
NOTES

I. CHARACTERISTICS OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN SINGAPORE

(Source: Summarized from "David Seth Jones, *Public Administration in Singapore: Continuity and Reform, Handbook of Comparative Public Administration in the Asia-Pacific Basin*, pp. 2 – 7")

The public administration in Singapore can be characterized as follows:

A. Meritocracy

The administrative institutions of Singapore have been built upon the principal of meritocracy, with recruitment, promotion, and ranking closely related to qualifications, performance and potential.

B. Generalist Administration by Specialists

Public administration at the senior level in Singapore (administrative service) may be characterized as generalist, or as specialist and technocratic. Many of those in the administrative service have been educated in technical, scientific, and other specialist disciplines, and thus the term technocrats. Administrative service officers are moved from one ministry to another, and often deal with matters in which they do not have a trained specialization, and hence they are also known as generalist. Where professional expertise and technical analysis plays a significant role in the development and application of policy, senior managers and professionals in the specialist services within their areas of specialization worked hand-in-hand with both senior administrative service officers and ministers.

C. Control and Accountability

Although Singapore may be characterized as a guided democracy based on the centrality of executive government, controls exist to ensure the bureaucracy is accountable in the use of its resources, and the exercise of its powers and responsibilities. The most notable controls are the Auditor-General's Office and the Public Accounts Committee of Parliament.

The Auditor-General's Office audits the accounts of all ministries, statutory boards, and other public authorities. The audits ascertain if the accounts of such organisations have been accurately and fairly presented, and if adequate controls were exercised in respect to revenue, expenditure, and accruals.

The Public Accounts Committee of Parliament focuses on any matters of concern raised in the Auditor-General's report and if, necessary, will pursue further inquiries.

D. Absence of corruption

A notable feature of the government bureaucracy in Singapore has been the lack of corruption. Since its independence in 1959, Singapore has stood out in successfully combating the corruption within politics and administration, which it inherited from the colonial period. The first important step was the enactment of comprehensive anti-corruption legislation in 1960, in the form of the Prevention of Corruption Act. The legislation has been made even more stringent and comprehensive through subsequent amendment. Under one of the amendments, a bribery offense can be committed even if no bribe was actually taken, so long as the intention to do so is proven. In addition, the policy of paying civil servants and employees adequately is the major force to combat corruption as it sought to reduce the temptation to take bribes or extort and embezzle money.

II. Major Changes in Public Administration

(Source: Summarized from "David Seth Jones, *Public Administration in Singapore: Continuity and Reform*, Handbook of Comparative Public Administration in the Asia-Pacific Basin, pp. 7 – 19")

A. Managerialism and Budgetary Reform

The principles of business management were introduced to the public administration in the 1980s. The purpose is to bring about the techniques of business management into the public sector and to encourage managerial initiative.

The first stage was the introduction of the "Block Vote Budget Allocation System" in the financial year of 1989, whereby "ministries will be delegated greater authority to manage their budget allocations" Under this arrangement, the target of total expenditure for each ministry is set as a percentage of GDP. After the approval of the budget of each ministry by Parliament, "the ministry is given flexibility and autonomy to spend the allocated funds according to its stated objectives and to manage the allocation between various programs and activities." Therefore, it has the freedom to transfer funds and manpower from one program or activity to another without seeking the approval from the Ministry of Finance.

The Block Vote Budget Allocation System was followed three years later by a further reform of budgetary management through the introduction of the so-called Singapore Government Management Accounting System (SIGMA). This is a computer-based information and analytical tool, whereby programs and activities are costed in detail. The costing involves a complete breakdown of expenditure on manpower, buildings, equipment, supplies, and support services for each program and activity. Civil service managers are now in a better position "to track and analyze the cost of their services, products or activities and to gauge their cost-effectiveness". With such information, managers can decide rationally if a particular expenditure should be increased, trimmed, or discontinued or to even contract out an activity to the private sector if it is more costs effective. With such detailed itemized costing information, civil service managers are now in a better position to exercise the increased financial autonomy given to them by the Block Vote Budget Allocation system in order to minimize costs and so achieve greater efficiency in resource usage.

Targeting setting and performance measurement known as Budgeting for Results (BFR), was introduced by the Minister of Finance in 1994. This required ministries (and sometimes statutory boards) to set precise and improved performance targets in relation to both costs and outputs for their programs and activities by which they will be evaluated. In this way, accountability can be preserved without undermining autonomy.

Another major budgetary reform was the implementation of the zero-based reviews of each ministry undertaken by the Auditor-General's Office once every five years. They were designed to afford a detailed overhaul of resource usage and spending outlays in each ministry and will act as a further 'powerful tool to identify inefficient, wasteful or unproductive activities'. The zero-based reviews were significantly helped by detailed costing information provided by the Management Accounting System and the setting of performance indicators. This will enable the Auditor-General to determine if costs are optimum and if outputs from existing resources could be improved.

Another major change towards the end of the 1980s was the levying of charges on ministries at market rates for the use of internal services provided by other civil service departments (e.g. supplies and public works). This also applies to the use of government buildings and state land, for which departments will be charged an imputed rental, which reflects the opportunity cost. The levying of internal charges in the civil service is thus designed to make department managers more cost-conscious and to avoid unnecessary consumption and usage. As a further improvement in the budgetary process, the civil service was required to draw up a register of its fixed assets, whose annual depreciation could be calculated. Based on this calculation, funds must be set aside, as an accrual within the annual budget, to reflect the depreciation.

B. Privatization: Corporatization, Deregulation, and Divestment

Major steps to promote privatization in the public administration were carried out. One such aspect was the corporatization of key statutory boards such as Singapore Telecommunication, the Singapore Airlines, etc. Corporatization has necessitated organizational and capital restructuring involving the sub-division of the original statutory board into a conglomerate of holding, parent and subsidiary companies, according to functional specialization. The government still maintains a controlling stake.

Prior to the full-scale corporatizations, a number of peripheral services of statutory boards were transferred to government-linked companies, being newly created as subsidiaries of the boards from which they were derived. Other statutory board services have been contracted out to private sector firms, or have been deregulated.

Corporatization had also been extended to the health care services, with the incorporation, in recent years, of government hospitals (now referred to as restructured hospitals). In their case, the change in organizational and financial status was more radical since they were previously under the direct control and financial management of the Ministry of Health, and did not enjoy the partial autonomy of a statutory board.

C. Reform of Personnel Functions

Formerly, the personnel functions within the civil service were mainly the responsibility of the Public Service Commission, together with the two other service commissions (viz. the Education Service Commission, and the Police and the Civil Defense Services Commission), and also the Public Service Division (PSD). The permanent secretaries and heads of departments in line ministries could exercise only limited personnel functions, delegated by the Public Service Commission (PSC), relating to the recruitment and promotion of the lower grades. However, in January 1995, important personnel responsibilities were delegated to the ministries, especially in the area of recruitment and promotion. However, for elite positions, such as the administrative service and promotions in the higher notches of the superscale grades of the professional and departmental services, the PSC continues to be responsible.

Another major change in the personnel management of the public sector has been the expansion of training. The main body responsible for training was the then Civil Service Institute (now known as the Institute of Public Administration), which offers in-service training courses and modules for civil servants at most levels from Superscale and Division 1 to Division 3. Further training for senior and professional civil servants is provided by the Civil Service College established in 1993. It is partly based on the model of France's Ecole National d'Administration, and offers induction courses, management development programs, seminars, talks, lecture series, and conferences on a variety of subjects.

D. The Shift to Client-Oriented Public Administration

In recent times, there has been a shift towards a more client-centered form of public administration, in which street-level officials are encouraged to be more sensitive to the needs of the public with whom they deal.

The most recent initiative in the shift to a client-centered bureaucracy has been the upgrading of counter and processing services in Government departments and offices. The aim was to make them "more accountable to (their) customers, be they individuals, companies or other agencies." The fostering of good customer relations has been a central priority for departments and offices that deal with inquiries, requests, and applications from the public on a day-to-day basis.

The initiative has particularly focused upon the performance of counter staff. Together with their managers and supervisors, the counter staff is expected to act informatively and courteously when handling inquiries and requests from members of the public. Counter staff are now appraised specifically on their manners, job knowledge, and helpfulness when dealing with the public. Financial incentives are provided, such as monthly bonus or quarterly bonus for those who are appraised positively. The appraisal is based on both the reports of supervisors and feedback forms filled in by members of the public. To improve their interactive skills, counter staff is also sent for special courses.

As part of the same initiative in providing more efficient customer-based services, attention has been given to weeding out unnecessary rules, procedures and red tape. Such streamlining together with computerization, has, amongst other things, led to significant improvements in expediting the processing of inquiries, applications, appeals, and registrations. For example, the registration of a company by the Registry of Companies and business, which previously took up to 49 days, now takes 9 days. The Ministry of Manpower now processes work permit applications in 3 days in contrast to 28 days previously.

The Service Improvement Unit was established in 1991 in the Public Service Division to promote better quality service, followed by the appointment in all the ministries of Service Quality Managers, each supported by a steering committee of other ministry officials. The Service Improvement Unit provides for ministries a set of guidelines to assess the quality of service. On the basis of quarterly feedback reports from Service Quality Managers, trends in service quality can be identified. In addition to giving feedback, Service Quality Managers are responsible for upgrading customer services in their ministries, and to this end may hire specialist consultants.

E. Creation of Local Administration

Another reform in Singapore's public administration has been the introduction in 1988 of a limited form of local administration, known as town councils. This has modified the hitherto unitary nature of the Singapore state, in which public services were under the centralized control of the civil service and statutory boards.

Town councils exercise jurisdictions only within public housing estates, but the geographical boundaries of the council area are coextensive with the parliamentary constituency or constituencies in which housing estates are located. The town councils are responsible for the management, maintenance and improvement of the common areas in the public housing estates (e.g. corridors, lifts, car parks, and gardens), taking over these functions from the HDB, which is the main public housing agency in Singapore. In addition, the councils levy charges and collect fees for the services they provide and may also undertake small-scale capital and renovation projects, but not major upgrading projects since the town councils are not the landlords and lessors of the buildings.

Town councils are largely financed by the central government, with only a small proportion of their revenue derived from the local levies that they impose on local residents in the form of service and conservancy charges.

Town councils arose out the desire to deconcentrate day-to-day maintenance responsibilities in respect of public housing. It was recognized that a town council would be more aware of maintenance problems within a particular housing estate, and more readily responsive to suggestions by local residents than the large central bureaucracy of the HDB

Appendix1: Singapore government organizational structure

(Adapted from: <http://www.sg/govern.html>)

Singapore is a republic with a parliamentary system of government. A written constitution provides for the organs of state, namely the executive, the legislature and the judiciary. The Head of the State is the President and administration of government is vested in the Cabinet headed by the Prime Minister.

The Executive

The Executive consists of the President and the Cabinet. The Constitution provides for a President who is elected by the citizens of Singapore (Note: it was only in January 1991 that Singapore citizens can elect their President).

The elected President holds office for a fixed term of six years and is empowered to veto government budgets and appointments to public office. He also examines the Government's exercise of its powers under the Internal Security Act and religious harmony laws, and its investigations into cases of corruption.

An appointed Council of Presidential Advisors advises and makes recommendations to the President. The President must consult the council before performing some of his functions, for instance, the appointment of key civil servant.

The first Presidential election was held on 28 August 1993. Mr Ong Teng Chong was elected.

Mr S R Nathan was elected Singapore's second President on 18 August 1999 and assumed his duties on 1 September 1999.

The Cabinet

The Cabinet is responsible for all government policies and the day-to-day administration of the affairs of state. It is responsible collectively to Parliament, and comprises the Prime Minister and the ministers in charge of the ministries of Communications and Information Technology, Community Development and Sports, Defence, Education, the Environment, Finance, Foreign Affairs, Health, Home Affairs, Information and the Arts, Law, Manpower, National Development, and Trade and Industry.

The Legislature

The Singapore legislature comprises the President and Parliament. Laws in and for Singapore are enacted by the President with the advice and consent of Parliament

Parliament

As the supreme legislative body, the parliament is unicameral. The present parliament of 85 elected members: 9 members are directly elected from single-member constituencies and 76 are elected in teams of 4-6 to represent the 15 Group Representation Constituencies (GRCs). At least one member of any group standing for the GRCs must be from an ethnic minority (that is, non-Chinese). Non-constituency and nominated MPs also sit in parliament. The main mission statement is to assist Parliament in its functions and in all matters connected with its procedure and practice, in the organisation of its business and proceedings and in the work of its Committees, the Presidential Council for Minority Rights and the Asean Inter-Parliamentary Organisation (AIPO).

The Judiciary

Judicial power in Singapore is vested in the Supreme Court and the Subordinate Courts. The Judiciary administers the law independently of the Executive and this independence is safeguarded by the Constitution of the Republic of Singapore. The Supreme Court consists of the High Court, the Court of Appeal, and the Court of Criminal Appeal. The Subordinate Courts consist of District Courts, Magistrates' Courts, the Juvenile Court, the Coroners' Court and the Small Claims Tribunals.

Structure of the Singapore Government Administration

