



International Centre for Organisational Management

LEADERSHIP IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

Faculty members of ICOM have considerable experience of managing parts of major public sector organisations, such as the Greater London Council and the Commonwealth Secretariat. They also have experience of designing and delivering development programmes for the Governments of Malawi, Botswana, Barbados, Abu Dhabi and Brunei, together with major parts of the UK Civil Service and National Health Service. In addition, they have been responsible for reviewing total civil services as commissioners.

All this experience has been channelled into the following programme specifically designed for the Government of Zambia, but which can be customised to all other governments and their ministries. It recognises that within government sectors worldwide, many attempts have been made to reform civil services through what became known as a new paradigm of public administration, an approach to 'breaking through bureaucracy'. Initiatives to improve the performance of the parastatal and private sectors have also been taken. However, the success of these initiatives has been limited. We will argue that the main reason for this has been a failure to understand HOW change can be delivered in specific situations. There has been no shortage of generalised advice about WHAT should be done, but little on the precise IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY to be adopted in country A or institution B.

This proposal suggests using ACTION LEARNING methods to define the strategy of the Cabinet and then to drive performance improvement into each ministry via well-trained departmental leaders, focusing on changing working practices and individual performances. Leaders of management teams will "cascade" ministerial strategies into each department aimed at improving the quality and speed of delivery of government services, reducing poverty and increasing the level of satisfaction of the people with these services. Another primary aim will be to have a direct impact on the performance of parastatal and private sector organisations such that they will improve the reliability and quality of their service (e.g. electricity, water, waste), expand and provide more employment opportunities and attract foreign direct investment.

Criteria for Success of Change Programmes

The criteria for success of any change programme is the extent to which it leads to a measurable improvement in the performance of the organisation and its departments and of the individuals involved. The key is the successful implementation of new working practices and processes which lead to measurable improvements in team, department and organisational performance. These new working practices and processes can only be implemented by competent and committed people who are led in an inspiring way. The essential ingredient is therefore the IMPLEMENTATION CAPABILITY of the organisation and its people.

Where to Start?

The best place to start a change programme in the Government of a developing country is at the top, with the Cabinet defining what the strategy of the Government should be. This would include defining the critical success factors (CSFs) and how resources should be allocated to each ministry. When this is done, following consultation with key stakeholders, this strategy should be cascaded down into the organisation, as illustrated in diagram one.

Ministers should first define their draft ministerial strategies and then take part in defining the overall strategy for the Government with their Cabinet colleagues. Once this has been done, the President should then commit each minister to defining their detailed ministerial strategies which need to be consistent with the national strategy and follow the CSFs agreed in Cabinet. The President will also require each of his ministers to produce a performance improvement plan (PIP) for their ministry. That is, a plan defining the improvements to be made in the year in line with the Cabinet strategy. Clearly ministers will consult their civil servants in defining their strategies. The President can also create cross-ministerial committees to ensure that key processes which affect all ministries are addressed assertively. For example, human resource issues, how procurement is managed and how costs are controlled.

Each minister will, in turn, require their permanent secretaries to ensure their deputy secretaries and directors define the strategies for their parts of each ministry. They should ensure these strategies are aligned with the ministerial strategy and feature the measurement of performance, process and quality management, effective customer care and modern people management, etc. The directors will then require their immediate reports to define their strategies and performance improvement plans for their departments and on down the hierarchy.

The keys to the success of this cascade process are:

- ∅ That the 'managers' at the pinnacles of each triangle (e.g. A, B, C, D and E in the strategy cascade) behave as leaders and are committed to continuously improving their ministries/departments/units. These leaders are called linking pins in that they are links between the different levels in the organisation.
- ∅ That the performance of each lining pin is measured based on their success in delivering performance improvements which contribute to achieving the strategy of the ministry, the directorate, the department etc. Successful achievement should be rewarded and reasons for falling short evaluated and addressed.
- ∅ That each linking pin is given appropriate resources, support and training to ensure they can improve the performance of their departments and therefore improve the utilisation of scarce resources within the Government.

This cascade process is the secret to improving organisational performance. It can provide the vehicle to ensure all parts of the organisation are aiming in the same direction, where continuous improvement is paramount and where individuals are motivated to give of their best and a learning organisation established. If effective, this process can lead to a new web of working practices which will lead, for example, to the removal of waste in the value chain, improved labour, material and capital productivity, improved customer (internal and external) satisfaction and above all, to an improvement in output which will be seen in better delivery of services, which can lead to a reduction in poverty and disease, the creation of more wealth and job opportunities, etc.



However, although this appears straightforward and is nothing more than good basic management, it requires considerable skill and tenacity to make it work. To help make it work we have grafted an ACTION LEARNING development programme onto the cascade process. This will combine the consultancy activity of defining what best practice is in each ministry with the training needed at all levels to ensure the cascade process works and individual managers are competent and committed to perform their roles with excellence. The process adopts the basic action learning model of projects, personal development plans and customised workshops, delivered by specialists who have worked in the public sector. This programme can also attract a qualification, which carries credits towards an MBA or MSc.

This type of programme can also be used to develop a country's permanent secretaries into an effective team, in developing specific ministries and in improving the effectiveness of "parastatal" type organisations.

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