being placed in the broader context of liberalization of the economy, within the framework of the government’s goal to transform Jamaica from a state-centered to a more private sector-led, market-driven economy” (Bernal and Leslie, 1999: 14). In furtherance of this ambition the government identified 57 entities, assets, and activities, comprising approximately 50 percent of the total assets of the public enterprise sector, for sale or lease, divesting itself of more than half the total by 1998. A similar substantial program was also undertaken in Trinidad and Tobago, starting in

the mid 1980s with the part sale of the government holding in the telephone company and gradually accelerating until an ambitious program of divestment and liquidation of 42 state-owned enterprises was revealed in 1993. As of 1999 the privatization program had raised over US\$542.2 million (ibid: 10).

Privatization elsewhere such as Barbados, St. Lucia, and Dominica has been more modest in keeping with the more limited role that the public sector has played in the economy. The exceptions are Grenada and Guyana, where ideological considerations had seen an extensive program of state ownership. In Grenada, sales of shares in banks, telecommunications, power supply, brewing, and sugar production raised some US\$10.4 million and significantly reduced state holdings (Bernal and Leslie, 1999: 11). In Guyana, about 14 public enterprises were divested or liquidated between 1989 and 1992 and, following a refocusing of the program in 1993 to concentrate on efficiency and productivity rather than simply raising revenue, some 24 entities across a whole range of activities were earmarked for privatization and restructuring in the next five years (ibid: Table 2). In all, Bernal and Leslie conclude that “privatisation has had positive effects in the Caribbean” (ibid: 20) even where it has been controversial, as it was in Guyana. In support of this assessment they claim that there have been net gains rather than losses in employment, improvements in efficiency in company performance, improvements in fiscal balances due to the sale and liquidation of unprofitable enterprises, and benefits from earnings of foreign exchange (ibid). The last point establishes that while one of the beneficiaries of this process has been the local private sector (national or regional), the major beneficiary has been international (or global) capital, which was better placed to raise the large capital sums needed and to meet the urgent need for foreign exchange to pay down external debts. Although such foreign investment brings advantages, it also raises questions of local competitiveness and the crowding-out of local capital from potentially profitable areas of the economy.

The downsizing of the public sector therefore does not necessarily mean a reduction of its role to the benefit of the local private sector. There is a substantial element of this in the Commonwealth Caribbean, however, in the growth of private sector provision for services previously provided almost wholly by the state. These include areas such as education, health, and security, where there was a record of failure to deliver adequate or quality services. Downsizing the public sector can also mean refocusing the state on new areas. One is the growth of regulation. This is the almost inevitable result of privatization and

globalization since the 1980s and imposes on states the need to develop a regulatory capacity that is robust enough to formulate and implement policies in the public, national, regional, and international interest. Recent work by Lodge and Stirton (2006, 2007) with respect to the telecommunications sector in the Commonwealth Caribbean illustrates the problems that need to be addressed. The authors argue first that building effective and efficient regulatory capacity in this sector demands the recruitment of a highly paid and very knowledgeable staff capable of understanding the technical complexities of the business and translating it into policy. Second, the regulatory regime needs to be sophisticated enough to frame appropriate legislation and ensure its enforcement in very different areas of the public sector while at the same time avoiding “capture” by the industry it is regulating or by administrative and political interests with different agendas (for example, very low tariffs that render the business unviable). Lastly, the regulatory agency needs to develop a reputation for autonomy, authority, and legitimacy with stakeholders that range from private subscribers, businesses, and government to the companies in the industry, which may have a global presence and associated international support (Lodge and Stirton, 2007: 100-103). This is a demanding set of conditions for any state, let alone a small developing one. It is therefore not surprising to find that countries in the region have followed diverse paths to regulatory reform, with different outcomes according to their strengths and weaknesses in these three areas (ibid: 109-20). In addition, success in one utility, such as telecommunications, does not automatically translate into success in another, such as water or electricity. This has resulted in real problems in developing regulatory capacity, and what they term “a partial withering” of the regulatory state in the Commonwealth Caribbean (Lodge and Stirton, 2006).

Another growth area in reform is the creation of policies and mechanisms to facilitate and enable the private sector to become more competitive. Calls for public sector reform in the early 1990s concentrated on improving competitiveness and claimed that a more effective and efficient public service would release resources to support private sector development. This reform also sought to more fully engage the public and private sectors in dialogue to facilitate a common understanding of problems and possibilities and encourage learning from each other on how to deal with them. A number of regional conferences and seminars were held to discuss competitiveness, during which the role of the public sector in support of the private sector was discussed in terms of partnership and innovation, particularly in the promotion of training and of “E-Governance” and “E-Commerce” (see, for example,

Barbados, 1999 and Caribbean Development Bank, 2002). A series of annual meetings was also launched by CARICAD in 1997 “to provide an opportunity for a critical exchange and review of experiences by public and private sector management personnel on topics of mutual interest, with a view to identifying principles and guidelines that could enhance policy formulation and implementation” (CARICAD, 2001a). The emphasis in these meetings was on the public sector and how it could best develop and apply private sector techniques to public management. The number and regularity of the meetings (until 2004) indicate the value that was placed on them, although the record of the meetings reveals a declining private sector attendance and limited participation, often by the same officials, suggesting their diminishing usefulness.

The emphasis on the private sector as the agent of economic growth remains at the core of current development thinking in the region. At the same time there is some evidence that the contraction of the public sector implicit in this approach has reached its limits in many countries. Recent figures on government expenditure as a percentage of GDP point to increases in 1998-2003 compared to 1990-1997: Barbados from 27% to 37%, Dominica 35% to 41%, Grenada 31% to 37%, Guyana 38% to 44%, Jamaica 28% to 35%, St. Kitts-Nevis 30% to 43%, St. Lucia 27% to 29%, and St. Vincent 31% to 33%, with only Trinidad and Tobago showing a fall from 28% to 26%. Non-comparative figures for 1998-2003 show government expenditure for Antigua at 29% and Belize at 32% (World Bank, 2005: Table 2:1). While some of this is attributable to rising capital spending and interest costs, especially in the OECS countries, the World Bank also attributes it to a rising public sector wage bill only partly accounted for by real wage increases. It notes, for example, that in Jamaica public sector employment rose from 90,000 to 120,000 between 1993-1994 and 2002-03 and that in Dominica and St. Kitts-Nevis central government employment rose 15% and 54% respectively between 1995 and 2001 (*ibid*: paragraph 2.12). It also suggests that the increases may relate to what it terms “high levels of voice and accountability in governance, characteristic of strong democracies” in which there is greater pressure on democratic governments “to extend public services to a broader strata of society” (*ibid*: paragraph 2.10). In other words, political considerations apply. While there are no general reasons why the private sector cannot supply a wide range of government services, this is a timely reminder that to do so requires broad public acceptance and that public service reforms aimed at substituting the private sector for the public sector in certain areas have political implications. They also require a robust, enlightened private sector that is not only socially conscious

and public spirited but has a long-term commitment to national and regional development – characteristics said to be lacking in many Commonwealth Caribbean countries.

New Public Management

New Public Management has sought to engage the private sector more closely with the public sector in two ways. One is to substitute the private sector for the public sector either directly through privatization or by contracting services from it. The former can involve full private ownership or some form of joint venture or co-production. Typically it involves various forms of production and the supply of infrastructure. The latter can take a variety of forms. This is, of course, not new, and contracts for public works were common in the past, but NPM has greatly extended and deepened the process, applying it to areas such as health and education provision and water supply, which were previously carried out almost wholly within the public sector. In order to do so, the system has had to be made more flexible and the type of contract more variable, to include, for example, short-term management or service contracts and tariff collection by private contractors. In all these cases the justification for new methods is that commercial considerations will deliver greater efficiency and reduced costs through a closer concern with the needs of the service users and a more flexible and entrepreneurial approach to delivery.

The same arguments apply to importing, adapting, and emulating private sector management methods in the day-to-day operations of the public sector. These include, as noted earlier, decentralization and performance contracting. Other proposed innovations were the introduction of competition within the public services through the creation of internal markets; a greater requirement to report on full costs (through budgets determined on the basis of the goods and services provided); and a greater emphasis on delivering the results to the client (through mechanisms such as citizens’ charters that set standards of performance and provided information on client expectations and measures for redress if they were not met). These innovations were focused on a drive to achieve “value for money” in the delivery of services, allowing the performance of the public sector to be more easily measured. Other innovations, such as the introduction of strategic planning, were more indirect. The intention here was to provide a more focused approach to management in which there would be a greater concentration on the core business of the ministry or agency, allowing governments to plan the utilization of resources more

effectively and assess the progress made in reaching them. It was particularly valued as an overall approach to public service reform because it would give a greater direction and purpose to the unit concerned.

The uptake of these new approaches and techniques has varied widely in the Commonwealth Caribbean. Jamaica has adopted many of them, but other countries, such as The Bahamas or St. Kitts-Nevis, have barely considered them. Most have tried a few. One of the most common approaches has been the acknowledgement of strategic planning, supported by a Project on Strategic Planning in the Caribbean Public Services, directed by CARICAD, and funded by the European Development Fund and described more fully below. The project covered all the states of the Commonwealth Caribbean, with the overall objective of “developing and strengthening institutional capacity within public service organizations for the application of strategic planning and management in order to enhance and improve the formulation, coordination and implementation of development policies and programmes” (CARICAD, 2000a).

Case Study: Strategic Planning in the Caribbean

The first meeting of the Working Group charged with monitoring the project took place in December 2000. It discussed a diagnostic review of strategic planning in eight countries, noting that while there was an intention in many of them to develop strategic planning, in only two of them – Barbados and Jamaica – had it actually been implemented. Even then there were difficulties, with Barbados having completed only a few of the proposed strategic planning exercises and Jamaica still treating it as “an academic or intellectual exercise undertaken because it was mandated” (CARICAD, 2000b). The Working Group met a year later to review progress. Although various sub-groups had met and a training workshop had been held, progress was still slow. CARICAD was asked as the executing authority to develop a strategic planning project model that could be customized for the region and to establish a Caribbean strategic planning network to share experiences and provide information (CARICAD, 2001b). The third meeting of the Working Group in November 2002 reported that a further training workshop had taken place and various meetings convened, but it was apparent that there was still little progress to report in various member countries (CARICAD, 2002). Various reports noted that this was due in part to the relatively low level of resources devoted to the project and the expectation that it could deliver more than was possible in the three years

that it ran. But the final assessment report also noted that there was no institutional mechanism within the project that could follow up on translating to the national level the initiatives and recommendations made at the regional level (CARICAD, 2003b). This demonstrates that while strategic planning could be encouraged regionally, it had to be implemented nationally and so would reflect the general context of public sector reform within each country.

Some of the difficulties that could be encountered at the national level are set out in a report on strategic planning in St. Lucia commissioned for the project. St. Lucia had set out an ambitious program of public sector reform in 2000 in which strategic planning was an important element. The ministry chosen for study was the Ministry of the Public Service, which housed the Office of Public Sector Reform, putting it at the centre of the reform program. The report noted that while there was commitment at senior levels to strategic planning, this began to shade off at lower levels in the ministry. At the lower levels there had been virtually no input into developing the “mission statement,” so that among the staff there was very little understanding of the overall goals of strategic planning. Similarly there was a lack of common purpose in the operations of the ministry, encouraging a belief that strategic planning was simply a tool for management. The conclusion of the report argued that while the “intentions and actions” of the ministry were “commendable” the “change team” had not been inclusive enough so that “full ‘buy-in’ had not been achieved” and a “common sense of urgency” was largely absent (CARICAD, 2003c). In short, that the purpose and the processes of public sector reform as proxied by “strategic planning” were not fully shared and understood within the ministry.

The problem being highlighted is not unique to St. Lucia but is a common problem in public sector reform efforts in the Commonwealth Caribbean (and elsewhere), partly because the process is largely driven from the top downward. To some extent this is inevitable in its early stages given that public sector reform is often contentious and in some cases externally imposed. To have continuing momentum, however, it must have support further down within the public service and from outside. To do otherwise is to keep it unduly technocratic and essentially managerial in its perception and purpose. There is more than enough evidence from the Commonwealth Caribbean that this is how public sector reform is often conceived, leading to the slow-down of reform and to cut back in its ambition to certain specific and often discrete sections of the public service (Sutton, 2006).

Human Resource Management

Overview

The most frequent observation in the development literature on small states is the claim that human resources are the single most important element for development. The Commonwealth Caribbean, as a region of primarily small states, holds this view, and it is repeated ad nauseam in various reports, most recently one by the World Bank (2005) that promotes a human resource development program as essential for exploiting the emerging opportunities in services it sees as the key to the future of the region. This concern with human resources is also echoed in the various proposals for public sector reform. For example, three of the eight chapters in Jamaica's plans for public sector reform focus directly on human resource management (Jamaica, 2003), as had earlier plans for public sector reform in Barbados (1998) and St. Lucia (2000), among others. In all cases a broad strategy for reform of human resource management (HRM) was proposed to deal with what were seen to be problems across the board in organizational structure, operational procedures, recruitment and training, and incentive and reward.

Within the Commonwealth Caribbean a traditional distinction has been made in HRM between "personnel" functions and "establishment" functions (Mills, 1984). The former relate mainly to the career of the public servant and involve recruitment, appointment, transfer, promotions, training, and disciplinary matters, which are entrusted to separately created public services commissions that operate independently from government. The latter involve the organizational structure of ministries/departments, position classification and grading of posts, staff numbers, salaries and conditions of service, training, and pensions. These latter functions were to be subject to political (ministerial) control since they have financial implications. Because of this they were concentrated in central personnel offices, usually located within a specialized ministry of public service, ministry of finance, or office of the prime minister. In reality, of course, there is a degree of interdependence and some overlapping jurisdiction in personnel and establishment functions, and hence calls for them to be concentrated in a single agency were common. This has been very difficult to achieve, however, because of the particular position occupied by public service commissions in the region.

All Commonwealth Caribbean countries have a public service commission (PSC), the majority a separate police service commission, and some have separate judicial commissions and teaching service commissions as well. The rationale for the PSC was threefold:

(a) to protect public servants against discrimination in respect of appointments, promotion, transfers and disciplinary proceedings; (b) to provide public servants with equal opportunities and fair treatment on the basis of merit; and (c) to avoid or at least minimise the incidence of the exercise of patronage as the reward for support of a political party or of individual politicians, and the exercise of nepotism, or favouritism from other influential sources. (Mills, 1984: 218-19)

To this end PSCs were to be autonomous from government, staffed by specially appointed commissioners and supported by a staff of public servants. Because they were meant to ensure the integrity of the public service against undue political influence, they were established within the independence constitutions by entrenched provisions (an example of the Whitehall dimension noted earlier), which meant they could be changed or abolished only by a vote of two-thirds (or three-quarters in some instances) of parliament (in one or both houses).

A view that has gradually gained ground in the region is that the PSCs as established at independence need to be reformed (or even abolished). Typical of this view is that of Kenny Anthony (Prime Minister of St Lucia, 1997-2007), who shortly before becoming prime minister prepared a paper setting out "an agenda for reform." In it he argued for the enactment of "public service employment acts" that would modernize the public service and introduce "a philosophy of partnership" between the executive, the public service commissions, their representative organizations, and the public at large. He urged legislation that would reduce the personnel functions of the commissions by permitting wider use of delegated power to permanent secretaries and the personnel departments in order to improve the speed and efficiency of decision making. He also proposed increased financial resources to the commissions so that they could discharge their duties more effectively (Anthony, 1995). These proposals were endorsed by the Working Group on Public Sector Reform for which they had been prepared and recommended to Heads of Government when they met in 1995 to discuss public service reform (CARICAD, 1995). Comparatively little action has been taken subsequently, however, to follow up on them, demonstrating the political sensitivity of such reform.

A key issue that has arisen in most discussion is the issue of delegation. The constitutions of the Commonwealth Caribbean permit delegation of the PSCs' powers to public servants, and this practice has grown in many countries. The delegation usually takes the form of powers given to permanent secretaries to initiate and make temporary contract appointments to improve operational efficiency. The proposition is that decentralized control allows for greater flexibility and transparency in a public service in which the nature of work is becoming more complex and diverse and in which individual responsibility is becoming more pronounced (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1996). Inevitably, this will mean that HRM is increasingly undertaken within individual departments in association with personnel offices. A tripartite structure of PSC, personnel office, and line departments has therefore emerged in the HRM process, with some countries, such as Barbados, locating the decision to hire, reward, and evaluate a new employee in the personnel division. Others, such as Guyana, leave it to the head of the institution or agency responsible, and yet others, such as the Bahamas and Trinidad and Tobago, retain it largely within the PSC (Draper, 2001). While some doubts have been raised about the ability of line departments to do the job more competently than the PSCs, such practices open the way for a different role for the PSCs. These would now be free to focus on the monitoring of staffing and discipline, the periodic updating of procedures and guidelines, and on longer-term issues that preserve the values of the public service as a whole.

The conditions in which public servants operate allow for high job security in established posts. However there can also be relatively high numbers of non-established posts, which are often given for political or patronage reasons and have no security. The figures for both established and non-established posts can be difficult to obtain with any accuracy. The World Bank report on the public sector for the OECS, for example, gives figures in 1999 for Dominica as 2,752 and St. Vincent as 4,932 (World Bank, 2001: Annex 2), which are probably established posts only. A Diagnostic Review undertaken by CARICAD in 2000, however, reports 2,000 non-established posts in Dominica (3,000 established) and 6,608 posts in the central civil service in St. Vincent (some 1,600 more than reported by the World Bank; CARICAD, 2000b). The St. Lucia White Paper records a dramatic increase in the number of civil servants from 2,150 in 1997 to 3,950 in 1999 (many of whom were non-established) (St Lucia, 2000: 8), a figure lower than the 5,928 reported by the World Bank that year (World Bank, 2001: Annex 2). The Chief Establishment Officer in Antigua gave a figure of 8,000 personnel in 1998, about 60 percent

of whom were in non-established posts (CARICAD, 1998). This confusion over figures could be due to the inclusion of positions such as teachers and nurses in the total in some cases but not others, but it also suggests that manpower planning within the public services was non-existent (at least in the OECS) and that recruitment to the public services is often expedient and ad hoc.

Promotion is based, in theory, on merit, but in practice it is most often governed by seniority. This is commonly defended as a means of ensuring objectivity and transparency in promotion – a key consideration in countries such as Trinidad and Guyana, where ethnic divisions are duplicated within the public sector. Although performance systems have been introduced in recent years to evaluate public servants, they have generally been regarded as ineffective. Employees are often given ratings on the higher end of the scale, “seriously compromising their usefulness for human resource management decision-making” (Draper, 2001). Training is offered, but it has not been seriously planned in many instances and does not “make heads of units or programmes accountable for spending on training and for the results of training activities” (ibid). Salary scales at the lower end of the public service tend to be similar to what is offered in the private sector, but at the middle or senior management levels they tend to be lower, leading to many unfilled posts, particularly at middle management levels. Merit pay systems do not operate efficiently. Disciplinary procedures permitting reprimand, fines, and dismissal exist for breaches of duty and negative evaluation, but “they are seldom applied, and the process of their application tend to be long” (ibid). In all, this list of negative features suggests the need for urgent reform, but as research in Trinidad and Tobago has shown, this may be viewed differently by public servants themselves.

In 1995, Anne-Marie Bissessar conducted a survey of 240 persons (65 percent female) in the Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Education, and the Personnel Department of Trinidad and Tobago who were at the time undergoing a period of NPM-influenced reform (see below). Her results (Bissessar, 2001: 100-53) showed that while a majority of employees (79.6 percent) accepted the need for change they were very equivocal about aspects of it. Thus, while practically all employees were aware of the emphasis being placed on reform, many of them, particularly at the lower levels, were fearful of its results. For example, although 73.7 percent believed that the introduction of performance appraisal systems would lead to greater efficiency and improved services, 23.4 percent believed it would lead to further retrenchment and privatization.

The majority was also uncertain as to whether it would work fairly or be distorted by ethnic considerations and the persistence of “cliques” who advanced their own interests first. Indeed, 90.4 percent believed that various forms of discrimination were widespread in the public service. It is not surprising, then, to find that an overwhelming majority (86.8 percent) wanted security of tenure and a similar figure (80.8 percent) wanted to retain the Public Service Commission, either as it was or as a reformed institution. Some 85 percent said their salaries were too low, and 64.2 percent said they would leave the public service if offered a job outside it at comparable levels of pay. While 88.3 percent indicated they would improve their productivity if offered a bonus, 79.6 percent did not think promotion based on performance was fair, citing educational qualification and seniority as the main criteria for advancement. In all, these figures point to a public service in which the majority (70.4 percent) did not feel the government cared for their welfare but in which 27.9 percent had sufficient commitment to remain even if offered a comparable salary in the private sector.

These findings point to the all-important factor of “human” in the human resource dimension. Public services do not grow up in a vacuum but inherit historical and cultural legacies that shape and condition the possibilities of change. This induces a fear of change among most public servants. The prevailing view is that if change is needed it should only be ‘incremental’. This view is frequently expressed across the Commonwealth Caribbean by the trade unions and civil service associations that represent their interests, but it has been challenged by politicians and their consultants who are hungry for change. At its heart is a contradiction noted by others in other settings and repeated by Bissessar for Trinidad and Tobago: that the programs of reform that were being recommended were to be implemented by the very public service that was to bear the brunt of the reforms – a practice akin to “burning the village” in troubled times and out of which no “winners” emerge. It also explains the ready resort to litigation by public servants who, with the help of lawyers who specialize in taking the government to court in countries such as Trinidad and Tobago, challenge the decisions of Assessment Centres on promotion by merit or even the decisions of the Public Service Commission itself.

New Public Management

The development, in whole or in part, of new HRM systems has been among the most visible of NPM-influenced public sector reform in the Commonwealth Caribbean.

While HRM is technically distinct from NPM, there is “a considerable correspondence between HRM and NPM models, in terms of both practices and underlying values” (Taylor, 2001: 179). They can be seen as “two sides of the same coin” in that there is the same focus on introducing business models into the public sector and on introducing greater flexibility in management practices. The typical range of activities covered by HRM includes human resource planning (planning the staffing of an organization); job analysis; recruitment and selection; performance management appraisal; career development; and pay management (performance-related pay).

The main goal within NPM is to improve HRM by recognizing, encouraging, and rewarding individual and, where relevant, team performance within a less hierarchical and more decentralized public service. It seeks to do so in several ways. First, it introduces flexible staffing and recruitment practices. In the region, this was to be achieved by more open and flexible recruitment practices for senior posts and by weakening the use of seniority and tenure as a basis for promotion, instituting short-term contractual appointments, particularly for professional posts. Mobility between departments was also to be encouraged. Second, incentive schemes encourage achievement, and various performance review techniques allow good performance to be rewarded. These also serve to identify the strengths and weaknesses of individuals and allow for a greater emphasis on career development. Accelerated promotion based on performance and training would also become the norm in filling middle and senior level positions. Third, training and development is strengthened and tailored to individual needs through the development of training divisions. These aim to maximize the effectiveness of all staff and sensitize them to the overall aims of the public service and to provide better opportunities for the individual. Lastly, a “sense of common purpose and common ownership” in the public service (and individual unit) was to be encouraged through open processes of consultation on new initiatives (involving stakeholders) and more generally through promoting gender balance and ensuring greater representation among and between various social and ethnic groups.

While most Commonwealth Caribbean governments acknowledge these objectives, the one that has gained the most acceptance and has been pursued the most vigorously is that of performance management. Systems have been introduced in all countries, and in some of the most advanced, such as Jamaica, there is a belief that performance management systems will create a “performance culture” throughout the public service. Accordingly, the

government made a commitment to implement a performance management system “developed in collaboration with all levels of staff” by 2004 and pay all staff “at a rate not less than 80 percent of the salaries within the private sector” by 2005 (Jamaica, 2003: 47). Others are more cautious. An official from Dominica pointed out that while a new performance management system had been introduced based on the principles of NPM, “there exists among public officers a general scepticism that it will operate as intended and that the system will produce the desired effect of increased efficiency and effectiveness in programme/service delivery. There is mistrust also surrounding the payment of bonus which is based on the performance of the individual as well as the sector” due to the weak “capacity of the Public Service to measure the productivity of the various sectors and the ability of the Ministry of Finance to provide a sufficient fund for payment of bonus when due” (CARICAD, 2001a: 14). As is often noted, the design, implementation, and operation of a robust performance appraisal system is expensive in time and resources and must enjoy widespread support if it is to be successfully institutionalized – a very demanding task for many small developing countries.

Case Study: HRM in Trinidad and Tobago in the 1990s

In December 1991, the newly elected People’s National Movement (PNM) government in Trinidad and Tobago became the first in the country’s history to appoint a minister, Gordon Draper, with specific responsibility for the public service. Draper had a background in teaching public management and had been involved as a consultant in several preceding studies on the public sector in the country. In January 1992, he presented his vision of public sector reform to the Trinidad Senate. It was strongly influenced by the NPM paradigm and comprehensive in its program of change. One of the central elements was “human resource management and human resource development” (Draper, 1995).

The reform program in HRM had two main elements. The first was the proposed decentralization of the personnel function. A task force was appointed to examine the issues, and it recommended that a separate ministry for HRM be created. Inevitably this meant a drastic reduction in the powers and responsibilities of both the PSC and the Personnel Department, which hitherto had handled these matters between them. Indeed, Draper’s early proposals envisaged the abolition of the PSC. This was a very radical move and also impossible politically given the constitutionally entrenched position of the PSC, the

changing of which would require a two-thirds vote in parliament. The initial proposal was therefore modified to devolving some of the powers of the PSC and the Personnel Department to the line departments/agencies. New draft regulations were drawn up in 1994 that proposed establishing human resource units in each ministry. These were to undertake a number of functions including “devising and implementing a system of continuous management and appraisal of the performance of personnel” (Bissessar, 2000: 77). Ultimately, the proposals were not presented to the Cabinet, but their existence and the program of change they represented were strongly resisted by the PSC. In the face of mounting criticism of its “mismanagement,” it issued a defence of its activities in 1995. The PSC claimed it was used as “a convenient scapegoat for many existing problems not only within the Public Service, but in the wider society” (ibid: 75). It also questioned the wisdom of proposals for the further delegation of functions to permanent secretaries, claiming they were already not effectively performing the functions delegated to them earlier, and challenged the ethos of the entire reform program with the claim that private sector values should not govern the operations of the public service. The defeat of the PNM government in elections in November 1995 ended the stand-off between the contending parties, leaving the PSC largely unreformed.

The second element in the reform program included detailed changes in the HRM system (Bissessar, 2000: 161-63). In 1992, a new performance appraisal system was developed and piloted with the intention of applying it to the whole public service by 1995. At the end of 1992, the Cabinet approved the revision of the existing Public and Service Regulations to make them more relevant to the new public service that was envisaged. The following year it commissioned a new “job evaluation and classification exercise” from KPMG to replace one that had been in operation since 1966. Its main objectives were to determine the relative value of positions within the public service and establish pay rates for them using quantitative methods. Initiatives were also taken in training and in informing public servants of the purpose and direction of reform. “Retreats” were organized to discuss the need for reform throughout the public sector and were accompanied by various brochures and circulars setting out proposals for change. New permanent secretaries were given an intensive training program with a focus on key elements of NPM reform, such as self-management, strategic management, and transition and change management in large complex organizations. Middle-level managers in the civil and protective services were trained to deliver better HRM to improve strategic planning

within the various ministries. The human resource information system was also to be modernized to allow better access to payroll, personnel administration, industrial relations, manpower planning, and employee health and safety information with the objective of speedier and more effective HRM. These initiatives (and other reform efforts) were to be coordinated within individual ministries by small implementation teams headed by a senior official and reporting regularly to the respective head of department or permanent secretary. Other committees were also established to coordinate the reform efforts, with the entire program directed by an “implementation steering committee” chaired by Draper himself.

In spite of the efforts and the publicity, the reform was not a success. As noted earlier, many public servants remained suspicious of the program. Draper became less and less involved in its implementation as he was given first the post of Minister of Foreign Affairs and then, following the unravelling of the PNM government in 1995, took on a leading role in the newly formed Commonwealth Association of Public Management (CAPAM) as a champion of NPM. There was also resistance to the use of private sector consultants to introduce the program, many of whom were seen as close friends of Draper and supporters of the PNM (Bissessar, 2000: 169-71). The result, Bissessar claims, was that as of 1996 “the Public Services of Trinidad and Tobago had achieved no major changes in either the structure or the systems of personnel administration. The Public Services continued to function largely along Weberian lines, with hierarchical structures, highly centralized administration and dependence on rules and regulations” (ibid: 173). In HRM, change was largely “cosmetic.” As such, care should be taken in reading the detailed booklet published by the Commonwealth Secretariat setting out the program of reform in Trinidad and Tobago under Draper (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1995). It is a “plan” for reform, which has much merit as a “blueprint for change” cleaving closely to the principles of NPM, but it is not an example of “achievement” in Trinidad and Tobago as it could misleadingly be mistaken for.

The Internationalization of NPM and Policy Transfer

One of the most distinctive features of NPM has been its global spread. Many agents have been involved in this activity at the global, regional, national, and sub-national levels to create policy networks and “epistemic commu-

nities” to diffuse NPM throughout the developed and developing world. The Commonwealth Caribbean has been very open to these developments. The main external agents involved include the World Bank, several agencies in the UN system, the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Inter-American Development Bank, the Canadian International Development Agency, the UK Department for International Development, CAPAM, and transnational consultancy companies such as KPMG, PriceWaterhouseCoopers, Ernst and Young, and the Governance Network (Sutton, 2006: 39-48). Within the region the main agent has been CARICAD, which has promoted NPM since the early 1990s. They were aided by well-placed individuals such as Gordon Draper, who had contacts and professional interests in both the developed and developing world. Together these agents have served to diagnose the problems, recommend the solutions, and support through financial and technical assistance the implementation of many of the projects of public sector modernization in the region since the mid 1980s.

In the course of these actions they have become contributors to a substantial process of policy transfer. Policy transfer is generally understood as “the process by which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in one political system (past or present) is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in another political system” (Dolowitz and Marsh, 2000: 5). In recent years it has attracted much interest in political science, and several frameworks have been put forward to study it. The one adopted here is that developed by Dolowitz and Marsh (1996, 1998, 2000).

They identify three forms of transfer: “voluntary” (typically lesson-drawing), “coercive” (imposition), and “middle ground” (a mix of both voluntary and coercive, which they see as the most common form of transfer). In the Commonwealth Caribbean, Ann Marie Bissessar identifies NPM “as a case of direct coercive transfer” (Bissessar, 2002: 150), by which she means it was primarily imposed on the region from the outside by international agencies. However, research conducted by Sutton (2006) finds that the process is much more complex and involves a significant amount of voluntary transfer and an even greater volume of middle-ground transfer. He also details examples of policy evolving over time, so that initial coercive transfer can become transformed into voluntary transfer as a program develops. The public sector reform program in Jamaica, for example, had many elements of coercive transfer in the 1980s, but by the 2000s had become more characterized by voluntary transfer. Coercive transfer is

thus the exception, not the rule, although the reform program in Guyana provides an excellent example of it (Scott, 2006).

Dolowitz and Marsh identify nine main actors in the policy transfer process, the most important of which are elected officials and bureaucrats/civil servants, with the latter of particular importance in the implementation stage. This is certainly the case in the Commonwealth Caribbean, where elected officials have been important in initiating public sector reform and then prominent in implementation (or resistance) to specific reform initiatives. Policy entrepreneurs, experts, and consultants working within think-tanks such as CARICAD and CAPAM, or in the service of intergovernmental organizations, have also been prominent in defining and implementing reform. By contrast, political parties and interest groups have been on the margins of the reform process.

Many of the eight different categories of policy or policy-related items identified by Dolowitz and Marsh are to be found in the Commonwealth Caribbean. Direct institutional transfer has taken place in Jamaica, with the creation of executive agencies (EAs), while policy goals, content, instruments, and programs have been transferred in HRM programs. Ideologies and ideas make an appearance in various published White Papers making the case for reform along NPM lines. “Negative lessons,” in the sense of “what not to do,” have been conspicuous by their absence, not only because there has been a strong consensus by the principal exponents of the virtues of NPM but also because the region has a poor record of program evaluation (Brown, 2000).

In discussing “from where lessons are drawn,” Dolowitz and Marsh draw a distinction between three levels of governance – local, national, and international. As noted above, the Commonwealth Caribbean experience points to the overwhelming importance of the international, with very little “cross-national” learning (the experience of other Caribbean states) informing the transfer process at regional or national levels. The CARICAD program on strategic management illustrates this very well. At the same time, some examples of cross-national transfer can be found, one of which is the influence of the Barbados experience of public sector reform on the design of the St. Lucian reform program (Sutton, 2006: 143-60).

Dolowitz and Marsh identify four different gradations, or degrees, of transfer, with politicians more likely to favour “copying” or “emulation,” while bureaucrats are interested in “combination.” Emulation is also more likely

at the agenda-setting stage and combination at the policy formation and implementation stage. The Commonwealth Caribbean experience supports this observation. All four forms of transfer can also be found: copying in Jamaican EAs and in HRM programs in Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago; emulation and inspiration from multiple sources in the design of programs throughout the region; and combination in the implementation of programs as lessons have been learned (except in Guyana).

In seeking to explain why some policies are transferred and others not, Dolowitz and Marsh set out five broad categories that restrict or facilitate transfer, arguing that the more complex the program is the harder it will be to transfer. This appears to be the case in Guyana and the smaller countries of the OECS that lack the capacity to adapt and/or fully implement programs recommended to them. On the other hand, the institutional legacy of the Westminster-Whitehall system and the cultural familiarity of the political elites with Commonwealth countries has facilitated transfer, as has the common language of English.

Lastly, Dolowitz and Marsh refer to “inappropriate transfer,” in which “insufficient attention is paid to the differences between the economic, social, political, and ideological contexts in the transferring and borrowing country” (Dolowitz and Marsh, 2000: 17). Ann Marie Bissessar makes much of this in her work on policy transfer, explaining the failure of NPM in the Commonwealth Caribbean in terms of the “poor fit” between the originating society, which is “developed,” and the borrowing society, which is “underdeveloped” and culturally different (Bissessar, 2002-2003). Like her earlier claim, this is again too stark a conclusion. The policy transfer process as outlined by Dolowitz and Marsh shows it to be a complex and multifaceted process in which significant change and accommodation can occur. This point is taken up in the work of De Jong and colleagues in their work on transfer, where they argue that in studying institutional transplantation concepts such as “glocalization” (foreign imports acquiring local colour) and “creolization” (institutional elements growing together in rather undefined ways without the lead of one clear exemplar) are needed (DeJong, Lalenis, and Mamadouh, 2002). These are very familiar processes in the Caribbean as anyone with only a passing knowledge of its history can attest. In reality, public sector reform in most countries, including the Commonwealth Caribbean, involves a process of “bricolage;” that is, transfers undergo synthesis and evolution (ibid: 283-300). Where bricolage has been noticeable by its absence (in Guyana and the Draper reforms in Trinidad and Tobago), failure almost certainly follows. Where it has

been undertaken (noticeably in Jamaica and increasingly in Barbados), success is more likely.

Policy transfer has thus been a major component of NPM-style public sector reform in the Commonwealth Caribbean, as opposed to other regions of the developing world that have not been as welcoming or as heavily engaged with it. Among many possible reasons for this are two very important ones. The first is the “openness” of the region’s political elite to ideas and practices in core metropolitan countries such as the UK, the USA, and Canada. Public sector reform is very much a top-down activity, in which politicians and senior bureaucrats are the key players. The frequent contact of these key players with their peers in the core metropolitan countries has served to develop a common understanding by all parties on the need for public sector reform and how to deal with it. The second is the observation by Manning that “it is important to note NPM was conceived as a device for improving efficiency and responsiveness to political principals. Its origins were in parliamentary democracies with curiously strong executive power, centralised government and little administrative law” (Manning, 2001: 298). That is, in countries that possessed essentially the same institutional characteristics as the Westminster-Whitehall system. The Commonwealth Caribbean is the best exemplar of this in the developing world.

The Politics of Public Sector Reform

The relative ease of transferability of NPM to the Commonwealth Caribbean in theory, however, has had to face a very different political reality from those in “developed” countries. The importance of the political dimension in sustaining public sector reform has begun to receive increasing prominence. Batley and Larbi (2004), for example, point out:

Reformers, including international agencies, may put forward technical arguments for organisational change but it is important to recognize that their recommendations enter a political and institutional arena in which they are only some among the bargaining parties. The same organization in a different cultural or institutional setting will itself take on a different meaning. Similarly, the same type of reform may produce different results in a different context.” (38)

A parallel argument is made by Robinson (2007), who argues: “Governance reforms typically founder on account

of political factors, rooted in a combination of inadequate political commitment and considerable public resistance... The challenge for research is to identify the circumstances in which developing country governments successfully design and implement governance reforms” (401). In short, public sector reform operates in a political context that shapes the content, feasibility, and outcomes of reform.

The NPM experience in five Commonwealth Caribbean countries (Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica, St. Lucia, and Trinidad and Tobago) points to six factors as important (Sutton 2006: 199-202). The first is the need for high-level political leadership in the design, promotion, and implementation of reform. Nearly all reform initiatives are instigated and carried through by a small, elite group of reform-minded politicians and senior bureaucrats within the executive. When they act cohesively, reform is more likely to be successful; when they conflict or their resolve to carry it through weakens, then reform will slow or fail (Robinson, 2007). This is certainly the case in the Commonwealth Caribbean. Most of the initiatives for reform have originated in the political leadership. When political leadership has waned, reform has slowed down, and when it has lapsed it has all but come to a halt. The engagement of senior administrators is also significant. The best example is Jamaica, where the reform process is driven from the Office of the Prime Minister and supported by an influential core of career and contract senior officials, including the heads of the EAs. They have provided strategic vision and an important element of policy coordination. The commitment of top political leaders and administrators is therefore essential for successful reform. Delegation downwards, for example, to public sector reform units as in Barbados and St. Lucia, is understandable, but unless they have the explicit and continuing support of the top leadership their prospect of leading public sector reform is diminished.

The second important factor is that reform will almost inevitably meet opposition from the organizations or departments being reformed. Bureaucracies are powerful interest groups with the ability to slow, subvert, or resist reform efforts, especially if they are being asked to seriously weaken the institution. Confrontation rarely works, which means reformers must persuade the bureaucracy of the need for change, providing incentives to support reform in a carefully developed strategy of reward rather than sanction (Batley and Larbi, 2004: 71-76). The experience of Trinidad and Tobago provides a lesson here. The reforms of the early 1990s met resistance and ultimately had to be scaled back. Guyana is another example,

where the Public Service Union has been very active in defence of its members' interests, describing public sector reform as a form of "ethnic cleansing" and of "political victimization" – charges not wholly without foundation.

Third, while there is a temptation to mount sweeping programs of reform, experience shows that most reforms, particularly successful ones, proceed incrementally. This allows the reformers to take on board the cultural and organizational attributes that slow reform and work around them through pilot projects and other administrative experiments. These provide guidance as to what is practical and feasible and what is not (Robinson, 2007). Guyana in the early 1990s is a classic case of sweeping reform that failed. Its problems were seen as so massive that only thorough and immediate reform was appropriate. When failure set in, reforms were cut back but then proved largely ineffective. A more successful example is Barbados, which by design, accident, or circumstance, has implemented reform more selectively and more slowly from the outset, although this can weaken the impetus to reform in the long run. St. Lucia and Trinidad and Tobago have also opted for a more incremental approach to implement their latest proposals for reform.

Fourth, reform is more likely to succeed if it is perceived as an essential element in a wider agenda for change to achieve vital national goals. Once these are identified, a broad coalition can be formed to support reform, including major interest groups and the attentive public. An example of this throughout the Commonwealth Caribbean is the linkage of public sector reform with increased competitiveness and better governance. There have also been attempts by regional organizations such as the Caribbean Development Bank and CARICAD to win over influential interest groups. Together, they have organized, for example, a series of annual policy forums that bring together the public and the private sector to examine ways in which they could learn from each other and become more aware of mutual interests. The widespread adoption of citizen and customer charters by national governments has also been an important mechanism to win the public over to reform through the delivery of better routine public services.

Fifth, reform should be "home grown" rather than foreign in origin and implementation. This is a persistent criticism of the first wave of reforms imposed in the 1980s by the international financial institutions and the second wave associated with NPM and supported by various foreign donors, both of which have been seen as promoting a

"one size fits all" approach to reform, thereby ignoring local realities. The situation in this regard has differed throughout the Commonwealth Caribbean. The most obvious case of foreign direction has been Guyana. Its public service reforms have been designed and implemented by various external consultants, including the most recent reform effort that draws extensively on NPM in its vision. Jamaica has also in the past seen the widespread use of foreign consultants, and throughout the region a variety of international organizations and foreign donors continue to press for reform based on NPM principles. At the same time there has been a steady growth in the practice of adapting reforms to local circumstances so that the percolation of NPM ideas into the national teams designing and implementing programs has been moderated. The result has been the gradual development of a sense of local ownership over the reform process in which the original external impetus has been forgotten or extensively overlaid. This now appears to be the case in Barbados, Jamaica, and, to some extent, Trinidad and Tobago.

Lastly, second wave reforms associated with NPM are much more difficult to mount and sustain than first wave reforms (Batley and Larbi, 2004: 71-72). They involve greater workloads for bureaucrats and for politicians in the promotion, monitoring, and enforcement of reforms, and so become particularly burdensome over a long period of time. The result is that while many second wave reforms have been launched, few are completed, and most are curtailed, modified, or they simply "run out of steam" in the face of other urgent pressures. There were signs of this "reform fatigue" in the Commonwealth Caribbean as early as 2000, when Dr. P. I. Gomes, head of CARICAD, noted in the organization's *Newsletter*: "Despite the logos, the letter-heads and even newly-designate ministries, with a full title *Public Sector Reform*, there is a growing sense of tiredness, a deep feeling of fatigue. Perhaps some serious frustration that this 'reform thing' in the public services in the region is running out of steam – very much becoming – 'sound and fury signifying nothing'" (Gomes 2000:2). In the event, the reform process has continued, but the sense of urgency surrounding it in the mid 1990s has abated, and a more realistic sense of what can be achieved over what time period prevails in many countries. In short, the expectations of the benefits of reform are now fewer than they were (Jamaica excepted), and the difficulties facing reformers are now more fully appreciated.

Public Sector Reform: Assessment and Prospects

The current phase of public sector reform reflects these uncertainties. NPM is no longer the unchallenged paradigm. Senator Tyrone Barker, then Minister of State overseeing public sector reform in Barbados, provides a succinct summary:

In the region as a whole, progress has been made on some fronts but the latest attempts at “externally induced modernisation” have not produced the results they promised. The new public management which has been introduced has some sound aspects: accent on results; service to the public; delegation of authority; greater attention to cost and the quest for efficiency, through the adoption of private sector practices, such as “contracting out” and merit pay. But the market-driven rhetoric and “reductionist approach” has been questioned. This particular administrative culture tends to neglect important political, social and legal dimensions. It offers no practical solution to the critical concerns, which continue to bedevil many of our regional countries.”(2004)

Other studies of NPM in the developing world have pointed to results that are “perplexingly equivocal” (Polidano, 2001: 60) and “slight at best... and possibly positively harmful in some settings” (Manning, 2001: 298).

Serious problems have also been raised by senior public servants in the region. Reporting on her experiences of public sector reform in St. Lucia, Catherine Butcher argues that the reform process “has brought a mixture of success and failure.” Some parts of the service, such as the Inland Revenue Department and the Ministry of Finance, which remain “integrally involved in the process of reform and continue to be very proactive and seemingly transparent, professional, efficient and effective in their dealings with the public and responding to customer concerns,” can be deemed a success. Others, which include “most of the major Ministries and Departments,” represent “the old order of the Public Service still very prevalent today – poor work ethics, wastage, lack of accountability and transparency, idleness, absenteeism, lateness, lack of professionalism and inefficiency.” Even more tellingly, Butcher claims that these negative attitudes pervade the “architects of the reform initiative themselves,” posing “a challenge to them to reform themselves, in order for the initiative to work” (Butcher, 2005).

These reflections point to a failure of both theory and practice. In itself, this is not surprising, since successful

public sector reform is remarkably difficult to deliver. In his study of public sector reform in developing countries of the Commonwealth (covering 40 jurisdictions, nine of which were in the Caribbean), Victor Ayeni notes, “the outcome of reform has been mixed at best: limited and often scattered successes; several pockets of uncertainties; and persistent economic and governance crises” (2000). Focusing on NPM, Batley and Larbi (2004) “raise questions about the appropriateness of the radical and comprehensive application of new public management reform models to low-income countries” (235) and conclude: “There is a need to re-think and re-prioritize reforms. The priority is to get basic government administrative structures and systems working before superimposing new roles on them” (236). They also argue:

Context really does matter and cannot be ignored by advocates of reform. Some of the new management reforms such as complex contracting may be inappropriate for some sectors such as health in some countries where the necessary preconditions do not exist. They may be appropriate for other sectors where private sectors interest and capacity exist, and where monitoring and regulating mechanisms also exist or can be developed easily. (236)

In all, this points to a much more nuanced approach to public sector reform, in which circumstance tops the agenda, not forgetting the importance of “skilful political management to steer it through” to conclusion (236).

Where does this leave the Commonwealth Caribbean and NPM? The obvious conclusion is that a differentiated and intelligent approach is needed for public sector reform. It is difficult to see NPM-style public sector reform working in a low-income country such as Guyana, however sophisticated the reform program and its consultants are, especially because there is serious weakness in the capacity of the public sector as well as serious racial divide. Equally, it is difficult to see NPM-style reform working adequately in the low-capacity small states of the OECS unless there is substantial external assistance. In this regard it is surprising to see NPM informing the recently announced public sector modernization project in Grenada, which, among other things, envisages the creation of executive agencies linked to performance management and a public sector reform unit (World Bank, 2006). In both these cases, thought must be given as to how to strengthen the traditional Weberian public service prior to the implementation of NPM-style reform. At the same time, Jamaica has shown NPM style reform can work, although the investment in it has to be considerable and carefully planned over a long period of time (the current guiding document

envisages a ten-year plan; Jamaica, 2003). The remaining Commonwealth Caribbean countries would be best to take a middle way that picks from a menu of NPM reforms. This has been the route chosen in part by Belize in its public sector program, although it has slowed considerably in recent years from the impetus it initially had in 1999-2000. Barbados is another example. It has sought to blend the best of the past, identified as “a professional and non-political approach, a culture of integrity, a habit of prudent fiscal management and a reasonably well trained public sector” (Barbados, 1998: section 2.2). It employs management innovations recommended by NPM to deliver more efficient customer services via customer charters and a more motivated workforce via performance management and employee assistance programs. Trinidad and Tobago now also seems set on this route and can provide the concluding comment on current reform efforts.

In March 2004, the government of Trinidad and Tobago launched a three-year program of activities – the Public Sector Reform Initiation Programme (PSRIP) – to support reform of the public service as an essential element of its wider goal of reaching developed country status by 2020. The principal objectives of the reform were to identify issues for transformation of the public sector, set out a “socially and politically sensitive strategy for transformation,” promote consensus to implement such a strategy, and develop “basic management instruments and capacity to manage reform” (Trinidad and Tobago, 2005: 8). The reform was to be directed by the Public Service Transformation Division of the Ministry of Public Administration and Information (MPAI) and was supported by a loan of US\$5 million from the Inter-American Development Bank.

In contrast to previous reform efforts, the PSRIP deliberately sets out to identify and avoid the errors of the past and to win broad support for reform. With respect to the 1990s experience in HRM, for example, it notes that the strategy for change management put too many strains on the “change managers,” so it now recommended a broader approach to change management. The PSRIP held a public service-wide conference on the theme in June 2005, followed by the establishment of “change teams” in ten ministries. It also established an Opinion Leaders’ Panel Survey (led by the international consultancy firm MORI) to obtain feedback from the public on the delivery of public services and a Public Service Employee Survey to gather the views and opinions of public service workers. Greater attention was to be given to correcting the fragmentation of the HRM function, which was located in four agencies (the Personnel Department, the PSC, the MPAI, and the Ministry of Finance) as well as in HRM units in most

ministries and departments. Other ongoing activities, such as job evaluations, were to be completed and monitoring and evaluation greatly strengthened. These areas were recognized to be “weak to non-existent” (ibid: 25) in terms of policy, programs, and projects. Lastly, it recognized that leadership was a key component of change, so a greater emphasis on training would be required of both senior public servants (such as permanent and deputy permanent secretaries), and government ministers would need to commit to change and adopt collective approaches to problem solving.

These are sound recommendations. The translation of them into specific management instruments is a demanding task, and reform will also face the continued skepticism of the public. The MORI polls in 2005 showed a higher percentage of the public (50 percent) describing public service delivery as poor than in 2002 (27 percent). Other negative descriptors in 2005 were unsatisfactory (39 percent), slow (33 percent), inadequate (31 percent), and unresponsive (17 percent) compared to the more positive ones of hardworking (26 percent), efficient (16 percent), and friendly (15 percent). Of note is that only 14 percent thought the public service was corrupt (11 percent in 2002; ibid: 14). There is clearly a long way to go to win over the public.

The other risks are political and economic. In their project proposal on the PSRIP, the Inter-American Development Bank (2003) identified political and ethnic tensions as major challenges. They stated it was possible that the opposition would not support any proposals for constitutional reform to overcome “structural rigidities” such as the relatively large size of the public sector, its bottom-heavy composition that favoured unskilled and semi-skilled employees, and the “centralised decision-making process and management of core functions” (ibid: 1.6-1.14). They were also concerned that the promising economic growth prospects in Trinidad would double government revenues tempting it “to use the extra cash, as it did in the past, to cover over existing problems and avoid tackling the structural ones” (ibid: 3.3). To avoid this outcome they recommended high-level discussions involving the government in Trinidad and Tobago and other multilateral organizations such as the IMF and the World Bank.

The promise and the problems facing Trinidad and Tobago’s public sector reform program are real. The record of past reforms there and elsewhere in the Commonwealth Caribbean do not provide many grounds for optimism. Reform needs to be tackled at a technical level (where NPM may have something to offer, depending on context),

at a political level (where NPM is largely silent on the difficulties), and at a systemic level (the issue of governance within the Westminster-Whitehall system). In other words, public sector reform needs to be holistic as well as innovative and very mindful of the particular circumstances of the region when it seeks to import the experiences of reform from other very different parts of the world. Finally, those promoting reform also need to recognize that the public sector is a very different “animal” from the private sector and that an “ethos of public service” is a major asset that should be encouraged and supported, not recklessly sacrificed to the cause of efficiency and effectiveness (Dibben, Wood, and Roper, 2004). The debate on public sector reform shows signs of taking this on board—it is imperative that the Commonwealth Caribbean should do so as well as it charts its way forward toward development and public service to its citizens.

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Centre pour l'innovation dans
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57 Erb Street West
Waterloo, Ontario, Canada N2L 6C2
tel +1.519.885.2444 fax +1.519.885.5450
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