

**SECTION 2: SINGAPORE'S PHILOSOPHY OF GOVERNANCE**

- 2.1 Principles of good governance
- 2.2 Civil Service values and practices that will be carried into the 21st century
- 2.3 Public service 21st century

## 2.1 Principles of governance

Singapore is a small city state covering 646 sq. km – 42 km from east to west and 23 km from north to south – and is completely urbanised. It imports all its food and most of its water. Every child grows up with an inescapable sense of national vulnerability, a simple lesson about the island’s geography. However, its small size has some advantages. Government is less complex, it is able to react quickly to social, economic and political situations, and it can mobilise the people easily. Disadvantages include a lack of economic mass, limited natural resources, and little influence on external events.

Because of its size, certain approaches in public policy in Singapore are likely to offer greater chances of success than others. The following is a representative list:

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| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>IMPROVING THE CHANCES OF SUCCESS</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Solidarity of Hearts and Minds</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Attitude of Self-Reliance</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Reward for Work; Work for Reward</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Test for Results, not Political Correctness</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Pragmatism, not Dogma in Economics</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Clean and Effective Public Service</p> |
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The British military presence in 1967 accounted for at least 20 to 25 per cent of the GDP. Unemployment ran as high as nine per cent. The Vietnam War was in full swing at that time. Given the backdrop of geography and history, it is not surprising that how best to assure the livelihood of Singaporeans with a safe and secure environment tends to dominate the thinking of both the people and the government. The government mobilised the people through intensive grassroots and mass communication, backing speech with action.

Securing jobs became a top priority. MNCs were welcome for the employment, investments, technology, know-how and markets they brought, a move not considered politically correct at that time. Tough action was taken to assure law and order.

Family planning was actively promoted to stem the rise in population. Compulsory military conscription was introduced for all males to bolster defence capability in the face of the British military withdrawal, as well as to serve as an important instrument in nation-building. These and other policies were hard-headed thinking reflecting the vulnerable position Singapore found itself in immediately after independence.

The Government moved decisively to shape the Public Service into an effective instrument of government policy. Certain fundamentals in governance were established right from those early days.

### **GOVERNANCE FUNDAMENTALS**

#### **Reward for Work; Work for Reward**

- Eschew Corruption and Nepotism
- Meritocracy for best use of Talent
- Maximum investment in Education
- Focused Subsidies with Co-payment, in Education, Health and Housing
- Asset Enhancement, Not Subsidies for Consumption
- Limited Welfare, not hand-outs: each has responsibility for own well-being

#### **Test for Results, not Political Correctness**

- Pragmatism, not Dogma, in Economics
- Learn by doing; correct and adjust as we go
- Secure opportunities, through Nimbleness, Flexibility and Adaptability

#### **Leadership is Key**

- Vision and direction essential for mobilising the people
- Government must have good share of national talent

Central to the thinking of the political leadership in Singapore is the critical need for an honest and competent Public Service which shares its nation-building philosophy and developmental goals.

The total strength of the Singapore Public Service is 113,000 with 62,000 in 15 ministries with its component departments, and 51,000 in 55 statutory boards.

Over the years, the following characteristics have become ingrained in the Singapore Public Service:

### **PUBLIC SERVICE CHARACTERISTICS**

- Fair and impartial in serving the public but not neutral about executing Government policy;
- Instincts of what are national concerns and interests and good understanding of national imperatives;
- Commitment to the values of meritocracy and freedom from corruption and nepotism;
- Judging effectiveness by results achieved with pragmatism and a sense of urgency;
- Continuous drive for efficiency in execution in a way which is responsive and economic.

These characteristics are by no means immutable or guaranteed. They have to be continually worked at.

Singapore has no government-wide, multi-year plans, strategic planning agencies or central co-ordinating agencies. Individual ministries carry out multi-year planning according to their needs. We have the advantage of being small enough to be able to function in this manner. But the reason for our being able to operate effectively for so many years with such an approach lies beyond this. What ties the ministries and other government agencies together are values and common understanding of national concerns and interests, rather than overarching national plans.

Singapore's development since the 1960s, in retrospect, can be summarised as shown below.

Reforms with a focus, undergirded by the principles of governance described above, have enabled the Singapore civil service to remain effective and dynamic. This has been our approach as we strive for a first-class public service.

### DECADES OF REFORM IN RETROSPECT

<b>Period</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Major Thrusts</b>
1960s	Survival	Changing mindsets of public officers to that of independence Nation-building Economic survival
1970s	Efficiency	Drive for efficiency and effectiveness Increasing selectivity in foreign investments Efficiency through statutory boards and corporations
1980s	People	Drive for productivity Drive for talent Move to higher value-added investments
1990s	Change	Future unknown and uncertain Live with world as Singapore finds it "Public Service for the 21st Century (PS21)"

## **2.2 Civil Service values and practices that will be carried into the 21st century**

In preparing for the 21st century, the Civil Service has made an open declaration of the Civil Service Corporate Statement which spelt out its mission, goals and beliefs. It also reflects the attitudes and values the Civil Service wants entrenched.

Details of Civil Service values is covered in Section 4.5 on "Mission Orientation". The rest of the profile discusses some of the Civil Service practices that will be carried into the 21st century.

## **2.3 Public service for the 21st century (PS21)**

To prepare the Singapore Civil Service for the 21st century, the Civil Service has launched a programme code-named "PS21" – or Public Service for the 21st Century – to prepare the public service for the challenges it will face. Details of the PS21 MTSD/VAProgramme are discussed below.