THE SITUATION OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION ORGANIZATIONS IN THE CARIBBEAN

A Review of National and Regional Issues and Challenges

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CONTENTS

• The Origin of Caribbean Public Administration Organizations
• Issues and Problems in Caribbean Public Administration
  - Dilution of the Notion of Neutrality
  - The Demise of the Meritocracy
  - The Restrictions of Smallness
• Re Engineering the White Hall Model
  - CARICAD and the Reform Agenda
  - Application of the Change Management Philosophy
  - Synthesizing the Imperative of political control and the precepts of depoliticized administration
Public Administration in the CARICOM states has been hindered by weaknesses in governance that has led to the identification of three areas where strategic interventions are thought feasible to achieve positive results:

1. Changing the nature of political leadership and policymaking
2. Reasserting the importance of merit based depoliticized administration with greater attention to sustained human resource planning, training and development
3. De-concentrating power and authority to professional administrators
With the exception of Suriname and Haiti, the machinery of public administration in CARICOM member states was shaped by the British colonial government during the period of colonial rule.

British institutional forms and traditions are deeply embedded in our societies following on three centuries of unbroken British administration prior to the achieving of independence.
The Westminster based parliamentary political system which in the Caribbean evolved from crown colony status, through embryonic ministerial systems, to the development of full cabinet systems, internal self government, and finally the post independence systems with the Queen as Head of State excepting Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, and Dominica.

The Whitehall model of public administration based on the notion of civil service neutrality, anonymity, and impartiality.
In the colonial period, day to day administration was carried out through various departments each administered by a chief professional officer who was in turn responsible to a Colonial Secretary, or Governor in some instances, who was in turn responsible to the imperial government.
With self government then independence, decision making and executive authority was transferred from Governors and Colonial Secretaries to local elected politicians serving as ministers.

Under this form of ministerial system which obtains up to the present time, responsibility for policy decisions shifted from chief professional officers to ministers of an elected government assisted by officials, the senior of whom are the Ministers’ senior advisors, the Permanent Secretary or as re dubbed in Belize in 2000, the Chief Executive Officer.
In managerial terms, a fundamental change in leadership and decision making at the strategic apex of these public bureaucracies had occurred.

The status of the chief professional officer positions transformed into the head of department/chief technical officer configurations that were established.

A clear separation of leadership and managerial functions at the macro organizational level that had not existed hitherto was instituted.

A new political elite emerged coinciding with the birth of a new administrative cadre, the Permanent Secretaries and Heads of departments the latter now clearly responsible for purely operational and policy execution duties at the micro organization/department level.
Generally, the post colonial administrations attempted to follow the White Hall model based on the notion of:

- a politically neutral public service, organized around a career-based group of professional administrators and chief technical officers; recruited, appointed and promoted using merit criteria, one of the hall marks of the model.

The establishing of Public Service Commissions in the period of internal self government provided a virtually autonomous framework for the recruitment, promoting and disciplining of civil servants. They were later embedded in the respective independence constitutions
In the post independence period most of the CARICOM governments created Public Service Ministerial portfolios with specific ministerial configurations to manage public service management affairs.

There emerged a form of organization that emphasized the sovereignty of politics over the supremacy of administration. Politics became the most important activity with ministers assuming unquestionable supremacy over decision making.
ISSUES AND PROBLEMS AFFECTING CARIBBEAN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

- Over time political influence on personnel matters has increased and has deteriorated into instances of nepotism, patronage based appointments, and denial of jobs to non supporters of the governing party.

- The result is that administrative structures have evolved into patronage institutions and not agencies of change and development.

- The system of meritocracy has eroded as a result of this assault and the doctrine of neutrality, impartiality and anonymity as a prerequisite for depoliticized service rings increasingly hollow.
The over centralization of authority at the strategic apex of ministry organizations has led to the following observation:

- “Heads of departments do not have the authority to discharge their responsibilities of running their departments efficiently because they do not have sufficient authority, particularly in relation to discipline” (Bain).
There is also the regional phenomenon of authority erosion resulting from political appointments and the perception by appointees that their line of authority and communication is not to the head of department but to ministers.
• A general weakness in human resource planning and development has also been identified as a matter requiring priority and sustained attention.

• Related to this is the almost intractable issue of the recruitment and retention of technical, managerial, and professional staff, too often lured by better paying prospects in the private sector and abroad.

• The brain drain continues unabated.
• A general inability to provide training in service to middle level and potential top managers is seen to be an important factor causing a decline in the quality of organizational leadership and management

• Low morale, poor performance, and low productivity levels have emerged as common characteristics of the region’s public administration organizations
• The establishment of statutory bodies and executive agencies has met with various levels of success in improving performance and productivity in some areas, but certainly much more politicized than the departmental organizations.

• The Jamaican experiment with specialized executive agencies is worthy of evaluation to determine whether their results-focused mandates can be incorporated into the mainstream development agenda
The issues relating to generally small economies and endemic resource and budgetary constraints are also to be taken into account in understanding the obstacles to the development of effective public administration organizations in the region.
RE ENGINEERING THE WHITEHALL MODEL

- In basic managerial terms the regional quest to develop effective and efficient public administrative organizations, identifies three key dimensions that require attention:
  1. leadership,
  2. human resource development and
  3. appropriate development management.
• Undergirding these dimensions is the need to instill a development ethos in the visioning that has been introduced to capacitate the leaders and managers of the organizations.

• As defined, it is:
  • “an action oriented, will-enhancing, skills-nurturing, goal-seeking process which is guided by clearly defined objectives. It is concerned with the...mobilization of existing resources and the creation and sustaining of new resources to realize the stated goals [including] prompt execution of development plans, programmes and projects, and measures to raise management skills and capability”
Since 1980 and within this framework, the Caribbean Centre for Development Administration has endeavored with varying levels of achievement to fulfill the mandate it was given by the Heads of Government of CARICOM:

- to support the building of leadership and management capacities in the respective governments of the region... as a factor of meaningful change
It is evident that over time the highly publicized rhetoric of public sector reform has not achieved the synthesis required between the political control imperative and the de-politicization of administration.

Without this synthesis, the general state of stunted bureaucratic effectiveness prevails.
• The politically recognized need for change in the nature of political leadership in the strategic apex of the public administration organizations co-exists with the persisting inability of the political parties to transcend the level of reproducing more of the same.
In this prevailing environment acquiring knowledge of what to do, in particular the making of leaders and managers, requires also the identification and mobilization of the forces that can precipitate and sustain *Praxis*...as the basis for real systemic transformation.
In consideration of this it may be feasible to adopt a change management approach that holds out the possibility of:

- impacting more substantially in supporting initiatives for the requisite changes in intraparty political re-orientation, and
- transformation of the culture of the administrative machinery that clearly establishes them as change and development agencies
Some key elements in this are:

1. The identification of the core leaders/prime movers in the political parties and administrative groupings.

2. The teaming of a credible sponsoring and coordinating group from these groupings.

3. The identification of areas of agreement and of disagreement, and of the outcomes the change programme should achieve. Herein lies the basis for establishing Praxis. The unifying of thought and action.
4. The assessment of the readiness requirements for the agreed changes, assigning responsibilities for implementation

5. Identify and manage sources of resistance to organizational change.
CONCLUSION

• Change at the strategic apex of political and administrative organizations is a prerequisite for organizational culture change in the operating core at the policy implementation level.

• The starting point is the manifestation and application of political will to accomplish this.......the rest will follow.
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