

The Bahamas Public Service Sector:
Reform Measures in Human Resources and Beyond

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Abstract

Across the globe, governments are reforming public sectors and the manner in which they deliver public services. A confluence of factors is driving this movement for reform: financial pressures and budget cuts mean that the public sector has fewer resources on which to draw; at the same time, public dissatisfaction with outdated methods of delivering public services means that the public sector is being asked to do more with less. Shifting economic realities are causing fundamental changes in nations where the public sector is the largest employer; governments in these nations that choose to delay reform are faced with the possibility of a complete collapse of their public sector infrastructures. There is an urgent need for reform in the Bahamas public sector, where the problems begin in a broken Human Resources system. A close look at the available information reveals that reforming the Human Resources system of the Bahamas public sector is a requisite first step towards complete reform.

I. Introduction

The Bahamas have a long history of corruption in government and public service. Cronyism and favoritism are found in every aspect of public life in the Bahamas; it seems as if the only thing that is needed when seeking employment in the public sector is to know someone within the organization in which you would like to work. There are written rules and legal guidelines intended to control the process of selecting qualified employees from a pool of candidates; on paper, at least, candidates must have the appropriate education or the requisite experience in order to be considered for a position at any level of public service. From custodial and janitorial work to the highest levels of administrative and government operations, those who seek employment in any sector of Bahamian public service are expected to proffer a CV that demonstrates their proficiency in their chosen field. Despite the existence of these rules and regulations, little seems to have changed where hiring and staffing for Bahamian public service positions is concerned. More often than not jobs are doled out between friends, or as payback for political favors, and even in exchange for bribes. It is clear that serious, sweeping reforms are needed if the corruption in the Bahamian Public Service sector is to be eliminated.

Charges of corruption were at the heart of the campaign waged against the Progressive Liberal Party (PLP) when they succumbed to the Free National Movement (FNM) in 1992. For years, PLP leader Lynden Pindling and several of his associates had been dogged by accusations of corruption; the allegations included charges of favoritism in hiring decisions, backroom deals between public departments and private businesses, and bribes and kickbacks from contractors, drug dealers, and more (Profile, 2006). Few of these allegations came with hard evidence, and criminal prosecutions were not in the offing; still, the rumors and stories floating around sounded convincing to enough voters that Pindling and the PLP were swept from office in 1992.

The allegations did not end with the PLP's defeat, as many of the ministers and other officials who repopulated the positions vacated by the outgoing party launched investigations into the actions of the recently-deposed administration. Kenneth Russell, the Minister of Housing, addressed the House of Assembly in 2007 to discuss the results of a recent investigation into the conduct of the PLP. According to Russell, the former administration had been rife with corruption at every level. The Bahamian government employs tens of thousands of people; Russell asserted to the House that a significant percentage of employees hired during the PLP's reign were not only unqualified for their jobs in public service; some of them were literally former convicts who, by law, were ineligible for hire in the positions they held (Lowe, 2007).

Russell described details of a PLP initiative called "The Second Chance Programme;" this programme was intended to ease some of the restrictions that barred nearly all convicted criminals from holding public service jobs. There were many within the PLP administration that felt such restrictions were too harsh, as offenses as simple as shoplifting and petty theft, no matter how long ago they occurred, were enough to bar former convicts from most government and public service jobs (Lowe, 2007).

Second Chance offered a means by which job applicants with criminal histories could become eligible for certain public service jobs. Under programme guidelines, applicants had to submit to background checks, drug testing, and clear several other hurdles before they could be considered eligible for employment in public service. Even then, the list of job titles for which they could gain eligibility was relatively short, comprised largely of menial tasks and jobs that included little contact between employees and members of the public (Lowe, 2007).

According to Mr. Russell, these guidelines and restrictions seemed to be mostly ignored by the members of the Human Resources departments who were responsible for administering and overseeing Second Chance. As Minister of Housing and Urban Development, Mr. Russell is responsible for the oversight of a wide range of public service jobs; in this capacity he oversees several quasi-law enforcement agencies established to control crime in urban areas. An audit of these agencies, begun shortly after the FNM took control of the government from the PLP, has turned up evidence of serious corruption and criminality, according to Mr. Russell (Lowe, 2007).

The investigation, recently concluded after months of examining evidence, conducting interviews, and piecing together bits and pieces of information, led Mr. Russell and his staff to what he claims is a startling conclusion: that the former administration operated by the PLP had hired convicted criminals to fill hundreds of different openings in dozens of different positions for which they were not eligible, including openings in several law enforcement agencies. Russell's team even discovered that some of the applicants had been charged with new crimes committed after they were hired but before they began working at their new jobs. Despite having been hired in complete disregard for the rules that prohibited such hiring, and despite having been accused of and charged with the commission of new crimes shortly after being hired, those applicants who had their new charges dismissed, or who pleaded down to lesser charges, were in most cases allowed to assume the duties of their new jobs (Lowe, 2007).

Asked to comment on the matter, a member of Mr. Russell's investigative team—who agreed to speak under the condition of anonymity—discussed a few of the details related to the Second Chance programme and some of the jobs those in the programme were hired to fill. According to the staffer, Second Chance was intended to help rehabilitate non-violent criminals, and to ease their transition from incarceration back into life outside of prison. Those in the

programme were barred from employment of a “sensitive” nature, and were typically prohibited from taking on jobs that involved interaction between employees and members of the public. Those who were considered for placement were supposed to be fully vetted: they had to have remained out of legal trouble since being released from incarceration, and they had to pass a complete background check that examined their life prior to the offense that had led to their imprisonment (Lowe, 2007).

Applicants who had been convicted of violent crimes were supposed to be automatically ejected from the programme, and further criminal offenses conducted after their hiring was also supposed to lead to ejection from Second Chance and make the applicant ineligible for future involvement in the programme. Despite these guidelines and restrictions, asserted the anonymous staffer, few applicants were fully vetted, if they were vetted at all. “They hired anyone who came in,” he claimed. Applicants in Second Chance often came with certain advantages; some were, for example, willing to work for lower-than-average wages, as many had difficulty acquiring employment in the private sector. The staffer claimed that, in some cases, applicants had the right connections to persons inside the PLP administration, and could gain access to various positions simply because they “knew the right people” (Lowe, 2007)

Applicants who were technically ineligible for any positions in the public service sector were not only being allowed to bypass the rules, they were also being placed in positions that were seemingly entirely inappropriate for any former convicts, regardless of the severity of their offenses. Under the auspices of the office of Housing and Urban Development, several quasi-law enforcement agencies were created in an effort to control the rampant and widespread crime happening in the Bahamas’ densely populated urban areas (Lowe, 2007).

Though the employees of these agencies were not officially considered to be police officers, they were still *called* police: the PLP created, among others, “Tourism Police,” “Urban Renewal Community Police,” and “School Police.” Applicants who were considered to be eligible for positions with these agencies had to undergo training and testing that was very similar to that of regular Bahamian police officers; applicants in Second Chance were, on paper, ineligible even to apply for openings in these agencies (Lowe, 2007).

Despite the restrictions barring Second Chance applicants from being hired by these agencies, managers and supervisors in several of the agencies were often willing to simply ignore such restrictions and hire any applicants that were available and willing to take the jobs. In theory, those hired for agencies such as “Tourism Police,” while not technically police officers, were still expected to undergo regular police training and adhere to the same rules and guidelines that governed the activities and conduct of Bahamian police officers (Lowe, 2007).

Those employed by these “special” police agencies were expected to carry out many typical tasks associated with police work, including patrolling certain areas and interacting with members of the community. Under the purview of the Housing and Urban Development offices, several programmes were created to help at-risk youth by offering activities and designating areas for games and athletic competitions. Many of these programs were directly supervised by members of these “special” police forces, meaning that the former convicts who were technically ineligible to even be hired for the job were then interacting not just with members of the public, but with children and young adults (Lowe, 2007).

This scenario, while unique in some respects, likely came as no surprise to the Bahamian people when details about the story were released. Corruption and scandal are found in all areas

of public service and all levels of government activity (bbc.com, 2011). The current administration has spent years investigating one scandal after another that they maintain were committed by the former PLP administration; at the same time, the FNM are no strangers to controversy. Kenneth Russell, the Minister of Housing and Urban Development who broke the Second Chance story a few years back is himself the target of numerous allegations and accusations of impropriety (bbc.com, 2011). Though Mr. Russell has been serving in his position for years, many say that little has been accomplished by his agency (Anonymous, 2011). He has been accused of failing to meet the standards of his position, and of filling out his agency's staff with friends, business associates, and those to whom he owes personal or political favors (Anonymous, 2011).

Mr. Russell is not the only public official who has been –and continues to be– accused of corruption; the Bahamian government is so rife with corruption that it has become the focus of several government initiatives designed both to root out corruption and to assuage public concerns. In 2008 Bahamian Prime Minister Hubert Ingraham declared that under his leadership, any public servants caught committing crimes or being involved in corruption would be prosecuted to the full extent of the law (Russell, 2011). Well-known religious leader Bishop Simeon Hall responded to the Prime Minister's declaration by challenging his parishioners to get involved in their local and regional governments, and to report corruption and other abuses of public trust (Russell, 2011).

The Second Chance scandals, and the Prime Minister's declaration about corruption in public service, are stories that garner attention from the media and the public. While they are each significant, and it is easy to understand why they generate news stories, they really only serve as a small reflection of a much larger problem. In a situation like Second Chance, the

problems are easy to understand, and the solutions are easy to implement: discharge the employees who were hired inappropriately, reprimand or discharge those managers and other administrators who either hired the former convicts, allowed them to be hired, or simply look the other way as they were brought into public service jobs. While those steps will bring an end to that particular problem, they will do nothing to address the larger problems infecting the public service sector in the Bahamas.

The real problem in public service is not that some officials are corrupt, or that some officials do not live up to the demands and expectation of their positions. What drags down the entire public service sector is not a problem that can be read about in newspapers or seen on the evening news; it is much more insidious than any headline-grabbing scandal. Throughout the modern history of the Bahamas, the public service sector has operated in two worlds. In one world, an entire body of legislative rules and regulations provides a constitutional framework that ostensibly guides public service activities and functions. In the other world –the real world- public service is carried out by a loose network of friends and associates who take and offer jobs based not on qualifications, but on connections.

This shadow world of cronyism is an open secret in the Bahamas; it seems that everyone is aware of the abuses of power and violations of the public trust that underpin all areas of public service, yet the problem is so great, so overwhelming, that few people seem to know what, if anything, can be done to remedy the situation.

The problem begins squarely in the Human Resources (HR) departments of public service organizations. HR managers and hiring agents are provided with a copious amount of information, from legal briefings to policy manuals to employee handbooks; all these and more

are created and disseminated among HR managers and employees, as well as individual department managers and anyone else who might be involved in, or provide oversight for, any and all hiring activities. Despite the effort devoted to the research, development, and dissemination of these materials, little has truly changed in the decades since the Bahamas gained independence. The problems do, in fact, extend back in time well beyond the point at which the Bahamas gained freedom; many of the cultural traditions that inform contemporary attitudes in the public service sector trace their roots to the way in which administrators and officials from the United Kingdom exercised their authority so far from the shadow of Her Majesty's crown.

Currently, hiring policies in public service HR departments typically reflect the personal attitudes and proclivities of individual managers and supervisors. In far too many cases, applicants for public service jobs are hired based not on their qualifications, but simply on the personal whims of those doing the hiring. This approach to hiring for public service positions permeates the entire sector of public service; unqualified HR directors hire unqualified applicants who will be supervised by unqualified managers, leading to an epidemic of public agencies that simply cannot carry out their duties and meet their obligations to the people of the Bahamas.

This is not a problem with any easy fixes, and it will not be corrected overnight. There are, however, steps that can and must be taken to repair the damage to public service that has been wrought by so many years of ambivalence and lack of concern in HR and throughout the entire sector. Fixing what is wrong with the approach to HR in the public service sector will also serve to lift the entire sector; as skilled and qualified applicants are identified and hired, they will begin to fill positions in public service that have too long been filled by people who are incapable of properly executing the requirements of their positions. As these qualified employees

settle in to their new positions, they will in turn bring in the next wave of skilled and qualified workers, and a cycle that once looked like a downward spiral will begin to resemble an ascending staircase.

Before exploring the reforms that can and must be implemented in public service Human Resource departments, it will first be helpful to understand how the situation began, and how it became what it is today. The next section of this paper contains a brief overview of Bahamian history, from its time as a dependency of the United Kingdom through its struggle for independence to an honest and unflinching assessment of life in the present-day Bahamas. After this account of Bahamian history will follow a more detailed examination of how public service HR functions in the Bahamas of today; the paper will then conclude with a discussion about how best to reform HR in the Bahamas' public service sector.

II. Historical Perspective

Beginning in the 16th Century, Great Britain (then still known as England) began to extend its reach to other parts of the world beyond its own island and the European continent. As the British developed an impressive naval fleet, so too did the Netherlands, Spain, and France, among others. For some time the Dutch in particular provided stiff competition to the British as they challenged each other for dominance in trade routes and in agreements between businesses and between nations. Eventually the British proclaimed the whole of Europe off-limits to the Dutch, demanding that any shipping and trade taking place between European nations and outside interests must first go through the British authorities. Though the Dutch had amassed a large number of cargo vessels, they had little in the way of military ships, at least not as

compared to the British. The British insistence on dominating shipping and trade went largely unchallenged for the better part of two centuries (Riley, 1983).

With their newfound power solidified, Great Britain began to expand the reaches of its empire, establishing colonies and staking out territories as far away as New Zealand, Australia, and the coast of West Africa. Beyond these territories, the British began trading with China and Japan, and would eventually establish a foothold in Hong Kong, where their presence would continue to be felt well into the 20th Century (Riley, 1983).

As the British claimed these various territories and colonies, they installed systems of government that mirrored that which was found in the homeland. Administration of government duties was carried out by a sometimes complex tangle of ministers, agents, and other officials; the bureaucracy involved in the colonies and territories could at times be maddening for those who were forced to deal with it (Riley, 1983).

The Commonwealth of the Bahamas was established in 1973, when the Bahamas gained independence and became a member of the Commonwealth of Nations. The governmental system in the Bahamas is a Constitutional Monarchy; the island nation is governed by elected officials, led by a Prime Minister. The British Monarch, currently Queen Elizabeth II, is also the Monarch of all of the nations in the Commonwealth of Nations. The current system of government in the Bahamas is relatively new, in that it dates back to the late 20th Century. Despite having gained independence from Great Britain in 1973, the administrative functions of the Bahamian government still retain some traditional remnants of the former colonial system. While rules have been established that guide the functions of government and of public service in theory, both the letter and the spirit of the laws are often ignored in practice (Profile, 2006).

According to the results of surveys conducted with several people employed in the Bahamas public service sector, the rules governing the functions of all areas of public service, including the policies related to human resources, are clearly spelled out. According to established guidelines, every effort is to be taken, when hiring someone for a position in public service, to ensure that the applicant or candidate has the requisite skills and experience needed to perform the duties of the job in question. Despite these rules, the reality is that qualified applicants are routinely passed over in favor of less-qualified, or even un-qualified, candidates. Those who are passed over may simply not have the right “connections,” while those without the right credentials may still be hired simply because they have the right social connections. As discussed in the introduction, there are some cases where the agent in charge of filling certain positions simply hires the first people to walk through the door.

In a public service system rife with corruption, it is clear that reform is needed. In this section, current trends and circumstances will be discussed, while the concluding section will examine suggested methods for reform, with special consideration given to the practical application of suggested reforms.

III. What is Public Service?

Though the details of each are different, most contemporary democratic systems of government share several key attributes. These systems generally consist of three main “branches” of government: the Judicial Branch, the Legislative Branch, and the executive Branch. The Legislative Branch, as manifested at a national level, generally consists of a legislative body, such as a Congress or Parliament; this body is responsible for enacting the laws

that govern the nation. The Judicial Branch is the court system; it is the courts that legal disputes are decided and settled, and where the legality and constitutionality of legislation is determined. The Executive Branch is responsible for the administration of government agencies and the practical implementation and application of legislation (Profile, 2006).

Government is, simply put, the mechanics through which the State expresses itself. The State is a conceptual entity, comprised of the collective agreed-upon beliefs of its people about how and why the State operates. Government is the manifestation of this conceptual body. Government is tasked with a great many responsibilities; most of these responsibilities concern the protection of the people and the provision of collective services that would otherwise be difficult for individuals to access on their own.

The services provided by government are referred to as “public goods,” though “goods” in this sense does not refer to a tangible asset (McCartney and Waugh, 2005). Rather, the notion of “public goods” is a reference to the value of the service provided by the government. The provision of public goods is understandably fraught with controversy. Nearly every function of the government is, directly or indirectly, connected to the provision of public goods. Though there is some consensus among people about what public goods government should provide, there is at least as much disagreement. Political ideologies often determine which public goods one will value, and which public goods one will see as wasteful or otherwise inappropriate. Finding common ground about the relative value and merit of public goods is an ongoing and never-ending process.

The governmental system of the Commonwealth of the Bahamas hews closely to the typical democratic system. Though Queen Elizabeth II is the ostensible Monarch of the

Commonwealth of the Bahamas, she is represented by the Governor General, who is the nominal head of state. The administrative and executive functions of the Executive Branch are presided over by the Prime Minister, who serves as the head of government. It is the Executive Branch that generally oversees the governmental functions that comprise the public sector as most people know it (Profile, 2006).

In the Bahamian system, many of the functions of government are administered through cabinet-level agencies known as Ministries; these Ministries operate under the supervision of a Minister. These cabinet-level Ministers report directly to, and consult with, the Prime Minister. The Ministers are both the administrative and political leaders of their respective Ministries. This means that they oversee the operations of their agencies, and that they are involved both in helping to guide and in responding to public perceptions about political issues pertaining to their area of public service (Profile, 2006).

The Commonwealth of the Bahamas has the following cabinet-level Ministries:

Ministry of Agriculture and Marine Resources

Ministry of Education

Ministry of Finance

Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Immigration

Ministry of Health

Ministry of Housing and National Insurance

Ministry of Labor and Social Development

Ministry of Lands and Local Government

Ministry of Legal Affairs and Office of the Attorney General

Ministry of National Security

Ministry of Public Works and Transport

Ministry of the Environment and Maritime Affairs

Ministry of Tourism and Aviation

Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture

There are, of course, many other functions of government and public service that are not directly addressed or overseen by these Ministries. While many smaller agencies and other specialized organizations are created to fill various needs or respond to various concerns, the above list offers some sense of how the Bahamian system is organized at the governmental and administrative level.

The public sector is responsible for creating and implementing policies. Political leaders set the tone and the agenda for political discourse, though in theory political leaders in a democratic system should be informed by and respond to the will of the people. The practical applications of the policies created in the public sector are what comprise public service.

This application of policies is manifested in the form of public programs. Policies are conceptual; programs are the manner in which policies are translated into action. Through various public programs, the public service sector delivers a wide range of services both to individuals and to private and public organizations; in addition, the public service sector

conducts business between and among the different Ministries and other governmental bodies and organizations.

In order to fund public programs, the public sector is responsible for raising revenue in the form of taxes, user fees, and other revenue streams. The public sector is ostensibly responsible for assuring its own accountability, and outside and independent agencies are also tasked with monitoring and auditing governmental organizations in order to determine how revenue is being spent, or in some cases, misspent. It is regarding revenue and taxes that most complaints about the public sector are made.

IV. The Need for Reform

It is not just the Bahamas that is in need of reform in the public service sector. Reform in the area of public service is being seen in many countries, from other Caribbean nations to countries such as the United States, Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, and many others (CARICAD, 1998). The motives for reform vary from one country to the next and even from one region to the next within a particular country. In some cases, reform is needed to rid the system of corruption; in others, reform is needed simply to bring the public service sector up to the standards and expectations of people in the 21st Century. In the case of the Bahamas, both factors contribute to the need for reform. According to reports from several people employed in the Bahamas public service sector, a system of cronyism and favoritism in the filling of government jobs, the disbursement of government funds, and the creation of government agencies, has been the norm for decades. While the PLP rode into office with the promise to deliver all the gifts that democracy could provide, the reality was that those in positions of leadership quickly grew

complacent, and the tasks of government and public service were assigned to and carried out by an ever-expanding network of friends, family members, political associates, and others who either needed or owed favors of one sort or another.

The Bahamas has been implementing some needed reforms, as have other nations in the region, such as Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, and Jamaica, among others (CARICAD, 1998). In addition to discussing public service reforms in the Bahamas, attention will be paid to reform measures that have been tried elsewhere, in an effort to determine if some measures taken in other nations could and should be transplanted to the Bahamas.

V. Specific Areas of Concern

The information in this section was gathered in a number of ways. The first serious initiatives and calls for reform in the public service sector began as far back as the 1990s, under the PLP administration. While it seems that many needed reforms were not implemented during the time the PLP was first in power, it is still worth examining the available information from that period, as many of the reforms that were suggested then are still relevant today. Information about problems in the public service sector both then and now, as well as information about suggested and implemented reform measures, can be found in official government reports; the reports from independent agencies and commissions; news sources and other forms of media; public pronouncements from organizations such as the Public Service Union of the Bahamas; and directly from those in public service, as several public servants were gracious enough to fill out questionnaires related to their duties in public service, and their views and opinions about what sorts of reforms would be helpful to improve public service.

One common refrain heard from employees and managers in public service relates to the issue of Human Resources. Because privacy laws related to employment are so strict, this is one area that is quite difficult to research; information about hiring policies, training, promotions, employee evaluations, and other areas that fall under the purview of Human Resources can be hard to find. It is in these matters that the information provided in the questionnaires will be especially useful; along with this information, anecdotal evidence will also be discussed, though any information not taken directly linked to its source will be clearly labeled as such, allowing the reader to make his or her own determination about the validity of the information.

VI. Human Resources

One area in need of reform is Public Service Human Resources. Since gaining independence in 1973, the government of the Bahamas has been buffeted by endless charges of corruption in and mismanagement of Human Resource (HR) departments. Despite the creation of standards and guidelines for HR managers and hiring agents, it is an open secret among those in public service and many in the private sphere that the rules as they exist on paper have little bearing on the practical manner in which employees are hired, trained, promoted, or placed in various positions. Several surveys and questionnaires conducted with anonymous respondents who are employed in various sectors of public service in the Bahamas tell similar stories.

One respondent, an HR manager responsible for hiring employees to work in a particular branch of public service (which will not be identified so as to maintain anonymity for the respondent) describes a scenario in which qualifications, education, and experience have little bearing on the application or hiring process. When a position or group of positions opens, the

prerequisite qualifications for the position are made public; this is supposed to avoid a situation where a large number of unqualified or inexperienced people apply for the position(s). Despite the fact that the needed qualifications are clearly delineated, nearly every open position receives a flood of applications from persons with little or no experience or appropriate qualifications for the position.

In many cases these unqualified applicant will still be interviewed for the position; it is not unusual for mid-level HR personnel to receive instructions from supervisors and others that are higher in the hierarchy to bring in certain candidates for interviews. Though it is generally unspoken, several respondents to the aforementioned survey indicated that it is common knowledge that the best way to get an interview is not to have the right qualifications, but simply to know the right people. This cronyism and favoritism has been a part of the public service sector since its inception; as noted earlier, the roots of this phenomena predate Bahamian independence, stretching back to the days of British rule, when patronage and political favoritism were the primary methods by which foreign posts –such as those in the Bahamas- were filled by British subjects.

It is not just in the area of hiring that HR functions are in need of reform. Nearly all aspects of public service HR have been corrupted by the long-standing acceptance of cronyism and favoritism. As each successive generation of employees replaces itself with yet another generation of friends, family members, or political supporters, the gap between the demands of the jobs and the ability for employees to meet those demands grows wider. Training for various positions is often woefully inadequate, with much of it based on an “on the job training” mentality that ensures one unqualified employee will be training another unqualified employee. This lack of standards in the area of training ensures an exponential breakdown of qualifications,

as those poorly trained employees pass ever-diminishing information from one generation of employees to the next.

The issue of promotions and employee evaluations is tied in with these other phenomena as well. All of the respondents to the questionnaire expressed serious misgivings about the manner in which evaluations are conducted and raises and promotions are disbursed. Each respondent indicted that in their respective departments there was no standardization for the conduct of employee evaluations; not only were there few guidelines about how to conduct evaluations, there were no specific determinations about when or how often evaluations should be undertaken.

In most cases, the matter of employee evaluations was left entirely to the individual supervisors and department managers. Managers decided for themselves when to carry out evaluations, or whether to carry them out at all. It was not uncommon, according to the respondents, for managers to arrange for evaluations based on having a social connection with an employee; these evaluations would often be used as a pretext for granting the employee a raise in pay. Conversely, managers and supervisors could use evaluations against employees, as an evaluation with a negative outcome could be used as an excuse to not offer a raise, or to force or block a transfer.

As noted, these borderline-farcical evaluations are often tied to bonuses or raises in pay. A manager who wishes to offer a pay increase to an employee will first create a set of criteria for an evaluation; these criteria are usually generated on a case-by-case basis, and are often tailored to the specific employee. Once a manager or supervisor has generated a positive performance evaluation, it is then sent through to those officials who approve pay raises. Because the

evaluations themselves are arbitrary, as is the selection of which employees will undergo such evaluations, the subsequent pay raises are quite often also arbitrary. Due to the lack of standardization and the uneven application of regulations and guidelines in public service HR, it is not uncommon for employees engaged in the same positions to work under completely different rates of pay. This is understandably a cause of some friction, though it is also so common and so rooted in the tradition of public service in the Bahamas that few people employed in public service actually complain about it.

There are several other policies and trends within the ranks of Public Service HR that are problematic. The first is the rehiring of retired public servants. This idea was first developed as a policy in the late 1990s, when a booming Bahamian economy meant that there were more job openings than there were applicants to fill them. This was also, naturally, a period of rampant cronyism, as desperate hiring managers often took any applicants whom they could get to fill open positions. In this context, it is easy to understand the appeal of rehiring a retired public servant, as he or she will likely require little or no training. Given today's economic climate, the Public Service Union opposes the hiring of retired public servants, asserting that doing so eliminates possibilities for advancement and professional development for younger people employed in the public sector.

The global economic downturn has meant that governments around the world have had to make tough decisions where budgets are concerned (McCartney and Waugh, 2005). Particularly troublesome for HR and department managers is that most people employed in public service make a lifelong career out of it. Budget cuts and downsizing can mean that those remaining in public service are being called upon to do more work for the same pay, often taking on responsibilities that are largely unrelated to their primary position. Other ways that departments

are getting work done is through the use of temporary employees; these employees will naturally have less experience with the demands of the job, and it is often questionable whether the short-term savings in salary is worth the long-term costs associated with ineffectual employees.

The Human Resources divisions of the public service sector are not the only areas in need of reform, of course, though reforming HR will have a positive impact on all areas of public service. As more qualified and experienced employees fill positions in the arena of public service, the delivery of public goods will improve dramatically. Reform is needed throughout the public service sector, but it begins with people, and the skills and qualifications they bring to bear in the execution of their duties.

VII. Other Areas in Need of Reform

It is not just the Human Resource departments in the public service sector that are in need of reform. The culture of cronyism and favoritism has infected all areas of public service. By any measure of public opinion, the public service sector in the Bahamas is bloated, unwieldy, ineffective, and far too costly. Complaints about the Ministries abound; a recent Internet search on Minister of Housing Kenneth Russell turned up page after page of complaints about his performance and conduct in office.

One recent news story, from July 2011, alleges that Mr. Russell has been giving away government-owned land to squatters with the expectation of political favors and support in the future (Anonymous, 2011). Mr. Russell denies the accusations, maintaining that the land in question had been sold for a nominal, but still reasonable, fee, and was done so in an effort to ease the strains of economic hardship for a relatively small group of people. Despite his

explanations, many in the public see this action as just another in a long list of questionable decisions he has made. In his tenure as Minister of Housing, Mr. Russell has cultivated a reputation with the public of being an ineffective public servant, and one who is more concerned with political favoritism and the benefits of holding office than he is with serving the people of the Bahamas (Dames, 2011).

Mr. Russell is certainly not the only public official who has developed such a reputation, and he is not the only one in public service who has become a target of those who see the need for across-the-board reform in the public sector. Because Mr. Russell holds a high-profile position, his actions –and inaction- are visible to the public, while the activities of some others in public service are less obvious. Though Mr. Russell is just one of many public servants, in the minds of many he has come to represent all of the ills in the public sector (Dames, 2011).

Suggestions and plans for reform in the public sector were first formulated almost as soon as the Bahamas gained independence, and calls for reform continue to this day (CARICAD, 1998; Dames, 2011). In the next section, we will examine some of the specific plans and calls for action that have been generated by various organizations both from within the Commonwealth of the Bahamas and from outside her borders.

VIII. Public Service Reform: Literature Review

1. Report on the Caribbean Ministerial Consultation and Workshop of Public Sector Modernisation and Development. (CARICAD, 1998)

As far back as 1998, the Caribbean Centre for Development Administration held a seminar on the topic of Public Service Reform. The organization conducted a series of workshops and discussions aimed at sharing ideas between member nations. Representatives of the governments of twelve countries were in attendance: Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, British Virgin Islands, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Montserrat, St Lucia and Trinidad and Tobago.

Several specific areas of concern were discussed in the various meetings, including:

1. Public Sector Reform and Development

(i) general discussion

2. Country Case Studies

(i) Issues on Executive Agencies;

(ii) Legal and Constitutional Issues.

3. Roundtable Discussions

(i) The Interface of Elected and Non-elected officials;

(ii) Employee Assistance Programmes;

(iii) Human Resource Management Issues.

4. Modernizing and Developing Administrative Structures:

(i) Corporate Governance Issues

(ii) The Caribbean Management Development Association (CMDA): Its Structure, Functions and Proposed Activities.

Representatives from each nation made presentations to the group wherein they offered insight into current and planned reforms in their nation. The Bahamian presentation detailed some of the steps the nation has taken towards reforming its public service sector, such as the use of retired public service officers for specific assignments, increased pay levels, enhanced training, and improved human resource management and the introduction of a certificate course in public administration at the College of the Bahamas.

The workshop was intended to allow the attending nations to share ideas for reform, as many of them also shared similar needs for reform. Many of the presentations, as it turned out, contained similar information, as those charged with planning for reform in one nation often faced the same problems as did those in other nations.

Though this workshop was held over a decade ago, complaints about the public service sector have only grown louder since then. One common refrain from those who are concerned with the lack of change in the public sector is that many of the suggested reforms, such as the ones discussed in these meetings, are either not implemented, or are implemented too slowly and inefficiently.

2. The Civil Service in Latin America and the Caribbean. (Draper, Gordon. 2011)

As the title makes clear, the researcher in this case took a broad view of public service reform, exploring the circumstances of several different regions and making suggestions based on his findings. The report provides a brief overview of current and possible future reform efforts

in the public service sectors of several nations; the bulk of the report, however, is devoted to the topic of Human Resources, with suggestions for improvements in several areas.

Author and researcher Gordon Draper explains that the research for his paper was conducted primarily through the use of questionnaires that had been filled out anonymously by civil servants in the nations he studied. His focus was on reform efforts in Caribbean nations; as a means of comparison, he also examined the public service sectors of several Latin American nations, including Guyana. As for the Caribbean nations, he studied the Bahamas, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Barbados.

Draper found many similarities among the Caribbean nations, both in terms of how their public service sectors were structured, and in what sorts of problems they faced. These nations followed similar paths as they each gained their freedom; all developed various models of democratic rule, and all received large amounts of revenue from tourism. In the Bahamas, as in many Caribbean nations, the public sector is the nation's largest employer, and it is only natural that, as such, it will also have the greatest number of problems related to human Resources and other areas of concern.

Draper continues to detail the common threads he finds among the public sectors of the Caribbean nations. All of the nations adhere to the model of political neutrality; that is the public agencies do not stake out political positions of their own, but instead follow the political guidelines espoused by the party in power. Another shared trait is the idea of implied tenure; most public servants make a lifelong career out of their employment in the public sector.

Draper posits that the tendency for those in the public sector to defer to governmental leadership on political matters may be a remnant of colonial days. Under British rule there

existed a strata of leadership; the Monarch ruled from Great Britain, but the geographic and temporal distance between the Monarch and the Bahamas meant that another, practical layer of government had to be in place on the island. When the British took control of the island, there was no large, overriding governmental or political system with which they had to contend or compete. This allowed the British to rather easily install their top-down style of leadership, and the public sector under British administration functioned much as it does today, in terms of politics.

Despite this tendency for those in the public sector to defer on overtly political matters, Draper's research found a number of problems related to the communication between public agencies and Ministries, and the Ministers and senior leaders who oversee them. The interface between those working within the various ministries and the Ministers themselves is often quite ineffective, and even adversarial. Draper notes a deep, abiding sense of mistrust between the two "sides," with neither side convinced that the other side has anything but its own interests at heart.

One source of what Draper refers to as "anxiety" is that the Ministers operate under enormous political pressures. They are tasked with pleasing their constituents, and are often asked to do things that may be difficult or impossible for their Ministry to carry out. Still, these leaders do often ask their subordinates to work towards difficult goals; this conflict between outside political pressures and the realities of Ministerial capabilities is often the source of much contention.

Draper goes on to discuss a common problem in public service; he refers to it as "inadequate preparation." This term, as used in the paper, covers everything from unqualified applicants vying for open positions to established employees who are not provided with the

training needed to properly do their jobs. As has been seen, this problem at the HR level is one of the most common, and most serious, areas of concern for those interested in reforming the public service sector.

Draper notes that public service is, in large part, the very definition of government in action. The Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) has delineated several goals for reforming governance and the public service sector throughout the Caribbean. Draper reprints highlights from their broader list of suggestions; those that Draper included in his report are listed here:

- (a) A modern, effective, and accountable public sector that promotes equity in sharing the benefits of development activities through effective and efficient delivery of public services;
- (b) Local, national, and regional institutions with the capacity to meet the needs and challenges of adjusting to globalization and integrating market oriented public policies with poverty reduction.
- (c) Significant participation of poor and vulnerable people in social partnerships national consensus building, local development planning and resource allocation and the functioning of local public services that benefit the poor.
- (d) Adequate regulatory frameworks for setting and enforcing sound environmental and social standards.

While some of the suggestions seem obvious, it bears repeating that several concerted efforts have been made to reform public service in the Bahamas, to little effect. With the problems so deeply entrenched in the very culture of public service, it may take much more

repetition and reiteration of suggestions and ideas for reform before they will be heard and implemented.

Though Draper's report is extensive, and covers many areas of public service that need reform, it is when he turns his attention to Human Resources that his report makes its biggest mark. Draper first discusses the matter of Service Commissions. These commissions are remnants from the colonial days; they were intended to insulate public servants from political interference. In order to ensure that politicians did not get involved in recruitment, hiring, firing, or disciplining those in the public sector, the commissions were created to handle much of those tasks. The commissions have largely disbanded, though some remain in place. More significantly, though, many of the standards they followed have cemented into traditions, and it is these traditions that in many ways are responsible for the lazy manner in which applicants are screened or employees are evaluated. Draper concludes that effective reform would bring these commissions –and their traditions- to an end.

The bulk of the information that Draper presents in the section on Human Resources was culled from responses to questionnaires he had sent out in the months leading up to the writing of the report. Draper points out that many of the questionnaires were never returned, while many of the ones that were returned were not filled out completely. This paper was also predicated on the use of questionnaires; many of these questionnaires were also returned in an incomplete state, while many others were never returned. Draper asserts that the (lack of) overall response to the questionnaires is indicative of the need for adequate “information systems” at the HR level (Draper, 2001; p16).

Human Resources: Demographic and Statistical Information

The report offers some demographic information about public sector employees in Bahamas (and in several other nations). In the Bahamas, those employed in the public sector make up nearly 11% of the labor force, and comprise roughly 5% of the total population. 45% of public sector employees are males; the remaining 55% are females. This tendency for females to work in the public sector at a slightly higher rate than males was true not just for the Bahamas, but throughout the other Caribbean nations studied in the report.

The Bahamas adheres to a single legal system that governs all legal aspects of employment in public service. All the rules and regulations pertaining to worker's rights and responsibilities, as well as the manner in which workers may seek career advancement or salary increases, are delineated by law and apply equally to all. Draper notes that this differs from a number of other nations, some of which apply different standards and rules to different aspects of public service.

Responses to Questionnaires

The following section contains some of the questions that were posed in the questionnaires that were the basis of Draper's report. A brief summation of the answers will be provided after each question:

To what extent does the public service employment system in your country coincide with the general labor system regulating private employment?

Responses to this question from most of the Caribbean nations, including the Bahamas, were quite similar. Respondents from the Bahamas indicated that public sector managers had to follow the strictures of the Fair Labor Relations Act, as did employers in the private sector. Employers in the public sector can offer whatever salaries, terms, and conditions they choose; there is no concerted effort to standardize wages and salaries for different positions or job types.

The decision to hire a new employee and important subsequent decisions regarding assignments, promotions and evaluations are made by the following, regardless of which legal system applies:

- ***The director of the unit or division***
- ***The head of the institution or agency***
- ***A body with cross-organizational responsibility***

Many respondents from the Bahamas indicated that a “body with cross-organizational responsibility” was tasked with making hiring decisions. In some cases, the public service organizations in question still had hiring decisions made by Service Commissions. In other cases, individual managers and department heads make hiring decisions. In much the same way as salaries and wages are not standardized, the same holds true for hiring decisions in the Bahamas.

Of the following choices, which best describes the system used to hire new employees?

- ***Formal system using testing, neutral panels, competition among candidates, and other means that assure the best candidate is hired***
- ***Informal system that uses some objective criteria and the discretion of the hiring manager***
- ***System based entirely on managerial discretion, irrespective of any qualifying criteria***
- ***Mixed system where different approaches are taken at different times and for different positions***

Most respondents from the Bahamas selected the second variant, with the fourth variant coming in at second place. There are few hiring restrictions in the Bahamas, and none for ethnicity or gender. Typical public service jobs begin with a six-month probationary period, at the end of which a probation report is supposed to be written by the probationer’s supervisor,

though there were some indications that these reports were not always written, and many employees would automatically be placed in regular status.

Job Security

Jobs in public service in the Bahamas are relatively secure. It is this job security that many of those calling for reform claim is at the heart of the problems associated with the public sector. The process for dismissing someone from a public service job is usually time-consuming and complicated, as those who are threatened with dismissal have the right to hearings on the matter, and to challenge allegations and accusations against them. Generally, a public service employee must commit fairly serious offenses in order to be terminated.

Employee Classification

There are different types of employee classifications, such as temporary, probationary, permanent, and contract employee. In recent years, some special projects undertaken by the government have made use of contract employees who are signed on for the duration of the project; these employees differ from temporary employees in that the length of their service is almost always predetermined, and they may be contracted to fill a wide range of positions, whereas temporary employees are often hired on a day-to-day basis, and are typically tasked with menial jobs or general labor positions. In the case of special projects requiring contract employees, it is not unusual for a regular employee to take a leave of absence from his or her regular job in order to contract for the special project.

Promotion Systems

When asked about promotion systems, few of Draper's respondents from the Bahamas provided answers. The available literature on the subject does seem to describe this as a gray area, where few specific rules and regulations apply. While Draper's respondents largely avoided the question, several of this paper's respondents did address it, and the answers were not unexpected. As described earlier in this paper, a supervisor or department manager makes many promotion decisions – like many hiring decisions- on a whim. This is another area of concern for those calling for reform. Along with promotions, horizontal mobility between positions typically involves the discretion of the managers involved, though there are few official regulatory restrictions on such horizontal moves.

Performance Evaluations

In the matter of Performance Evaluations, Draper's report says the following:

There seems to be a prevailing view that the performance evaluation systems and tools currently in place are not effective.

Draper's assessment of the performance evaluation standards in Bahamian public service is a bit of an understatement. By all accounts, performance evaluations in nearly all sectors of public service are haphazard affairs, based not on standardized criteria, but on the whims of whoever is charged with conducting the evaluation. It is here that friendship and cronyism can benefit an employee, as a glowing performance evaluation can mean the difference between maintaining one's rate of pay and receiving an increase. Draper asserts that performance evaluations are generally used to make determinations about pay raises and promotions; the typical performance evaluation in Bahamian public service is largely useless in those capacities, lacking as it does any sense of objectivity.

Generally, performance evaluations in Bahamian public service are generated as a formality when a manager is seeking a pay raise for one of his or her employees; such evaluations, by their nature, tend to be overwhelmingly positive. Considering the difficulty managers often have in terminating public service employees, negative performance evaluations would be mostly useless.

Training and Career Development

There seems to be little in the way of formal training programs in the public service sectors of the Caribbean nations. There are occasions where an employee may request specific training; decisions to fulfill such requests are made on a case-by-case basis. There are also some generalized training programs that are offered to all employees, from mandatory safety training to optional training about various subjects. Aside from very specific roles such as police officers, most training is done on the job.

Wages and Salaries

Generally speaking, starting wages and salaries are delineated for each position in Bahamian public service. Pay raises and salary increases are determined on a case-by-case basis, which means that, over time, people engaged in the same job can earn disparate rates of pay. From a regulatory standpoint, most positions are intended to receive equal pay for equal work; the disparity between the regulations and the practical reality is yet another source of contention for those seeking reform.

Pressures on Public Service Sectors

Draper determines that many of the situations and circumstances that are exerting pressure on the Bahamian public service sector are found throughout the Caribbean nations.

Among the pressures that may lead to reform of the public sector, the report identifies

- Internal financial problems; budget cuts
- External financial circumstances; global downturn, decrease in tourism
- Population growth and the need to do more with less
- Public demand for improved services

Draper lists several other factors in his report; most are either closely or tangentially related to fiscal concerns. As financial circumstances have hit public and private organizations as well as individuals, the demand for quality public services is increasing just as the monies available for public budgets is decreasing.

Most of the nations involved in this study are in the process of implementing reforms in their public service sectors. The bulk of these reforms have been predicated on the concept of New Public Management (NPM). The NPM model will be discussed in greater detail later in this paper; in the context of Draper's report, the changes based on NPM that he details are driven by the effort to adapt proven management techniques from the private sector for use in the public sector.

Draper places significant emphasis on the need for reform in the area of Public Service Human Resources. Nearly every system and function of HR is antiquated and inefficient. Changes to Public Service HR, from providing adequate training to extant and new employees to a complete overhaul of hiring practices, reforming Public Service HR will have immediate

benefits to that sector and long-term benefits that will be felt throughout the entire public service sector.

2. Public Sector Reform: Principles and Perspectives and a Comparative Overview of Public Sector Reform in the United States and the Commonwealth of the Bahamas

(McCartney, Donald M. and Waugh, William. 2005)

Overview of Public Service

In this report, Donald M. McCartney and William Waugh focused on fewer nations than did the previous report, choosing to compare reform efforts in the Bahamian system of public service to similar efforts in the United States. Where the previous report paid special attention to the need for reform in Public Service Human Resources, McCartney and Waugh take a broader view as they discuss the need for reform in all areas of public service.

This report echoes other studies of public service in the Bahamas by restating the theme of “political neutrality” and the fact that public service organizations typically work with the political leanings of the presiding administration. In recent decades, the leadership of the Bahamas has changed hands several times, being passed back and forth between a progressive and a conservative party. As one party is supplanted by the other, the public service sector simply falls in line with the politics of the new administration. Many of the functions and programs promulgated by the government have political components; it would be awkward and disruptive in the public sector operated according to its own internal political determinations.

Before entering a discussion on reform, McCartney and Waugh first attempt to define the role of government and what “public service” actually means. As the authors define it, public

service comprises most of the functions of government; as such, discussions about reform are by necessity wide-ranging and potentially complex and even confusing. Despite these potential limitations to their discussion, the authors effectively manage to cover a fair amount of rhetorical ground within the context of a relatively brief report.

Discussion of Reform in the Public Service Sector in the Commonwealth of the Bahamas

The current system of government in the Bahamas grew out of the system established in the 1700s by the British as they colonized the island. The colonial government was based largely on systems already extant in Great Britain, with adaptations made for circumstances in the Bahamas. By the early 1800s the Board system was established with the creation of the Board of Education, followed a few years later by the Board of Health. As legislation was passed that granted legitimacy to these Boards, more were created to oversee various concerns of public life.

As the Bahamas were moving towards independence, the nation's Constitution was reworked in 1964; among the changes to the document was the creation of the Ministerial System; this system remains in place, relatively intact, to this day. It was during this era that the Service Commissions were formed. Prior to the Constitutional reform of 1964, many governmental agencies and organizations were heavily politicized; they were often staffed with people who were politically beholden to someone in high office, and the agency or organization could easily be steered into acting in a manner that was beneficial to a particular party or politician.

The impetus for creating the Service Commissions was to separate political influence from the functions of recruiting, hiring, promoting, and job placement within the various public service organizations. While it has been noted that the overarching political stance of the party in

power will be followed but the public service sector, there was still a concern that Ministers could gain unfair political advantages if they were able to stock the Ministries and other organizations with employees who were overly loyal to that particular politician.

McCartney and Waugh place much less emphasis on what circumstances have led to the need for reform. Where Draper discussed Service Commissions in some detail, and explained their controversial nature, McCartney and Waugh spend little time exploring the causes of problems in the public service sector, choosing instead to simply focus on what reform efforts have been undertaken and what reforms may be implemented in the future. The authors first provide a list of benefits –some minor, some more significant- that have been provided to public sector employees between 1964 and 1998:

- *Salary advances* • *Medical loans* • *Mileage allowance* • *Overtime not over 35 hours per month*
- *Extended sick leave* • *Vacation leave for maternity purposes* • *Special leave with pay up to a maximum of six days* • *Attendance at meetings and conferences overseas without financial implications, and* • *Crossing efficiency bars with respect to salary scales* (McCartney and Waugh, 2005).

While this list of perks and benefits must have been warmly received by public sector employees, the various items on the list do not comprise anything that could correctly be identified as a “reform;” the benefit derived from these items went largely to the employee receiving it. For something to be classified as a reform, it would have to provide a benefit not just for the employee or the entire organization, but also for the members of the public that are served by the organization. In that light, the following list represents changes to public service employment and functions that could better be declared “reforms”:

• *Introduction of new performance appraisal system* • *Customer service initiative at the Registrar General's Office* • *Reform of the Royal Bahamas Police Force*¹⁷ • *Privatization* • *Contracting out* • *Employing contracted workers* • *Corporatization* • *Budget and service cuts* • *Decentralization* • *Redesign of public sector structure, and* • *Public sector and private sector partnerships*

The first item on the list, the “Introduction of a New Performance Appraisal System,” may be the sort of “reform” that, at first glance, seems to only be a potential benefit to the employee being appraised. In fact, such a system would have wide-ranging effects and repercussions; as new systems are created that reward those who excel at their jobs, the resulting improvement in individual employees will eventually translate into overall improvements in the organization.

It is interesting to compare the report from McCartney and Waugh with that of Draper; the former was written in 2005 while the latter was written in 2001. Despite the sense of urgency conveyed in Draper’s report –and in many other articles and news reports of the day- few, if any, of the reforms suggested in Draper’s report had been implemented by 2005. Most of the concerns expressed by Draper are mirrored precisely in the report by McCartney and Waugh. In their report, the authors assert that it will take political pressure to make reform happen. The report encourages the public to become involved in local and regional politics for several reasons. The first, as noted, is simply to gain proximity and access to those politicians who can actually work at reforming the public service sector. The second reason to become involved in politics is for the opportunity it affords to understand how government works. Armed with a better understanding of how public service organizations function, those interested in reform are better-equipped to target their efforts in ways that can actually achieve practical results.

3. Public Sector Reform Programmes and Performance Management in Trinidad and Tobago (Beresford, Riley and Nunes, Micheline. 2004)

In 2004 a seminar was held in Barbados that focused on how large-scale change in public sector management could be implemented with minimal disruption and maximum benefit. Authors Beresford Riley and Micheline Nunes crafted a position paper on behalf of the government of Trinidad and Tobago; this paper discussed the implementation of Change Management to ensure that the transition from an antiquated system of public sector management to a more efficient and effective system would be as smooth as possible. It is clear from the available literature that the need for public service reform in the Bahamas is quite similar to the circumstances in Trinidad and Tobago. With very few exceptions, the suggestions put forth by Riley and Nunes are interchangeable between the Bahamas and Trinidad and Tobago.

At the time the authors wrote this paper, the public sector HR needs were met by four disparate organizations. The first, the Personnel Department, advises on salary and wages for public sector jobs, and provides consulting and communication assistance between the other HR agencies. Next is the Service Commissions Department which oversees recruitment, hiring, promotions, transfers, and other day to day functions of HR. Third is the Public Management Consulting Division; this agency is responsible for creating new jobs and for developing procedural and regulatory materials relevant to public service HR. The fourth agency is known as the Pensions Branch; as its name implies, this agency is responsible for disbursing funds to retired public service employees.

Overview

Riley and Nunes note that the HR system in Trinidad and Tobago is antiquated and unwieldy, and they recognize the need for “an integrated performance management system” (Riley and Nunes, 2004) that will tie all of the various HR functions together into one efficient system. The HR system is fragmented here for much the same reason as it is in the Bahamas: governmental control of the island nation was developed in fits and starts, and has been reformed and revamped several times just in the last half-century. The Service Commissions in Trinidad and Tobago arose for the same reason they did in the Bahamas: to keep the process of hiring, firing, and promoting employees free of intense politicization. Many of those calling for reform in each nation are advocating for the abolition of the Commissions, asserting that they are remnants of an outmoded system that would have no place in an entirely-revamped system of management.

History of Public Sector Reform

Riley and Nunes provide a detailed account of public sector reform efforts that have taken place in Trinidad and Tobago from the 1960s to the present. Though the specifics of each initiative are not relevant to a discussion about reform efforts in the Bahamas, it is worthy of note that many of the initiatives launched in Trinidad and Tobago directly parallel initiatives that were undertaken in the Bahamas.

Current Initiatives in Public Sector Reform

At the time this paper was written, a new round of reform initiatives was being considered. Much of the paper is devoted to discussing the initial steps that would need to be taken if reform efforts were to be implemented. The authors outline four specific objectives of the new programme:

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

While at first glance these objectives may appear to be too broad and general to be of any real benefit, a closer examination reveals that they are actually quite necessary first steps. The main thrust of the objectives is in identifying needed reforms, garnering political support for the implementation of those reforms, and creating a plan of action that will allow that implementation to take place as the old systems of public service are dismantled, all without interrupting the delivery of any public services.

The paper discusses a wide range of programmes and initiatives intended to foment needed reform in the public service sector. Each initiative was intended to build on the strengths and successes of those which came before. The first step was to identify the issues and areas of concern that reform should target. After making these determinations, it would be necessary to instigate a nationwide dialog about the issue of reform. Once the need for reform was firmly established in the national psyche, the real work of reform would begin. Experts in various fields would be contacted and hired; reform efforts would require experts in various aspects of public service, and would also require experts in change management and the implementation of new policies and functions into an extant, operating organization.

After the initial steps are taken to establish the need for reform and to put in place a foundation of financial resources and experts who can work to create the new system of

management, the real work will begin. In some instances, the functions of public services will be strengthened to the point of redundancy; as the transition from the older management systems to the new management systems is made, these strengthened services will ensure that the delivery of services to the public is uninterrupted.

As is the case with much of the research into public service reform, the authors of this report focus their attention first and foremost on the HR sector. The steps needed to bring about positive change in public service begin with the people that carry out the functions of public service. It is clear from this and other reports that the public service sector in the Bahamas (and in other Caribbean nations) is based on completely antiquated systems of HR management. The authors of this report have created a direct, straightforward plan that goes beyond simply making general suggestions about “change” and “reform,” and offers concrete steps that can and should be taken to ensure that the transition from the old way of doing things to the new way of doing things runs as smoothly as possible. The government of the Bahamas could do well to study this report, as many of the ideas it contains could benefit the Bahamas as well as Trinidad and Tobago.

IX. New Approaches to Old Problems

It is clear that reform is needed in the Bahamian public service sector. In many ways, the structures and traditions that determine how public service is managed and implemented are living fossils, remnants of a system that was put in place hundreds of years ago. In some cases, recruiting, hiring, and promotions in the public sector are still managed by a commission that was designed decades ago, in an era where little training was needed to perform most jobs, and

little experience was necessary to be hired for most jobs. In the last half century the world has become a very different place. Instant communication, the Internet, computers, and other forms of technology have changed the way billions of people work and play.

Working in public service in the Bahamas is like stepping back in time. Many of the functions of public service are carried out no differently than they have been throughout the nation's history. As the public service sector has stagnated, the rest of the world has continued to develop. The people of the Commonwealth of the Bahamas have expectations of their government leaders and their public service sector that are not being met. Looking through newspaper articles and editorials about the state of Bahamian public service from 1981, 1991, 2001, and 2011 reveals a litany of complaints that is markedly unchanged from 30 years ago to today.

For many, public service is a career. It is difficult to remove someone from a position in public service and the current system of management, while it does not actually encourage sloth and complacency, also does little to discourage it. In the current system, job candidates are often selected simply for showing up, or because they have a friend in the organization. Those who are already employed in public service do not get ahead based on performance or merit, but simply based on friendships or political favoritism. In the face of these circumstances, it seems almost unfathomable that reform could ever be implemented, as the obstacles seem insurmountable. Despite these challenges, however, reform is not just necessary, it is imperative. The system as it exists now cannot continue to stand under its own power. Even in good economic times the system was dysfunctional; in today's stark economic climate, the costs of maintaining the current system are simply too high.

If the Bahamas are to replace their current system with one that works more efficiently, what sort of system should replace it? In the last few decades, many governmental and bureaucratic systems have supplanted their outmoded administrative models with systems built on the concept of New Public Management. What is New Public Management, and is it the solution to the problems faced by the public sector in the Bahamas?

The term “New Public Management” is actually a catch-all phrase that refers to many different theoretical models; at their core, however, these different theories of management have some common elements. Simply put, New Public Management (NPM) refers to the application of private-sector principles to the public sector (Levy, 2010). There are an endless number of different public-sector organizations, and there are as many approaches to managing private-sector organizations that can be transposed or adapted to those public organizations.

NPM arose in the late 1980s during the time that Ronald Reagan was the U.S. President and Margaret Thatcher was the Prime Minister of Great Britain (Besosa, 2007). Reagan and Thatcher presided in an era when conservative principles of business were seeing renewed popularity, and the idea that private-sector principles could be applied to the operations of government began to garner some serious attention and consideration (Besosa, 2007). A corollary of this concept was that many functions of government were being “privatized;” proponents asserted that privatization would save the government money and that competition among businesses that were interested in doing the work that had formerly been the purview of government would lead to lower prices and greater efficiency (Levy, 2010). Whether privatization of government functions actually saves money or promotes efficiency is a question for another paper; what is relevant here is whether the principles of privatization can be applied directly to public organizations.

There are some insurmountable differences between private and public organizations. Perhaps the greatest difference between the two types of organizations is the way each acquires revenue. Private organizations typically rely on generating profits to acquire revenue; whether selling materials or finished goods, or providing services, the primary function of any private organizations is to create revenue in order to continue functioning. Public organizations, by contrast, typically count on allocations from tax revenues or similar sources of funding. According to those who support the role of NPM in governmental systems and other public organizations, these differences, while significant, do not mean that public organizations cannot benefit from the application of some private-sector principles (Levy, 2010).

Proponents of NPM assert that public organizations should be run more like businesses, with close attention paid to budgets, cost-cutting, and the bottom line (Besosa, 2007). Some even envision ways in which sprawling, monolithic organizations can become “competitive;” by changing an organization’s management structure, an organization that once functioned as a single entity can be divided into smaller organizations, each with specialized functions (Levy, 2010). Goals that are set for these smaller organizations to reach can be tied to incentives, such as additional funding for a favored project; the first of these smaller organizations to reach its goal is awarded the prize. This is just a simplified example, of course; the ways in which private-sector principles can be applied to public organizations are generally far more complex than that example, though it does serve to illustrate the basic idea.

It is easy to understand why NPM would be attractive to those who function inside a large, unwieldy public service organization, or to those for whom reform of such organizations is a priority. The idea that bulky public service organizations can be broken down into small, efficient operations is certainly attractive. In fact, in the face of some challenges, such as the

challenges of reforming the public service sector in the Bahamas, there seem to be few workable options for replacing the current system. It almost seems as if the NPM model is the exact opposite of the current model; as such, it seems like an obvious choice to replace the system currently in place.

While the NPM model does seem quite attractive at first glance, it is already falling out of favor in many circles (Levy, 2010). While the application of NPM principles has been shown to have a positive effect in many cases, those positive outcomes are not always sustainable; as time goes on, the shortcomings of NPM become more noticeable. The primary problem is a simple one: management principles for private sector organizations are based on earning a profit, while the management principles for public sector organizations are based on satisfying the needs of clients (Levy, 2010). Invariably the public sector organizations that abide by private sector principles eventually become dissatisfied as the focus on people is supplanted by a focus on revenue streams and the bottom line.

NPM models are based on ideas such as “output” and “flexibility,” but these models lack any sense that the purpose of most public organizations is to serve people (Besosa, 2007). A satisfied client is not merely “output,” and a public servant who goes out of the way to assure that a client is satisfied is not being merely “flexible.” The implementation of NPM models will likely reveal their shortcomings in time, as the absence of the “human factor” would become more noticeable over time. There are certainly some elements of the NPM models that, when applied to public organizations, could be of some benefit; in the long run, however, they are not the solution to the problem of public sector reform.

If the NPM model is not the perfect solution to reforming public organizations in general –and the public service sector of the Bahamas in particular- then what is the solution? How can reform be implemented?

The answer to that question may be a simple one. It is clear from reading the available literature on the subject of public sector reform that Human Resource departments should be targeted first when it is time to implement reform. It is there that the disparities between where the organizations are, and where they need to be, can best be assessed and dealt with. In fact, once a thorough examination of the public service sector is undertaken, it becomes clear that every problem, every shortcoming, every way in which the public sector organization fails to meet its actual goals or simply fails to meet public expectations, has, at its core, a connection to Human Resources. In some instances the lack of adequate training means a public servant cannot effectively execute his or her duties. In other circumstances budget cuts have left a Ministry or other organization shorthanded, leaving some members of the public dissatisfied with the Ministry. No matter what the problem, it can in some way be connected to Human Resources.

If every problem that is manifested in the public service sector can be connected to Human Resources, it stands to reason that the solutions to those problems can be found there as well. The position paper developed for Trinidad and Tobago takes a very different approach. It is quite possible that the plan being formulated for Trinidad and Tobago is a workable plan, and that if it is implemented it will allow their outmoded public service sector to be completely replaced by a new management system. What is of some concern with that plan, however, is that it is fairly complicated, and it is likely to be very expensive. The costs for such a program could, in fact, be so prohibitive as to make it impossible to implement it. That plan begins with an extensive PR campaign wherein the notion of public sector reform is “sold” to the nation’s

citizenry. Once the idea of reform has entered the public discourse, and has gained a foothold as something that is supported in theory, the real work of paying for it begins.

The next phase of the plan takes place on two tracks simultaneously; on one track, “experts” in management and public service are gathering together to formulate plans for the third phase of the project, while on the second track the current management system is being strengthened and bolstered in preparation for the time when the old system will switch over to the new one. In the final stage, the new management system is brought up to operating speed alongside the old system, and the functions of the old system are handed off to the new system one by one.

While that plan sounds good –even foolproof- on paper, there is no question that such a plan would be monumentally expensive. One of the most significant factors that is motivating the push for reform is the pressure being exerted on the Bahamian government due to the financial troubles that have plagued not just the Bahamas, but nations around the world. It seems somewhat counterintuitive that a plan to help alleviate the financial burdens caused by an outdated public service system should end up costing enough to fund that outdated system for years.

The solution to the problem of public sector reform lies in the most valuable capital available to a democratic system of government: human capital. Most of the studies, articles, and reports about public sector reform spend time discussing the need for reform in the Human Resource departments. In every instance, however, the plans for HR reform are presented as a part of a larger plan. This approach may ultimately miss the mark. One common theme that pops up while researching this topic is that calls for reform have been made since the inception of the

independent Bahamian nation. Each successive generation cries out for reform, and even points out the same problems year after year, decade after decade. Despite these cries for reform, little seems to get done, and the problem just gets worse every year.

It stands to reason that a new plan is on order. Various studies have indicated a few core reforms that could be –and should be- applied to the public service sector. The implementation of these ideas would be relatively inexpensive, and they could easily be tied to incentive plans that would ensure enthusiastic participation from all members of public service organizations. These ideas are nothing new; in fact, they are the few basic ideas that are mentioned in nearly everything that has been written on the subject. Here, briefly, is a list of suggested HR reforms:

1. Eliminate the Service Commissions. Expenditures for Service Commissions to be redirected to training for department managers, HR managers, and other members of the public service organization who hold positions appropriate to the role of assessing job applicants.
2. Eliminate “cattle-call” job interviews. Implement new hiring standards; demand that candidates for a job actually have the requisite skills, experience, or education for the open position. Incentives for finding qualified candidates can be created to add value to this change.
3. Implement appropriate Performance Evaluation standards. Eliminate non-standardized, “friendship-based” evaluations. Implement the administration of regularly scheduled performance evaluations for all employees; this will help break the current pattern of only conducting evaluations when an employee is seeking a raise.
4. Implement merit-pay standards for pay raises. Currently, managers generate nearly-meaningless performance evaluations and send them along with written requests for a pay raise

for one of their subordinates. In a system where performance evaluations are conducted regularly, the results of all such evaluations can be considered together.

5. Implement Promotion Standards based on performance evaluations and testing
6. Implement training programs for all positions.
7. Implement policies that make it more difficult for ineffective employees to keep their jobs

There is no question that some of these reforms will be controversial, and it is likely that the Public Service Union will oppose many of them. The situation in the Bahamas, however, is becoming untenable, and if reforms are not implanted soon, the reality of the fiscal situation will become clear as more departments are shuttered and more employees are cut loose. The system as it exists today is bloated and top-heavy; money is wasted unnecessarily to prop up a public service system that is completely outdated and inefficient. Implementation of these simple reforms will, in short order, begin to save money for the public sector. A well-trained staff of public servants will complete their duties and meet their responsibilities more quickly and more efficiently; the money saved by streamlining these operations can be used to create incentive programs for employees that will make the reforms more attractive.

Most of the reform plans for the public service sector in the Bahamas have HR reform as a part of a larger plan. Year after year, suggestions for reform are put forth by researchers or advisory panels or private groups, and year after year these suggestions are ignored. It is time to stop seeing Public Service Human Resource reform as one part of a larger plan, and begin to see it as the only plan. People are at the heart of public service, and it is there that reform can, and must, begin.

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