

SECTION 3: PUBLIC SERVICE FOR THE 21st CENTURY

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3.1 Overview of PS21

As Singapore moves into the 21st century, the Singapore Public Service needs to ready itself for the challenges ahead. Countries are getting increasingly competitive and the public service needs to sharpen its saw and be proactive to serve the country and its people better.

The context for change

The future is unknown and uncertain. There is increasing complexity and an avalanche of information is flooding the world. The rate of change is increasing and with it, new challenges need to be faced as new opportunities present themselves.

The Singapore public sector needs to be responsive to two major developments: a public that is demanding increasingly higher standards of service, and an economy that is increasingly outward-oriented. The public sector needs the imagination, pragmatism, nimbleness and flexibility to adapt to new requirements. In an emerging world where reaction times are getting shorter while choices and risks have increased, the public sector needs to work smarter, not just harder.

Singapore has little influence and control over external events. The key to survival and success lies in its people's attitude to change and their skills for managing change.

Implementing change

To prepare public officers for change and for the challenges of the 21st century, the Singapore Public Service launched a programme on 5 May, 1995 known as "Public Service for the 21st century" or "PS21 " for short. PS21 is about inculcating in every civil servant a positive attitude towards change and in making every civil servant an activist for change. It is about shaping the public service so that it remains relevant and effective to meet the needs of the new century.

Any organisation that effects change only in reaction to circumstances becomes the slave of circumstances. It dooms itself to running around making urgent change after urgent change because it allows circumstances to overtake it. The thrust in PS21 is to see change as part of Civil Service life, and to prepare for desired change as a superior way of managing the future.

Many public officers tend to see their job principally as that of observing rules and following precedents. The qualities of consistency and continuity, perceived as the virtues of the Public Service, will prove to be limitations unless we carefully graft upon them the qualities of flexibility and enterprise. We need to overlay the role of facilitator and nurturer upon a public service whose traditional role is that of regulator and controller.

To help Singapore succeed in the new emerging century, the Singapore public service is looked upon as the:

- (i) creator of conducive conditions for Singaporeans and business – so that Singapore can stay ahead of the competition;
- (ii) catalyst for desired change – to entrench a mentality helpful to the management of successful change, a mentality that sees change as opportunities for improvement and progress;
- (iii) pace-setter of desired change, because the public service needs to be in front and leading the way forward. The public service must not only change in step with developments in Singapore society and the international environment, but move ahead to create and facilitate programmes for national growth;
- (iv) standard-bearer, because the intent is not just to match but to surpass benchmarks in best management practices, setting superior standards in public administration – to be a good model for efficiency, innovation and service quality.

The desired end is a public service always on the look-out for improvement, for better ways to do things, questioning if it should carry on doing what it is doing, asking what else it should be doing. It means a paradigm shift in the way public servants usually work and think.

The objectives of PS21 are therefore:

- to nurture an attitude of service excellence in meeting the needs of the public with high standards of quality and courtesy;
- to foster an environment which induces and welcomes continuous change for greater efficiency and cost-effectiveness by employing modern management tools and techniques while paying attention to the morale and welfare of public servants.

The elements for setting up the organisational framework for managing PS21 are:

Staff Well-Being:	the focus is on the individual
Quality Service:	the focus is on the customer
WITS (Work Improvement Teams) and Suggestions:	the focus is on attitude development, continuous improvement and building teams
Organisational Review:	the focus is on vision, future search for strategic improvements/change

PS21 aims to cultivate the following attitudes and values among public servants:

Attitudes

- To be the best, to do the best;
- To be an active agent for change and continuous improvement;
- To be a team-player where the result of group effort exceeds the sum of the individual efforts.

Shared Values

- We serve the public with courtesy, efficiency and integrity;
- We are members of a forward-looking, innovative and resourceful organisation;
- We care for our staff, value their contributions, and seek to develop them to their fullest potential.

In implementing PS21, four PS21 functional committees each headed by a Permanent Secretary were set up. They are:

The PS21 Staff Well-Being Committee

To promote policies and programmes that provide for the well-being of public servants.

The PS21 Quality Service Committee

To promote quality service in meeting the needs of the public as well as internal customers.

The PS21 EXCEL (Excellence through Continuous Enterprise and Learning) Committee

To foster positive attitudes towards change and an environment which seeks continuous improvement.

The PS21 Organisational Review Committee

To examine organisational structures and procedures for greater effectiveness and efficiency.

3.2 Service excellence

As the Singapore population becomes better-educated and demands higher standards of service, the Civil Service must gear itself to provide top quality to members of the public.

The context for change

The public is the reason for the existence of the public service. With the launch of PS21, the public service has set out the definition of Quality Service in open statements under Excellence in the Public Service. It is a commitment to the public and an open declaration of intent to deliver quality service to the public.

Excellence in the public service conceptualised from the standpoint of civil servants means:

- We want to give you quality service
- We are courteous and fair
- We do our best to help
- We have pride in our work
- We want to keep improving
- Feedback shows us where we can do better. Suggestions help us improve. Praise helps us work with a smile.

Quality service covers every aspect of contact with the public: telephone, face-to-face contact and written communication.

Implementing change

Organisations are expected to deliver quality service to the public. It is therefore important that counter staff are helpful, courteous and efficient when serving the public.

A Counter Allowance Scheme was introduced in August 1995 to encourage and recognise quality counter service. The intention is to encourage staff serving at counters to be courteous, helpful and efficient when serving the public. Counter staff will receive a monthly allowance based on a set of criteria. Outstanding performers will also be rewarded with quarterly bonuses. Those who gave poor service or receive substantiated complaints from the public will not be rewarded. This requires continuous monitoring of performance.

A Service Excellence Helplist shows the specific standards of behaviour supervisors expect of counter staff. The public is also encouraged to give feedback using the Service Feedback Forms given out by the counter staff. Assessments of performance are based on inputs from supervisors and from feedback forms completed by customers.

In June 1996, the monthly counter allowance was extended to officers who provide services over the telephone. Those who qualify are those deployed specifically to provide service over the telephone, e.g. accept applications or registrations or handle enquiries on government rules and procedures. Officers whose function is only to redirect incoming calls do not qualify. A set of standards of behaviour is provided to the supervisors in the form of a checklist known as the Telephone Service Excellence Helplist for supervisors to assess their staff on the level of service provided. An officer will not be eligible for the counter allowance if he/she receives more than two substantiated complaints of poor service.

Desired change will not come about just because top management desire the change. People at different levels need to support the change programme and must be prepared for the hard work that is required before the desired change can be entrenched. Hence, reinforcement of desired change is carried out through the helplist, training, observations, feedback and incentives.

Most vital to the programme is that specific criteria are set to measure the quality of face-to-face service and service through the telephone. The helplists were therefore designed so that service characteristics or requirements are known to the service personnel, his supervisor and the supervisor's supervisor. In this way, there is no argument over what the required performance is. For instance, the attributes of face-to-face service in the helplist requires behaviour that is specific, performable, realistic and observable by an organisational or independent observer. The helplist becomes a mirror or a communication tool based on actual observations.

Another initiative in this area is the use of *electronic networks* to give the public easy access to government departments. For instance, applications for public service jobs can now be made on the Internet.

Enhancing service quality in the public sector is a continuous process. Training, practice, feedback, reinforcement and recognition of staff are vital steps on the road to excellence. The Civil Service will do its best to maintain and improve the quality of service to members of the public, but training is only one element in the quality equation.

3.3 Work Improvement Teams (WITS)

The Singapore Civil Service introduced Work Improvement Teams (WITS) more than a decade ago. Under PS21, the concept was revamped and revitalised, and all employees are now expected to participate in WITS activities in one way or another.

A WIT is a group of employees of any grade from the same work area or cross functional areas or in cross-functional issues who meet regularly to solve problems or seek improvements in their own work area.

The term "work improvement" is taken to mean quality improvement. "Quality" includes quality of management; service; procedures; outputs; inputs; personnel; teamwork; efficiency; effectiveness; attitude; work environment; information; problem-solving capability; service; the use of resources; and performance.

The philosophy behind WITS is that an employee wants to take an interest and pride in his/her work and make a contribution to his/her organisation, and ought to be helped to do so. It is the organisation's responsibility to provide the conditions whereby the employee can fulfill some of his/her socio-psychological needs (for example, the need for belonging; self-esteem; self-actualisation and initiative; recognition; constructive contribution; pride of work; closer identification with the organisation).

The WITS concept is based on findings that true motivation must be based on the work itself by building into it goal orientation; learning; direct communication; feedback; responsibility; recognition,; self-actualisation and teamwork.

WITS aim to improve:

Performance

- quality of service, output
- productiveness

Motivation

- making work more meaningful
- providing little challenges here and there
- having open and effective communication
- developing more positive attitudes

Quality of work life

- job satisfaction

- work environment
- teamwork and human relations

The context for change

Empirical evidence shows that the average employee wants to contribute constructively to his/her organisation; that s/he wants to be part of the team and wants to do his/her best for the organisation. The employee has great positive potential that is often sub-optimised by the way organisations use them. WITS is conceptualised and practised as an action-learning process to tap the potential of employees. WITS is a way of developing employees so that their need for commitment to their organisation is satisfied.

Implementing change

With the launch of PS21, every individual in a ministry is encouraged to participate in Work Improvement Teams (WITS) activities as a WIT member/leader/facilitator or as a member of the ministry's Steering Committee.

All new entrants are automatically assigned to a WIT. Existing staff who are not members of any WIT either form new teams or are co-opted into existing WITS. This results in wide participation in WITS activities.

A newly-formed WIT will have to complete at least one project within its first year of formation. Subsequently, each WIT is expected to complete two or three projects a year.

Each ministry has a ministry-level Steering Committee responsible for working out the system and procedures; setting realistic targets; establishing evaluation criteria; establishing criteria for tangible and intangible awards and other forms of recognition; monitoring, evaluating and reviewing the progress and achievements; and promoting and publicising productivity participation programmes within the ministry.

Every year, a public sector-wide WITS Convention is held to recognise outstanding ministries, departments, teams, facilitators, leaders and members for their contributions to the WITS movement. In WITS, no improvement effort is too small. All improvement projects, no matter what the size of the improvement sought, are worthy of celebration and recognition.

To enable officers in the Civil Service to understand the philosophy behind WITS and to learn WITS tools and techniques, the Civil Service College (Institute of Public Administration and Management) provides training in the following courses:

1. WITS Members' Course
2. WITS Leaders' Course
3. WITS Facilitators' Course
4. The Facilitator As A Process Manager

Details of an officer's involvement in the WITs are also included in the Staff Confidential Report (SCR) to accord official recognition.

3.4 Staff suggestions

The context for change

There is always a better way of doing things in the Civil Service. More than ever before, the 21st century requires civil servants to be receptive to change and to continuously look for improvements as they carry out their duties. The Civil Service needs to create an environment where innovation, improvement and change is a cherished aspect of being nimble and progressive in the face of 21st century challenges. So in addition to WITS, the Civil Service introduced a new suggestions scheme which marks a departure from the old paradigm which only valued a suggestion in terms of monetary savings.

Implementing change

The Staff Suggestions Scheme (SSS) provides a channel aimed at encouraging every employee to suggest ideas which may be helpful in solving or avoiding problems or improving work processes or the work environment. Through the Suggestions Scheme, an employee can participate directly in helping his organisation manage change or bring about improvements. An employee will find his job more meaningful and interesting when he is allowed to participate in the thinking, innovation and change process. The Staff Suggestions Scheme aims to get him used to looking for improvements.

Through providing the conditions that enable staff to bring forward ideas, problems or situations, it is hoped that a culture that favours change and improvement-seeking is nurtured. Therefore, any suggestion initiated by an individual that provides information about a blockage, about a new way of looking at things, new alternatives or minor improvements in doing things is encouraged. This means that the basic philosophy is that even small things can have strategic consequences, and managers/administrators should not shy away from small problems or concerns.

An idea from staff can be accepted as a suggestion if it helps to:

- improve process efficiency;
- improve service/product quality;
- improve the use of resources, materials, space etc.;
- reduce damage;

- cut down service time;
- improve service standards;
- improve the design of forms, equipment etc.;
- reduce paperwork, or simplify procedures;
- save costs;
- cut down wastage;
- achieve corporate, group or section goals or effectiveness better;
- improve practices/routines;
- make better use of aids/machines;
- bring up a problem or a potential problem;
- highlight a problem;
- provide information or insight.

However, an idea would not normally be accepted if it is:

- a grievance or a complaint relating to the terms and conditions of employment;
- criticism directed at other staff;
- a solution to problems created by the officer himself, e.g. error rates, inefficiency.

Each ministry has a ministry-level Committee which is responsible for planning, setting realistic targets, establishing suggestions evaluation criteria, establishing criteria for tangible and intangible awards and other forms of recognition, monitoring and reviewing progress, and encouraging participation within the ministry.

Ministries which embark on the Staff Suggestions Scheme for the first time will strive towards at least one suggestion per employee per year for the first 12 months, and full participation in the Suggestions Scheme.

Staff are encouraged to contribute their suggestions either on an individual or group basis (three or more contributors). The suggestion made will include full details of the problem identified, the proposed solution and the possible benefits of implementing the suggestion. Once a suggestion is accepted for implementation, the appropriate authorities will take follow-up action.

To support the Staff Suggestions Scheme, the Civil Service College (Institute of Public Administration and Management) conducts two types of courses on SSS:

1. PS21 – Staff Suggestions Scheme: Promoting and Encouraging Participation
2. PS21 – Staff Suggestions Scheme: Developing and Fielding Your Ideas

Ministries are encouraged to send their staff for training.

Details of an officer's involvement in the Suggestions Scheme is included in the Staff Confidential Report (SCR) to accord official recognition, e.g. the number of suggestions contributed; the role in promoting the suggestions scheme; special awards conferred. In addition to official recognition through the SCR, other awards are conferred to recognise individuals, groups/teams and departments for their outstanding contributions and achievements.

The Suggestions Scheme provides an opportunity for every employee, either as individuals or teams/groups, to propose continuous improvements to enhance productivity.

3.5 Other aspects of PS21

(A) Staff well-being

The public service has schemes which cater to the general well-being of staff, such as medical/dental coverage, leave schemes and staff loans. However, there are always suggestions on how existing schemes can better meet the needs of public officer. Whatever is done has to take into consideration the larger context since the public sector as a whole is the largest employer in Singapore. It will influence the overall tone for employment in the country.

The context for change

In striving towards excellent service to meet the needs of the public, the needs of the service providers need to be taken care of too. It is only through civil servants that the public service can achieve the objectives of PS21 – to attain higher standards of service and to be responsive to new developments and changes. PS21 Staff Well-Being is the PS21 aspect of managing the human side of the enterprise.

Implementing change

The role of the PS21 Staff Well-Being Committee is to promote programmes that will motivate staff. These programmes cover the areas of healthy lifestyle, recreation, social development, recognition and appreciation.

Many of the schemes relating to staff well-being are service-wide. However, individual ministries and statutory boards are given the autonomy to implement their own activities and programmes and set up their own facilities.

In October 1995, the Civil Service introduced a Long Service Award Scheme to recognise officers who have provided good service over a continuous period of 10 years and more. The Award was initiated by the PS21 Staff Well-Being Committee to express the regard and appreciation of the Civil Service for the effort and contribution of these officers. The criteria for the award are length of service and performance.

The Civil Service has also implemented a Healthy Lifestyle Programme to take care of civil servants' health and fitness.

(B) Organisational review

The Public Service has rules and regulations to follow. It is important to abide by these rules and regulations through the work processes put in place. However, it is also essential to look for improvements in the way work processes are carried out. This is because what worked well in the past may not work in the future in view of rising public expectations and demands for higher standards of service. New requirements necessitate a search for new relevance.

The context of change

Organisational reviews focus on strategic directions for organisations including seeking new strategies, goals, approaches and systems. No matter how active staff are in WITS and in the suggestions scheme, there is a clear limit to how much improvement they can bring about. This is because their ideas are largely confined to their immediate work situations. Fundamental strategic and department or service-wide improvements can only come through management interventions. For example, corporatisation and the establishment of Autonomous Agencies can only come from a much higher level. To help top managers bring out strategic changes, PS21 exhorts central agencies to focus less on control and more on how best to empower and enable operating agencies to get their jobs done and do the public proud through greater effectiveness.

Customers of government services see the Government as a single organisation and are not concerned about how the public service organises itself internally. More often than not, the activities are organised along functional lines for the public service's own convenience as service providers. And as each organisation in the public sector seeks its own efficiency paradigm, the public may get red tape and inconvenience.

Implementing change

Under the leadership of steering committees and the Service Improvement Unit (discussed in Section 6.1a), many innovative programmes and systems have been devised to serve the public better. For example, applications for passports can now be made through the post and purchases of shares offered through "Initial Public Offers" can now be done through Automated Teller Machines. More needs to be done in this area as information access is very essential. Departments have also simplified work procedures so that it is easy for the public to do business with the government. For example, organisations like the Central Provident Fund Board (which administers the compulsory national savings scheme for employees) and Housing and Development Board (which builds and manages public housing) have

automated many of their databases and the public can get information through telephones, computer terminals or televuew. The Singapore civil service plans to provide more and more of its services through electronic means in the next century.

By the 1997 financial year, all ministries, departments, organs of state and government-funded statutory boards will be managed as Autonomous Agencies (AAs). As part of an AA, staff will work towards achieving clearly-defined output and performance targets. The goal is to transform the culture of public organisations into one that is efficient, effective, enterprising and responsive, and entrepreneurial.