

“Performance Appraisal in the Public Service”

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During the launch ceremony for the Governments' Public Sector Reform Programme in January 1995, the Rt. Hon. Prime Minister Owen Arthur emphasised that the promotion policy in the public service must be based on objective criteria and that a rethinking of the performance appraisal system should be undertaken.

Current System

In 1996, the Ministry of the Civil Service reviewed the existing system of performance appraisal to determine its adequacy for improving the productivity and performance of public officers. This review exposed a number of deficiencies within the system including problems of subjectivity displayed by some reporting officers when conducting and completing the annual appraisals; submission of incomplete information on appraisal forms; appraisals not completed on a continuous basis; and appraisals used as a punitive measure rather than as a developmental tool. There existed inadequate standards of performance management with a tendency to emphasise an officer's traits rather than his or her performance. Also, the system gave limited opportunity for feedback and no avenue for rewards or sanctions.

Evolution of PRDS

Based on the findings of the review, the Ministry of the Civil Service under whose portfolio this activity fell, proceeded to include in the Draft White Paper on Public Sector Reform, the need for the development of an effective performance appraisal system.

Utilising inputs from various key stakeholders including the social partners, the Office of Public Sector Reform (OPSR) embarked on a programme aimed at providing the Public Service with a new performance appraisal instrument: the Performance Review and Development System (PRDS). The OPSR was also charged to produce relevant guidelines for the use of PRDS and that it should assess all levels of personnel in the public service, excluding the police and teachers, for whom separate appraisal systems exist.

Development

In 1997, consultancy services in the area of training for the new system was provided by the Commonwealth Secretariat. This exercise saw some twenty officers from across the public service being trained in the purpose and use of appraisal techniques. The objective was intended that these persons would go on to train others in the use of the PRDS. This would ensure that persons administering the new appraisal system would be equipped to do so in a competent manner.

Today, this reform initiative has transformed into a pilot project managed by the PRDS Unit, comprising six staff members to oversee the development and implementation of the new performance appraisal system across the public service. A Steering Committee of public officers and union representatives was formed to manage the Performance Review and Development System process and to ensure that the project remains on course. The PRDS Unit continues the rolling out of PRDS in five agencies: the Ministry of the Civil Service, Finance, Home Affairs, Labour & Social Security and Office of the Attorney General.

Prerequisites



It is imperative that these agencies have in place strategic plans, organisational charts, job descriptions, operational manuals and work plans, as they are the essential foundations for the successful implementation of the new system. To date, OPSR has assisted several Ministries and Departments with the prerequisites and continues to give support to the pilot agencies. One of the main objectives of the new appraisal system is to improve the organisation and employee performance by creating a link between the strategic plan, the organisations plan and the individual employees’ work plans. The new system will also see

performance linked to a suitable reward and recognition programme. To achieve these linkages, it will be necessary to continuously assess employee performance, which must be done in a transparent, and non-discriminatory manner.

A New Structure

The PRDS is structured to:

- Link individuals’ work performance to the key tasks and results of each agency;
- Provide a set of necessary behaviours aimed at the development of employee skills and behaviours required to achieve the “renewed professionalism” in the public service;
- Improve work planning and the allocation of resources;
- Identify employees’ competencies and allow the prioritising of training and development needs;
- Provide opportunities for improved dialogue between managers, supervisors and employees;
- Identify early, any unsatisfactory work performance and develop relevant performance improvement plans for employees who are not meeting required standards;
- Recognise and reward outstanding work performance through incentives and opportunities for career development; and

- Appraise the work performance of all employees in an open, objective, fair and consistent manner.

The PRDS is based on an annual cycle of planning, objectives setting, coaching, review and feedback. Appraisals are conducted in four phases, with an initial meeting between supervisors and employees intended to develop the employees work plan in March/April followed by the first progress meeting in July, the second in December and an overall final assessment or evaluation meeting in March of the following year.

The Future

The expectations of PRDS are positive. It seeks to improve the functioning of the public service since it is designed to promote a climate of continuous learning and development growth for all public officers. It is in line with global 'best practices' in performance management. 'Best practice' organisations communicate openly and provide performance feedback to employees. They also make sure that officers understand their roles and they are equipped to carry out their jobs and share the successes of the organisation. At the heart of every public sector reform initiative, lies the desire to improve Government services for the Barbadian Citizenry for whom it provides. PRDS aims to directly improve the productivity of employees and raise levels of customer satisfaction, ultimately directing us towards an improved Public Service. The public can expect more timely and efficient service rendered in a more professional manner.