

### 3. PS21 – KEY FEATURES AND SUCCESS STORIES

From section 2, we know that PS21 is an inter-ministerial initiative to prepare the civil servants for the challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Civil servants need to anticipate change, welcome change and to execute change. It encompasses around people (customers and civil service officers)

The key ideas behind this PS21 are:

1. Improve in the quality of service and in the delivery of service. The use of computerization and electronic ways of delivering public service is highly recommended.
2. Take good care of staff in terms of welfare, recognition of good service provided
3. Encourage creativity and innovation in staff
4. Increase public awareness

All these key ideas are fully embedded in the four functional committees of the PS21 initiative. To illustrate how a public organisation put these four ideas into place, we shall take a look at the achievement of the Central Provident Board (CPF) and also another example of the Land Transport Authority

**Example 1: Central Provident Board (CPF) Board** *(adapted from Chapter2: Best Practices in CPF Board, Best Practice Cases: Customer Service, PSB Singapore, 1997)*

This example serves to show an example of how the CPF Board transformed its customer service and under PS21 initiative can influence a newly set-up statutory board to improve its quality of service.

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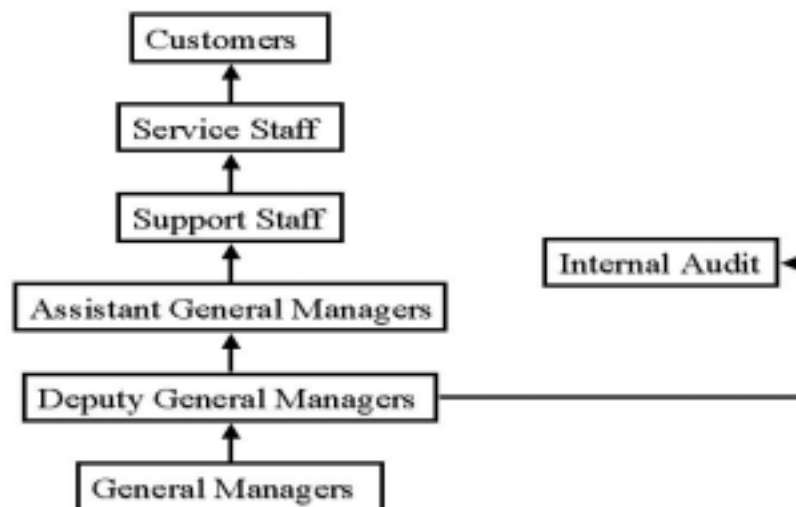
#### CPF BOARD COUNTER SERVICE HIGHLIGHTED

THE Central Provident Fund (CPF) Board is featured in the Mastering the Best Practices Series, in the casebook "Best Practice Cases: Customer Service".

Counter service is highlighted because of the significant improvements made by the CPF Board in serving customers. This began in 1987 when the Board embarked on the total quality management process to improve its work processes.

The total quality management process began with a change of mindset. An organisation service chart was drawn up, with "Customers" placed at the top to remind management and staff that CPF customers are important.

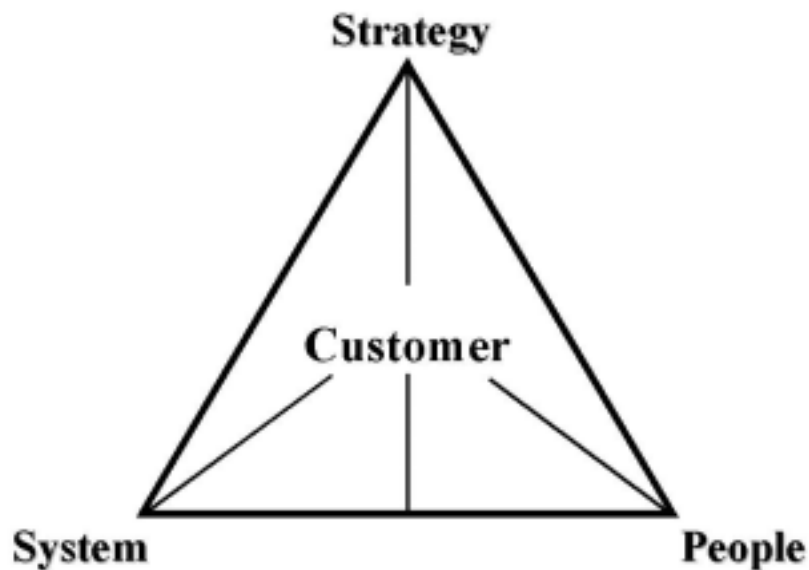
**Fig 7: CPF Inverted Service Organisation Chart**



Departments were renamed to reflect service rather than operations. Specific changes include:

- The department handling CPF-schemes was renamed "Member Services Department"
- The Enforcement Department was renamed "Employer Services Department"
- The enforcement officers were renamed "Employer Services Executives"
- The Customer Service Officers (CSO) scheme was introduced in 1990. The initial batch of officers was specially selected to ensure that the people selected have the right attitude and inclination for customer service. Having the right capability is important because these officers are the in a sense the ambassadors of the CPF Board.
- A new Customer Service Department was set up in 1995 to centralize the provision of front-line and the management of the public communication function. IT is headed by the Assistant General Manager (Customer Service). The responsibility of the department will eventually be extended to include centralized telephone and correspondence services. This is part of the Board's one-stop" service concept

CPF Board also uses the Service Triangle to reinforce the message that “customer is always important”. CPF’s business and service strategies, its staff and systems exist because of its customer.



The CPF Board prides itself on its emphasis on providing top-quality customer satisfaction. Its service counters handle up to 2,000 enquiries and transactions on an average day.

The Board has set stringent service standards at its service counters:

- Waiting time for simple transactions within two minutes
- Waiting time for more complex transactions during non-peak hours within 10 minutes
- Waiting time for more complex transactions during peak hours and on peak days within 30 minutes
- All transactions completed in one visit.

The Board has introduced several electronic services including:

- CPF PAL-Phone
- CPF PAL-Machine
- CPF PAL-Internet
- CPF Phoneline.

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To motivate staff to provide quality service to customers, the CPF Board has the following recognition and rewards:

- 1) Staff Excellence Award. This is the Board's most prestigious award. It is given to both front-line and support staff. Each year, about 10 such awards are given.
- 2) Staff Suggestion Scheme. Accepted suggestions are awarded points which staff could accumulate and exchange for cash or benefit-in-kind.
- 3) WITs are given cash awards if their projects are accepted. (Note: The Board has achieved a 100% staff participation rate in Work Improvement Teams (WITs) and the Staff Suggestions Scheme (SSS). In 1996, WITs projects achieved cost savings of \$2.45 million)
- 4) Public Contact Improvement Scheme (PCIP) Awards. Customer Service Officers who have received high ratings and met the service standards are recognized and awarded points which they could accumulate and exchange for cash or benefits-in-kind
- 5) Recognition of Compliments. The General Manager personally thanks each staff who has received a compliment from a customer. Those with a high number of compliments are invited to staff functions hosted by the General Manager.

The CPF Board also encourages feedback on its services – from public and staff. Public and staff feedback include the following:

- 1) CPF Service Annual Survey. Each year, the Board conducts surveys on its counter, telephone and correspondence services among CPF members and employers. From 1992 till 1997, about 96% of the CPF members and employers have rated the Board's services "Good" or "Very Good"
- 2) Public Contact Improvement Scheme (PCIP). PCIP is a counter-service feedback scheme introduced by the Government for its ministries and statutory boards. Customers are encouraged to use the PCIP feedback forms to express their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the Board's counter service. The counter staff's service is also monitored and assessed by the supervisor. In 1996, CPF Board received about 18,800 PCIP forms and 98% rated its counter service "Excellent"
- 3) "Compliment Bank". Internal and external compliments are highlighted in the Board's LAN system. In 1996, the Board had about 2,600 written internal compliments and 19,400 external compliments
- 4) "Complaint Bank". Complaints are treated as feedback for improvement. They are discussed by top management and used as case studies for improvement
- 5) Staff Suggestion Scheme. The Board has in place a staff suggestions electronic system to make it easier for staff to make suggestions to improve work or service. Each suggestion is rated for implementation, study, etc.

- 6) Work Improvement Team (WITs). WITs are encouraged to work on projects that improve services, besides improving efficiency and effectiveness.

Besides having the feedback system, the Board also strives to keep its customers informed of new schemes and policy changes that affect them. This is done primarily through its corporate newsletter, CPF Newslines, which is the first corporate newsletter to be published in the local news dailies, five times a year. Through CPF Newslines, it is able to present comprehensive updates of CPF schemes and services on an ongoing basis. As and when the need arises, changes in CPF policies are communicated through advertisements in the press, on radio and on TV.

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**Example 2: Land Transport Authority (LTA)** (Source: Challenge Newsletter (Aug 96 issue 7 vol. 2))

This example serves to show how the newly launched PS21 initiative can influenced a newly set-up statutory board to improve its quality of service.

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The Land Transport Authority (LTA) has been a hive of activity since its formation in Sep 1995. And PS21 ranks high in the mindset of this new statutory board. A **Service Quality Sub-Committee**, set up to look into issues related to meeting the needs of the public for quality service, has set in motion the wheels for improvement.

Initiatives launched by the Service Quality Sub-Committee of the LTA

- **Road tax Renewal**

In the past, motorists renewing their road tax had to bring along their vehicle registration book and the vehicle renewal notice. This service has since been simplified to omit the need for motorists to produce the vehicle registration book for endorsement when renewing road taxes.

- **Directional signs at MRT stations**

More prominent signs depicting surrounding buildings and places of interest located at close proximity to MRT stations have been put up for the benefit of MRT commuters

- **Information signs for road trenching sites**

More information is now captured on these signages to facilitate public feedback and suggestions. These include hotline numbers, name of contractor and a mascot apologizing for the inconvenience caused.

- **GIRO service**

To facilitate payment of registration tax/fee and legal requisition fees by authorized motor traders, the GIRO system was implemented on 7 May 96.

- ***GIRO service for road tax***

LTA has worked towards the introduction of GIRO for the payment of road tax. This provides motorists with a more convenient way of renewing their road taxes and reduces the waiting time at LTA's service counters. Part of this system involved electronically linking the major insurance companies to LTA so that their vehicle insurance records can be updated on-line. This therefore implies that vehicle owners just need to sign on to the GIRO system and the new validated road tax will be sent to their homes. There is no need to physically make a trip down to LTA or other road tax payment centres like in the past.

LTA has developed this system in 2 phases. In Phase 1, LTA worked with the major insurance companies to establish electronic links to facilitate the on-line updating of vehicle insurance particulars and records.

In Phase 2, LTA explored the possibility of an electronic link-up with the Customs and Excise Dept (CED) to automate the verification process of open market values of cars and computation of registration taxes. System studies were carried out to further explore the possibility of paying and renewing bus licences and passenger vehicle seating fees through GIRO.

- ***Automated Traffic Offence Management System (ATOMS)***

ATOMS is a joint project between the Subordinate Courts, LTA and Traffic Police (TP). It consists of ATM-type automated payment kiosks to allow offenders to pay fines for minor traffic offences. The 24-hour kiosks are located island-wide at places like shopping centres, etc. Traffic offenders need not go to LTA, TP or the Subordinate Courts to make payment to settle their cases.

#### 4. EXTERNAL CUSTOMER PRECEPTION SURVEY ON PUBLIC SERVICE 1999/2000

*(Adapted from: Results of the External Customer Perception Survey on Public Service 1999/ 2000, Press Release)*

As part of the continuing drive towards Quality Service and a Public Service for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the PS 21 Office of the Public Service Division (Prime Minister's Office) commissioned Market Behavior Pte Ltd (MBL) in August 1999 to conduct an External Customer Perception Survey. The intent was to determine how external customers – namely the general public and business users – perceived the quality of service provided by the main public service providers in Singapore. The survey was conducted between 1999a and May 2000.

Overall, the Public Service was rated well by members of the public, earning a rating of 5.09 out of 7 (based on Likert scale, with 1 – 3 being extremely poor to poor, and 5 –7 being good to excellent) (**see Chart 1**). From the general public 73.3% of respondents rating the Public Service as 5 and above (**see Chart2**)

Business users gave a rating of 4.95 out of 7, with 70.3% of them rating the service as 5 and above. Across the individual agency-specific surveys, the general public has generally given higher ratings than the business public on the same agencies (**see Chart3**)

In general, the public service was rated highly on:

- a) Electronic Services – in terms of accessibility and usefulness
- b) Courteousness & helpfulness of counter staff
- c) Courteousness of officers.

In general, the service attributes that were rated less highly were:

- a) Telephone Service: ability to get through at first try
- b) Telephone Service: effectiveness of telephone staff
- c) Quick response to queries & problems – verbal or written
- d) Counter Waiting Time

The results show that the public in general has become perceptibly more courteous, helpful and responsive. This is a clear indication that the public service's commitment to courteous, quality service under the Public Service for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (PS 21) initiative since 1995 has been successful and appreciated by the public.

The results also indicate a generally rising trend in expectations of the public in terms of the speed and responsiveness of services to their needs – reflecting a challenge facing all service-oriented organizations, whether in the public or private sectors. The results further suggest that electronic public service, many of which are relatively new, have been well-received by the public and can be exploited further to deliver better and more responsive service in order to meet rising public expectations.

Chart 1: Comparison of Rating for Overall Perception of Public Service for 1996 and 1999/2000

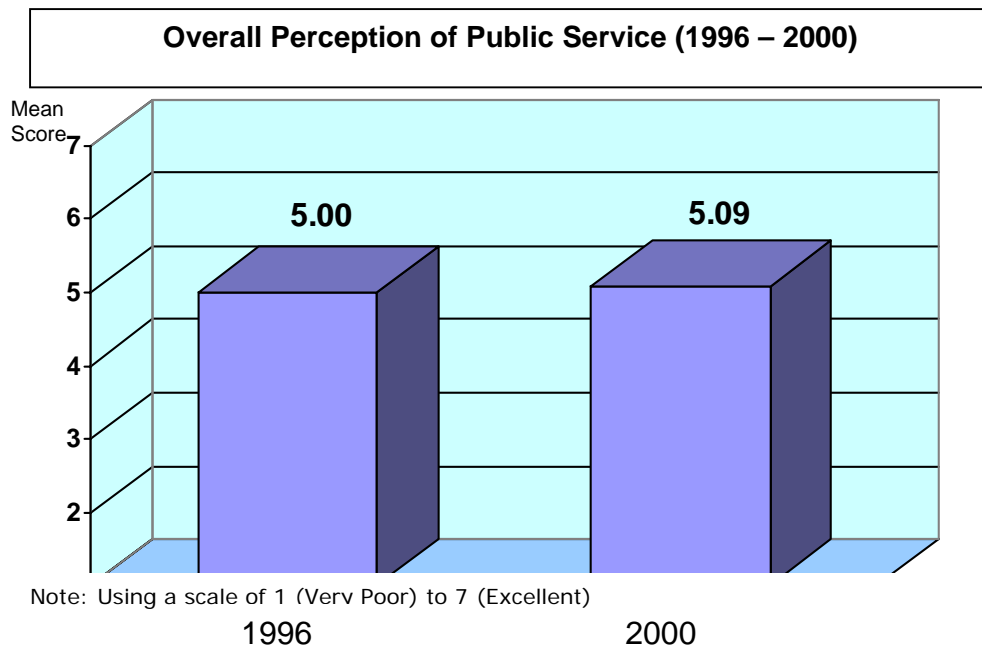
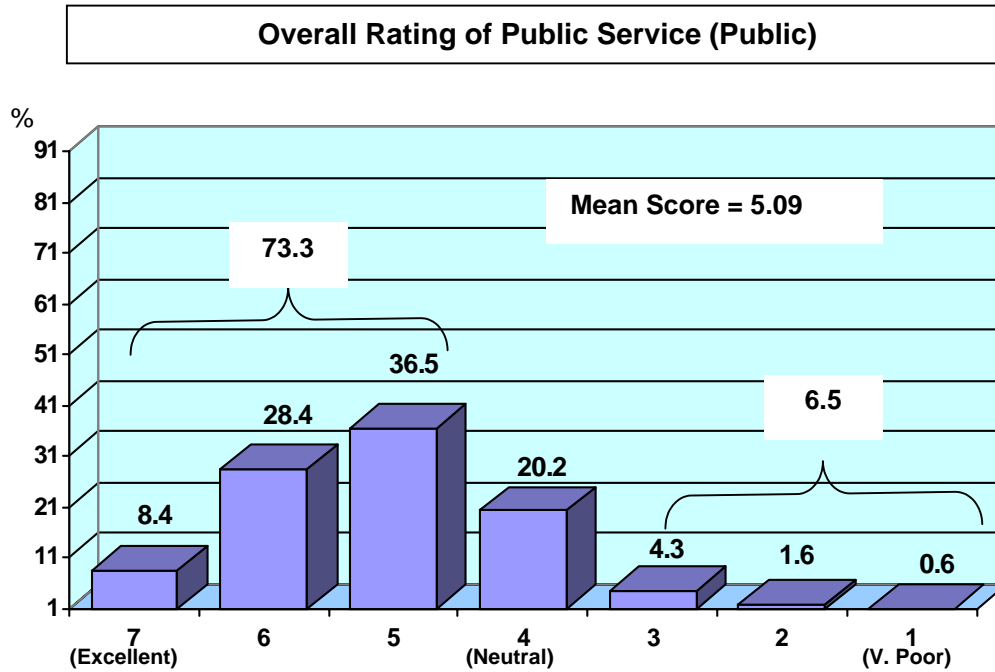
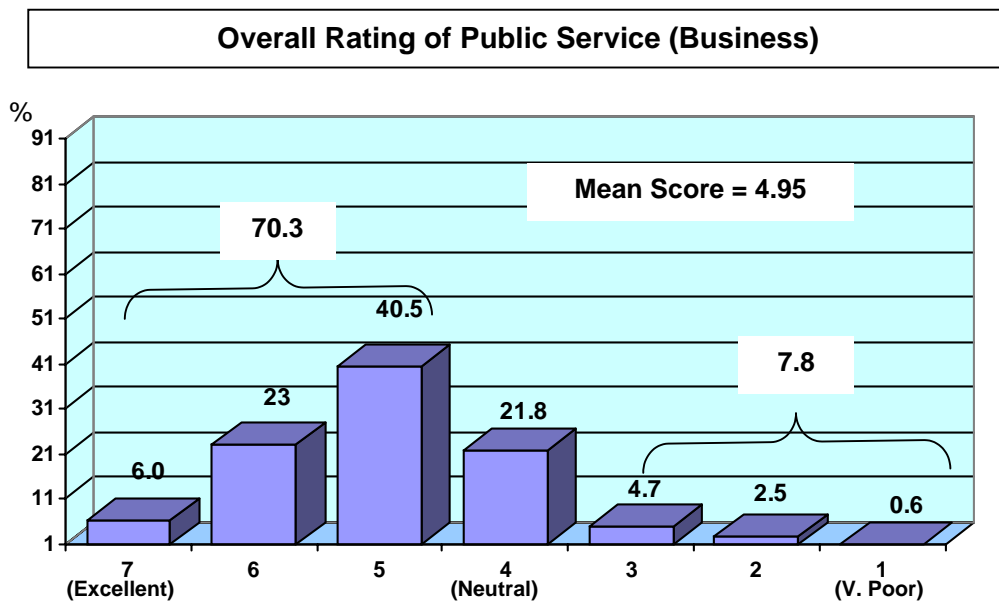


Chart 2: Public Segment – Breakdown of Overall Rating of Public Service



Base: All Respondents (n = 8920)

Chart 3: Business Segment – Breakdown of Overall Rating of Public Service



Base: All Respondents (n = 3632)

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## 5. Performance Appraisal

Besides providing material incentives for participating in the activities of the PS21, such as the Work Improvement Team (WITs) or the Staff Suggestions Scheme (SSS), yearly performance appraisals also take into account the participation rate in the PS21 activities. A staff would be appraised positively if he or she is very active such as providing useful suggestions or to have received positive feedback from the public. In addition, if the staff is in the leadership position, such as a leader in a WITs team, the motivation and the participation rate of his team members would also be counted for his appraisal.

On the other hand, if a staff has performed very well in his work but did not participate actively in the PS1 activities, his final appraisal might be affected.

## 6. PS21 – Further Evaluation

An important point to note about PS21 is that this initiative is a non-political organisation. It is an initiative that set public organisations to rethink about their mission, vision and processes. However, PS21 sprung at the same time the other initiatives such as the Singapore 21, the Infocomm 21 were initiated. All these are part of the concerted effort to advance Singapore into the 21<sup>st</sup> century - globalization, integrated world, information overflow, and sophisticated technology. In other words, PS21 is part of the total package to attract business to Singapore, to boost Singapore economy. By having less red tape, more transparency, more efficient way of delivering public goods, more investments would likely to be attracted to Singapore. Hence being a pragmatic Singapore, the ultimate purpose of PS21 is to enhance economic growth.

Another point to note about this PS21 is that it does not arise suddenly; it is a gradual process. An important change that took place that has a significant effect on PS21 is the autonomous agency (AA) concept. These public organizations are managed like a private company and hence they are given greater flexibility. If there were no flexibility, there would be no incentive for public organisations to change.

The third point to note about the PS21 initiative is that it is set against a backdrop of, in a sense, 'already cleaned' public service sector. From the historical background described in the Appendix 3, the corruption problems have been greatly reduced and the figure has been very low in the 19. PS21 is therefore act as a booster, to formalize the process and to prepare the civil servants a different kind of change in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Most importantly, to further embrace the use of Internet Technology, to introduce sophisticated management tools, to bring the standard of public organizations on par with the private organisations.

Therefore, if PS21 were to be implemented say in the early 1980s, the outcome would be different. Back then, corruption rate is still high and that Singapore is still a developing country, a non-political force such as the concept of PS21 would not work. Till this end, it would be interesting to take a brief look at the administrative reform of New Zealand that has also achieved much acclaim on its public service. Readers would then be able to note that the reforms by New Zealand would likely be the action taken by Singapore if Singapore would to introduce 20 years ago.

## 6.1 Administrative Reform of New Zealand

*(Adapted from: "Current Good Practices and New Developments in Public Service Management: A Profile of the Public Service of New Zealand, The Public Service Country Profile Series: No. 8, Commonwealth Secretariat, 1998")*

### **Background**

In the beginning of the 1980s, due to the much dependence on the state to boost the economy of New Zealand, the New Zealand Government has incurred much fiscal deficits.

In mid-1994, many of the key ministers elected wanted to change New Zealand, to overcome its chronic debt problems and to make New Zealand's way in the world. They took the views that all sectors of the economy should be exposed to the forces of competition. The Government would therefore minimize its interventions, focussing instead on creating incentives and conditions to encourage these ideas and energies to spark and flourish in the community and business sector. It began with the removal of subsidies and other support mechanisms and the progressive dismantling of regulations and controls.

The Government saw the state sector, with its traditional focus on resource distribution, regulation and control, an with relatively little transparency in its processes and activities, not so much as a tool for reform, but as a significant part of the problem. It felt that the state cost too much, contributed too little to wealth-generating production, and was a dead weight on our society.

The ministers of the Government elected in 1984 accordingly decided that the state sector should be exposed to the same sorts of market rigors that were beginning to reshape agriculture, manufacturing and business. The key overall concepts in the Government's approach to reform that would undoubtedly brought the most radical changes to the structures and systems of the state. Virtually all of the state's activities would become open and comprehensible, in the belief that this transparency would eliminate unnecessary functions and inefficient processes, and clarify accountabilities.

### **The key reform principles and legislation**

The concepts of transparency and consistency into a set of organizing principles for the reform process that can be summarized as follows:

- The state should not be involved in any activities that would be more efficiently and effectively performed by the community or by private businesses.
- Trading enterprises would operate most efficiently and effectively if structured along the line of private sector businesses
- Departments would operate most efficiently and effectively with clearly specified and non-conflicting functions, and particularly with policy and operations functions separated, and with commercial and non-commercial functions separated
- Departmental manager would perform most effectively if made fully accountable for the efficient running of their organisations, with the minimum practicable central control of inputs.
- The costs of state activities should, as far as practicable, be fixed through real market factors: in other words, the quality, quantity and cost of products should be determined by the purchaser's requirements, rather than the producer's preferences.

These principles were reflected in three important pieces of legislation:

- The State Owned Enterprises Act 1986 which provided the basis for converting the old trading departments and corporations into businesses along private sector lines;
- The State Sector Act 1988 which made departmental chief executives fully accountable for managing their organisations efficiently and effectively, and changed the role of the State Services Commission from employer and manger of the public service to employer of chief executives an advisor to the Government about management of the state sector; and

- The Public Finance Act 1989 which changed the basis of state sector financial management from a focus on inputs the costs of production, to focus on outputs the relevance and effectiveness of actual products, and on outcomes the overall results of these outputs from the Government's point of view

### ***The Reform Process***

The reform process had four main streams, as summarized in the following paragraphs:

#### 1) Structural Reform

Much of the major structural reform was undertaken in the first three or four years when long-established department such as the Ministry of Energy, the Ministry of Works and Development, the Forest Service and the Post Office, were abolished. Most of their functions assumed by 'state-owned enterprises' operating commercially under the boards of directors. Many of these enterprises have subsequently been sold, in some cases to offshore interest. Most of the remaining 14 enterprises are viewed as potentially marketable.

The state has now withdrawn almost entirely from direct involvement in trading enterprises.

#### 2) Public Service Departmental Restructuring

Departmental restructuring began in 1985, to rationalize the functions and shape of the core public service, particularly by separating policy advice functions from service delivery and moving much of this servicing to a new tier of non-departmental agencies now known as 'Crown entities'. While most of this was completed by 1990, restructuring continued in key areas including education, science, transport and social welfare, and is still in progress in a few areas.

#### 3) Education and Health Restructuring

In 1988 the Government began a major restructuring of administration in the education sector, beginning with the schools system. Local education boards were abolished and their functions transferred to elected boards of trustees for each institution. The Department of Education was replaced by new core public service agencies and Crown entities. Approaches began toward improvement of accountability and performance in the tertiary education sector.

Local partly elected funder/ provider health authorities have been replaced by appointed regional health authorities with funding responsibilities, and Crown health enterprises operating commercially as service providers

### 1) Reform of the Management System

Systems reform to improve accountability and performance in the core public service and the wider state sector began in 1988 when chief executives became individually accountable to the ministers responsible for their departments, ending 75 years of centralized control of the public service. The role of the State Services commission changed from employer of all public servants to employer of the chief executives. The chief executives were placed on formal performance-related limited term contracts.

This was followed by a series of financial management and accounting reforms designed to introduce as many of the disciplines of the commercial operating environment as practicable to the state sector. In particular this was through the formal purchasing by ministers of the outputs of departments, at specified standards of quantity, quality, timeliness and cost, through accrual accounting, and through capital charging. The apex of these financial and accounting reforms is the production of a rational set of national accounts.

The key processes and instruments of the reformed accountability and financial management system are now firmly established. Modifications and refinements continue to be made year by year to improve the relevance and utility of these mechanisms and this will continue. Changes in political priorities and circumstances, and developments in technology and in the wider operating environment, will mean that there will probably never again have entirely settled structures and systems.

### THE RESTRUCTURING OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

From 1912 to 1987 New Zealand operated the conventional British model of public administration: a unified, career public service with careful rules for the exercise of authority, serving the elected government of the day.

The changes that were introduced since then can be grouped under five main headings, each ushered in under the authority of sponsoring legislation.

#### ***Commercialisation of state trading activities***

All government trading activities were put on a full commercial footing (implemented through the State Owned Enterprises Act). They were set up as companies with relevant ministers as shareholders and oversight of their activities was entrusted to appointed Boards of Directors. They were to operate under strictly commercial criteria – paying taxes and dividends etc.

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Any social or public service activities such as promoting employment or regional development or maintaining access to services, were to be delivered through separate contracts that the government would make with the enterprises, on an arms-length, commercial basis. Most have since been privatized.

### ***Fragmentation of core administration***

The core administrative departments were split into semi-independent units and the chief executives were given wide-ranging discretion to manage them as they saw fit. (Implemented via the State Sector Act).

Where possible, units were governed by semi-independent boards exercising a type of trustee role and, rather than being government departments, they became “Crown Entities”. These “entities” were established in the school sector, in state-owned science and research facilities and in public hospitals, and between them spend about two-thirds of the amount the central government allocates for the provision of services.

### ***Contracting for the supply of outputs***

Instead of giving different departments and agencies set amounts of money to pay for specific activities, the government moved to a system of “purchasing outputs” from them. It was up to the management of the departments to determine how to supply the service; the mix of in-house versus contracted service, technology used and so on.

For example, the Ministry of Fisheries manages the use of the offshore fishery, monitors fish stocks and carries out similar functions. But in funding it, the government “purchases” 41 enforcement operations against commercial offences against fisheries laws, 24 enforcement operations against poaching and black-market operations, 4,300 observer sea days to collect biological data, etc., etc.

The purchase “price” of the service is in theory negotiated each year between the Chief Executive and the central control agencies (especially the Finance Ministry). There is a contract for performance that is monitored by a department that acts as a type of “employer of employers.” (The new financing regime was implemented through the Public Finance Act).

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***Extension of management control over employment conditions***

Public service managers (and those in the private sector) were given extensive powers to shift away from collective bargaining as the basis of determining pay and conditions of employment and to move to an individual basis of setting such conditions. Negotiations were fragmented and conducted at the level of the individual department and all central mechanisms for public sector pay determination, or arbitration, were dismantled. (Implemented initially through the State Sector Act, but substantially extended by the Employment Contracts Act).

***Extension of finance market influence over the exercise of political discretion***

Before each budget, the government is required to publish the broad parameters of its intended tax and spending levels, for the next three years. Before each election, the Finance Ministry is required to issue an assessment of the financial health of the nation. (Implemented through the Fiscal Responsibility Act).

While this is superficially about open government, it makes governments very sensitive to finance market nervousness about what might be seen to be loose fiscal intentions. It gives the bureaucracy a lot of scope to influence the pre-election environment. Finally, it tends to bind governments into longer-term commitments to tight fiscal policies because there is no political mileage in promising more spending in two or three years time, and some economic advantage in signaling tough policies.

**Summary of New Zealand Model**

- Dramatic privatization of state enterprises
- Strategic and results driven management systems
- The use of internal markets within the public sector and the application of purchase agreements between ministers and ministries
- The use of contracts for service and employment
- The development of the concept of Deputy Minister's as Chief Executive Officers
- Performance-based compensation systems
- Private-public sector competition in bidding and tendering
- Accrual accounting systems in government
- Principal-agent models of organisation in the public sector
- Strong and consistent political support for reform
- The use of critical results indicators
- Development of core competencies of public sector managers

## 6.2 Singapore and New Zealand

It is interesting to note that for the case of New Zealand, it is the total reshape of the public sector. Almost every aspects of the public sector have been transformed. In a way, New Zealand is much more transparent compared to Singapore. As for Singapore, she still retains her bureaucratic structure. In a survey on red-tape ranking done by CIPE (*The Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE), an affiliate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, works to build democracy and market economies throughout the world*), Singapore is ranked 7<sup>th</sup> in terms of procedure and need 22 business days, whereas in the case of New Zealand, it ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> in terms of procedure and need only 3 business days (**Refer to Appendix 8: Red tape Ranking**).

However Singapore's PS21 initiative cannot be compared to New Zealand's reform directly. The latter is a fundamental change, while for the PS21, it is a non-political initiative. It affects more to the individual level; changing the mindset of individuals to welcome change and to anticipate change. PS21 is launched on the premise that the fundamental problem such as corruption has already been lowered and the level of public sector service in Singapore is already satisfactory. PS21 wants to do achieve more; to instill creativity in public service staff, to make use of modern management tools and to deploy Internet Technology to deliver efficient service.

However, one important point to note is that for the initiatives in both countries, both have strong top management support and that is the fundamental factor for success.

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## 7. CONCLUSION

In summary, PS21 is an inter-ministry initiative to transform the public service sector to be more responsive to public needs and to be always on the move to improve working condition. The ultimate objective is to change the attitude of civil servants personnel. The concept involves both 'direct and 'indirect approach.

'Indirect' approach refers to approaches such as training and education, provision of management tools or other skills, to share the experiences of best practices, and to the management or organization (through e-government, e-citizen). Besides the individual ministries, this indirect approach are usually carried out or assisted by other PS21 entities such as the PS21 Office (in charge of communication, providing information), the Civil Service College (in charge of training and education), the Scenario Planning Office (providing management tools), the Managing for Excellence (takes care of the functionality of the whole public service organisation such as the e-government initiative).

'Direct' approach refers to those approaches that impact more on the individual civil officers such as providing material awards (e.g. cash tokens, tea reception, etc.), public recognition for efforts (such as prize presentation ceremony at the WITS convention). Most importantly, participation rate for PS21 activities forms an important component in the annual performance appraisal.

Since the inception of PS21, the impact of PS21 on the public sector of Singapore has been phenomenal in terms of quantum leap improvement in various public agencies and formed an interesting case for research on reengineering on the public sector. A public sector survey conducted in 1997 showed 96.1% of the respondents indicating that their organizations were affected by the PS21 initiative, with 73% being significantly or very significantly affected into undertaking major organizational change (Yim-Teo, 1997)

Examples of early success stories are the Inland Revenue Authority of Singapore, Immigration Department, and Tan Tock Seng Hospital where many fold improvements in process time and service quality were reported (Khoong and Ku, 1997). Other agencies that have undertaken major reengineering initiatives included Ministry of Labor Work Permit Department, Fire Safety Bureau, Ministry of Defense, Singapore Productivity and Standards board, National Library Board and Singapore General Hospital.

In case of Work Permit Department, improvements reported include a reduction of application turnaround time from 7 days to 1 day and the number of trips that employers need to make to the department from 5 to 1. The Fire Safety Bureau managed to drastically reduce in the approval processing time for building construction project plan from 100 days on average to 1 day. Likewise, the processing time for approval of publications, audio materials, films and videos by the Ministry of Information and the Arts was reduced from 30 days to within 4 days (Khoong and Ku, 1997).

PS21 is about changing mindsets to foster and facilitate continuous improvement, both for the individual and the service as a whole. This concept of continuous improvement is premised both on the economic necessity of maintaining Singapore's competitiveness as a nation and on the duty as public officers to serve the community as efficiently and effectively as possible. Although PS21 was launched in May 1995, it does not mean that there is a quantum leap in the changes of attitudes and service after 1995. The reform to the public service sector has been gradual, and the launch of the PS21 is to put the effort of reforming officially, to put it into proper framework and to re-channel the use of resources. Hence, the launch of PS21 acts as a catalyst for change.

In the pursuit for service excellence and to meet new challenges, public service officers need to be empowered with flexibility, initiative and creativity. At the same time, the efforts by them should be aptly recognised and rewarded. Hence, the emphasis on staff well-being and its selection as a key functional elements of PS21; without it, the other three elements: ExCEL, Organisational Review, and Quality Service would have little chance of success.

It is very crucial to recognise the importance of educating the public service staff. Continuous efforts on educating the importance of being responsive to the public needs and to continuously improve working conditions are necessary. Top management must be convinced in the benefits of PS21 and they must be actively involved in the activities of PS21. If the top management serves as a positive role model, it would be easier to convince the rest of the public service staff that the activities of PS21 is good for them. They can then give useful suggestions that can really help to improve the working conditions to help the organisations, and not just to provide lip service or to consider the PS21 activities as "Extra Curriculum Activities".

Despite some of the success stories, the public service sector in Singapore has not yet achieved the state where innovations and responsiveness of the civil servants are fully internalised. Singapore will continue to improve the attitude of its civil servants and the public organisations. PS21 will continue to affect the way public organisations work, and even if all the public organisations attain the Singapore Quality Class award, PS21 will still continue to set the stage for better service; to continue to look for ways to improve. Ultimately PS21 is about change and eventually the pragmatic reasons of attracting investment and economic growth are very much dependent on the success of a country's internal affairs.