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**Public Sector Organizational Readiness For Performance
Improvement:
The Case of the Sanitation Services Authority**

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Abstract

Regionally, administrative reform is generally undertaken without much appreciation for the state of either organizational readiness, or of those directly impacted by the impending changes. There may be too great a dependence on the sheer "correctness" of the vision to generate the necessary "buy-in" from the rank and file within the public sector units. This paper promotes alternatively, a data-based view of the change process within government agencies, by identifying the areas where, and to what extent public sector employees' attitudes and opinions may or may not resonate with the new public management philosophies underlying current approaches: value for money, increased productivity and/or improved performance. The paper examines areas of consensus and "resistance" regarding factors most likely to contribute towards the expected organizational change within Barbados' Sanitation Services Authority, and the implications of the findings for the wider public service. It closes with recommendations and some issues requiring further study.

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INTRODUCTION

The issue of the governance of public sector organizations in Barbados has not moved too far beyond peripheral discussions related to the ongoing exchanges on administrative reform. Although discussions refer obliquely to concepts articulated elsewhere, such as, clearer responsibilities for top management, performance (productivity) indicators, output- and results-oriented behaviour, businesslike management, parsimony, financial discipline, efficiency, effectiveness, outputs and outcomes (see Kickert and Koppenjan 1997; Van Wart 1999; Wholey 1999), there is an absence of an articulation of what form the "new public management" should take in Barbados. Despite this, one aspect, the issue of organizational performance improvement, with stout resistance in some quarters, appears to have gained greater prominence.

Another important observation regarding the public sector change effort in Barbados is that much of the discussion on administrative reform is being undertaken without much concern for the issue of organizational and sectoral readiness. This suggests, if anything that the actors and stakeholders may be depending to a large extent on the sheer "correctness" of their viewpoints to generate the necessary "buy in" from the rank and file in public sector organizations. Important questions emerging from all of this are: How far are public sector employees attuned to the philosophies that underscore the new thrust of the present administration to get value for money, increased productivity and/or improved performance? Secondly, what factors are most likely to effect the performance change within public sector agencies?

In an effort to present a data-based view on some of these issues, a limited investigation was initiated. The overarching objective was to assess the readiness of a government agency, the Sanitation Services Authority (SSA), for organizational performance improvement. In fairness to all stakeholders, the agency was not singled-out because of any special organizational characteristic; it was simply a matter of data availability. And as such, the SSA represents an agency whose operations, taken against the backdrop of increasing acceptance of the superiority of the allocative efficiency of the market under the emerging philosophies as found in the literature on the "new public management", "enterprise culture" (see Hood 1991) and "entrepreneurial government" (see Osborne and Gaebler 1995), could well be a candidate for privatization – at least partially. A secondary objective was the possible identification of critical factors which can drive organizational performance improvement in the public sector.

The SSA as a public sector agency has responsibility under the Sanitation Act 1974 for the collection of refuse; the disposal of refuse; street cleaning; cemeteries; and the public baths and conveniences. At the time of the investigation, the staff list indicated that the agency had a staff complement of 586: at the management level 14, at the supervisory level 22, and at the "Other"

subordinate level 550, representing 2%, 4% and 94% respectively of the total workforce.

In keeping with the objectives of this investigation, an attempt was made to incorporate those new public management-related concepts into a series of statements, which would help to identify whether an organization was ready for performance improvement. The result, the questionnaire in the appendix represents a refinement on a previous instrument designed to cover some of these same factors regarding the Barbados Port Authority, as part of a larger study on governance and public policy.

Performance as defined in this study

Although many organizational performance studies are designed around the issue of performance and performance improvement, the topic tends to be addressed under the rubric of organizational development (change) and management development. However, performance is a term that means different things to different people. Wholey (1999) suggests that organizational performance may focus on:

input dollars, staff, incoming workload, legal authority, political/em bureaucracy support;

the activities or processes which convert inputs into outputs and then to outcomes -- the extent to which a government unit's, or its programme activities comply with applicable laws, regulations, guidelines, or standards;

the quantity of an agency's, or a programme outputs -- products or services delivered to partners, clients, or the public;

the unit's, or the programme's efficiency or productivity which relate outputs to inputs;

the unit's, or the programme's service quality and outcomes -- results achieved in individuals, organizations or populations outside the agency or programme;

intermediate outcomes such as client satisfaction, corruption or short-term changes in the behaviour of individuals or organizations;

end outcomes such as environmental quality or health status;

important unintended outcomes of agency's or the programme's activities -- corruption, "creaming", other failures to provide fair treatment, costs incurred by

individuals or organizations as they respond to the agency's or to the programme's activities;

net impact -- what difference a programme has made. This is possible when this net impact can be "measured" through programme evaluation studies that compare programme outcomes to estimates of the outcomes that would have occurred in the absence of the programme.

However, from the productivity perspective, it can be viewed as a combination of performance effectiveness and performance efficiency. Performance effectiveness is a measure of task output and goal accomplishment, and performance efficiency is a measure of resource cost associated with goal accomplishment (see Schermerhorn 1993: 8). Swanson (1996: 53) who suggests the need for emphasis on analysis and metrics, identifies five variables (mission/goal, systems design, capacity, motivation and expertise) at three performance levels: the organizational, process and individual levels. However, in this study performance improvement is restricted to those issues associated with the use of the human resource within the public sector agency – elements which management may have some measure of control.

The paper from here therefore proceeds in four main sections. The remainder of this section takes the reader through the methodology used. This is followed in the second section by a presentation of the findings from the perspectives of two broad categories of workers: firstly, the managerial and supervisory group combined, and secondly the subordinate workers. Although an analysis was also made in terms of gender, primarily the objective was to ascertain whether expected differences in perspectives regarding the issues presented to the male and female employees at the SSA did in fact exist. The findings also present an analysis of the importance of the issues presented to the workers. This was done to provide an indication of how much effort may be required, and in what areas, to induce an improvement in performance within the organization itself, and in the public sector as a whole. A discussion of the findings is presented in the third section with a brief evaluation of the extent of the consistency of measurement of the performance factors identified in the investigation. The paper concludes in the fourth section with recommendations, including further investigation of some of the issues arising from the discussions.

Methodology

In order to determine the level of preparedness of the SSA for performance improvement, six factors were identified as being important. They are: the nature of rewards; human resource utilization; working conditions; organizational climate; decisions and decision making; and perceptions on organizational performance. To assess those factors in relation to organizational behaviour at the SSA, a 27-item survey instrument (see the Appendix) was used. Based on a 7-point scale, the intended unproctored instrument was aimed at determining to

what extent respondents agreed or disagreed with a series of statements related to the six factors identified above.

A departure from the norm, the instrument did not only rely on the perceptions of the operations of the SSA in terms of the issues presented. Based on the internal customer concept of TQM, respondents were also asked to indicate also whether the issues represented by the statements were important or not important from their perspectives. The intention was to gauge respondent sensitivity to those issues as an indication of the level of effort or stretch required to bring which groups of employees and on which particular issues, into alignment with organizational goals. To test in part the reliability and the validity of the constructs used in the questionnaire, the identified factors were subjected to the Chronbach Alpha test.

About 20% of the workforce was successfully interviewed instead of the 25% sample initially targetted for interviews. This was the result of problems associated with the use of the staff list as the sample frame (retirees, deceased persons and those who could not be found) in addition to other resource constraints. The 125 persons successfully contacted were drawn from a non-stratified random sample from the staff list. Random numbers for the sample were generated by the random number function of the MS Excel spreadsheet software. The resulting random numbers were then matched with the consecutively ordered numbers and names on the staff list. A pilot study of the instrument by some staff members of the SSA suggested a potentially high non-response rate for the issue of education attainment level, particularly with respect to subordinate SSA staff. The question was dropped from the survey, which was conducted during the first half of 1996. From the 147 distributed questionnaires, 120 usable responses (with two refusals and three non-useable responses) were analyzed using the SPSS computer software package, comprising 93 (80.9%) males and 22 (19.1%) females; five persons did not identify their sex. The response rate achieved was in part due to the ability of the case helpers to identify and locate the persons identified in the sample.

One drawback of the methodology was that the intended non-proctored approach was violated with respect to certain respondents who had to be assisted with the final part of the questionnaire. On discovery that a significant number of respondents were having difficulty with the statements regarding the objectives of the organization and the issue of productivity, case helpers were instructed to explain what those terms meant. Hence, accuracy regarding the issue of perceptions on performance particularly with the concept of productivity may have been compromised. The necessary intervention by case helpers suggests a significant level of discomfort by some workers with the concept then as had been presented to them. Additionally, because some of the case helpers who had the responsibility for the distribution and collection of the completed questionnaires were also members of the SSA, some of the respondents knew

the case helpers personally and vice versa. This too, could have affected responses to certain questions.

2. THE FINDINGS

Perceptual Orientations of Managerial/Supervisory and Other Staff

Organizational Rewards

Table 1 in the Appendix shows that respondents from both groups largely agreed that those who were rewarded by, or who made headway at the SSA, were those who (a) changed their work style to improve their output (43.8% and 37.5%)¹ but this was more pronounced with the managerial/supervisory group; (b) helped the organization achieve its goals (53.3% and 49.4%), the managerial/supervisory group being fully committed one way or another, unlike other personnel; (c) get along well with others (53.4% and 49.4%) although there was a substantial group of respondents (approximately 20 percent in each case) who were non-committal; and (d) continuously learned new skills to do their jobs better (60.0% and 53.3%).

Human Resource Utilization

The survey data show that respondents considered that the tasks and jobs farmed out to them: (a) largely made good use of their skills, knowledge and abilities (62.6% and 55.8%), but (b) were not re-examined from time to time to ascertain who needed training and in what areas (53.3% and 55.9%), somewhat negating the findings regarding the first set of responses, in so far as this was related to new knowledge, new skills and developments, and in the final analysis, organizational response to its environment; (c) those tasks and jobs were not distributed or based on individual skill levels and on what those individuals were most happy doing (56.3% and 36.9%) -- the latter part of this statement being novel to existing management practice in both the public and private sectors. Again, this was more pronounced in the supervisory/management group; nonetheless (d), individuals were given, by and large, the necessary information and instructions to do what was required of them (71.4% and 57.7%). This viewpoint was however less pronounced within the ranks of the "Other" workers in the organization.

Working Conditions

Responses to the questionnaire indicate a lack of organizational feedback in terms of individual or group performance: employees were not told on regular basis how well they are doing their jobs (53.4% and 57.2%). Significantly, 40% of the supervisor/manager group however considered the SSA was doing a creditable job in this respect. On the other hand, the organization did not seem to train its personnel to work at the highest possible level they were capable of,

based on ability (53.4% and 56.5%). There was however, a significant neutral group of respondents regarding this issue (13.3% and 16.5%), perhaps reflecting discomfort with negative self-reporting.

Employees also reported that they were not made to feel that they were important, nor were they treated as though they were part of a family (53.3% and 51.3%); a large group of subordinates (20.7%) were non-committal, perhaps an indication of dissatisfaction, fatalism, incredulity or even that the matter was raised at all. Additionally, a sizeable group indicated that they were left in the dark about important issues which concerned their jobs (62.6% and 52.3%). Noteworthy too, this was marked by a significant 13.6% non-committal response by the "Other" employee group. .

Organizational Climate

Our investigation suggests too that relations between the different sections of the SSA were not optimal, and that perceptions were reflective to a large extent on where employees were on the totem pole. This factor too, represents one of the weakest areas in terms of organizational readiness for performance improvement at the SSA. The managerial/supervisory group, as opposed to subordinate staff, did not see eye to eye on the issue of the level of cooperation between sections regarding the achievement of organizational goals. An almost equal percentage of workers in the two broad categories indicated diametrically opposite viewpoints on the issue (53.3% and 29.3% in agreement), and (46.7% and 57.4% in disagreement). Nonetheless, a large percentage of the managerial/supervisory group registered some disagreement.

Respondents also indicated that in their view, there was less than frank and honest communication taking place between the different sections of the organization (62.6% and 52.5%) -- a common occurrence in many public and private sector organizations. The presence of functional silos remains a dominant characteristic of the management landscape in the public sector. In terms of organizational groups too, divisions were apparent regarding the issue of mutual appreciation of the roles of the several sections in making the agency successful. Those who agreed that there was some degree of appreciation (43.9% and 38.7%) were almost equal to those who disagreed (31.3% and 42.1%). This was attended also, by a significant element of non-committal responses on both sides (25.0% and 19.3%). Perhaps dissatisfaction, fear, suspicion and resignation were significant factors at play here. The organizational climate being depicted here suggests, that there exists, a serious deficit in the required level of cooperation and teamwork to be addressed, before improved organizational performance at the SSA can be realized.

Managerial and supervisory staff, in relation to other staff members again part company on the issue of positive cooperation between sections of the organization, in terms of sections responding to the needs of other sections of

the SSA to make it successful. However, for the managerial and supervisory group, the level of agreement (60.0% and 44.6%) is much higher than the level of disagreement (33.4% and 48.3%) by subordinate staff on this issue. This represents an obvious gap to be closed.

Decisions and Decision Making

Employees of the SSA depending on their status in the organization, appear to hold differing views regarding decisions about appreciation of work conditions with respect to safety and health of employees. Managerial/supervisory staff indicated that decisions were so based (50.1% and 39.2%) with the opposite view being held by subordinate staff (43.8% and 44.0%).

Respondents also indicated that decisions about work tended to not to be based on the objectives of the organization (53.3% and 47.1%). (At the time of writing, the organization did not have a mission statement and the responses to this question may be tainted in light of the fact that some respondents could not readily identify what the objectives of the organization really were.) The implications for the communication of the organization's strategic management direction are evident. Because knowledge and use of organizational objectives are regarded as a key component in any performance evaluation system. These deficits should be causes for concern. However, according to the managerial and supervisory group, and some subordinate staff, decisions tended to be based on a sense of urgency (53.3% and 41.7%). In fact, the data show that subordinates were equally represented on both sides of this issue, and that there was a significant level of non-committal responses to this issue among this group (6.7% and 16.7%).

Managerial/supervisory level personnel and lower level staff did not agree that decisions about work at the SSA then were based on earning praise from those whom they served (50.1% and 44.2%). It is noteworthy that a significant and near 25% of subordinate staff remained non-committal on this issue. This suggests that granted the reported state of organizational climate with respect to the different sections in terms of the customer-producer-supplier relationship (see Melan 1993), the SSA with respect to the "new public management", had not yet fully developed a customer-orientation.

Perceptions on Productivity and Performance

The majority of respondents considered that improving productivity at the SSA was necessary (78.6% and 64.7%) but as indicated above, managerial/supervisory staff appeared to have a better grasp and/or a greater acceptance of the productivity issues than subordinate staff. Yet, on the comprehension of the concept itself, responses indicated that generally, a large number of employees appeared to have had some understanding of the concept (50.0% and 40.1%). Yet it must be pointed out, that even perhaps with

explanatory assistance from the case helpers, subordinate level workers were almost equally divided on the issue, with a near 19% level of neutral or non-committal responses. The managerial/supervisory staff too, as opposed to the subordinate workers, disagreed on the issue that results from productivity measurements might be embarrassing (46.7% and 33.3%). Whereas managerial/supervisory staff were equally divided on the issue whether there was enough information on hand to measure the performance of the organization (50.0% and 32.9%), the "Other" workers proportionately were more inclined than not, to agree that there was (50.0% and 49.4%). Nonetheless, there was a large percentage of neutral or undecided subordinates regarding this issue (0.0% and 17.6%). This suggests unfamiliarity or unhappiness with the operationalization, communication or presentation of the concept.

Differences in the Perceptions of Male and Female Staff

The SSA, a male-dominated organization provides an interesting case of male versus female perspectives (the groups comprising 80.9% and 19.1% respectively of the sample) on organizational performance and well-being. Overall, our findings (see Table 2 in the Appendix) gelled with expectations of a divergence of opinions on the issues as presented. Some of these expectations arise essentially out of: the nature of the organization; the type of work carried out there; the reward system; the distribution of tasks and jobs; and the knowledge of technical matters regarding operations.

The Reward System

With regards to rewarding employees, and those making headway at the SSA, there was non-concurrence on the issue of any association with employees changing their work style: a larger percentage of females disagreed (52.7%) than that for the males who agreed (39.0%). On the question of employees helping the SSA achieve its goals, there too was a divergence of opinion in terms of gender. A higher percentage of males agreed (53.0%) than of females (45.0%); who disagreed. Similarly, regarding the issue of cooperation and teamwork, a greater percentage of males agreed (54.4%) than of females who disagreed (42.8%). Likewise, with respect to the issue regarding the upgrading of skills to do a better job, a higher percentage of male respondents agreed (56.8%) than female respondents who disagreed (50.1%). It can be said therefore that in general, females felt somewhat disadvantaged by the existing reward system at the SSA, whereas males appeared to be largely satisfied with the status quo.

HR Utilization

There were some mixed views by male and female employees on the issues surrounding human resource utilization at the SSA. Without the benefit of a profile of education attainment of the SSA employees surveyed, and with respect to the issue of human resource utilization in the organization, the data show that:

(a) the majority of both males (55.6%) and females (52.4%) agreed that the SSA made good use of their skills, knowledge and abilities; (b) a majority of both sexes equally indicated that the organization did not examine the tasks and jobs on a regular basis to ascertain which employees who needed training and in what areas (54.2% male and 73.8% female), perhaps projecting the view that garbage collection and disposal as a relatively unchanging routine; (c) that although the men were almost equally divided on the issue of job allocation according to skills -- and where possible, according to personal preference (approximately 41.5% in each case), a majority of women (44.4%) disagreed that jobs and tasks were so allocated; but that (d) a majority of males (60.8%) and females (47.4%) however agreed that they were given the information or instruction as to what was required of them in terms of jobs to be performed.

From the foregoing, it might be said, therefore that there was general consensus on the part of both male and female employees, regarding the way the SSA utilizes its human resources, but that the organization appears to be sub-optimally utilizing its HR in terms of skill maintenance and the maximum usage of individual skills and/or aptitudes.

Working Conditions

Majorities of both male and female employees at the SSA share the same perspectives on working conditions there. Majorities in both groups disagreed with the view that the SSA told them on a regular basis how well they were doing their jobs, suggesting poor, or non-use of the performance appraisal tool -- a practice not uncommon in the public sector, although a smaller percentage of males (55.3%) than females (65.0%) expressed this viewpoint; (b) similarly, a smaller percentage of males (52.5%) than females (73.6%) indicated that they were not trained to work at the maximum level of capability based on their abilities, suggesting not only a likelihood of "protective" gender bias, granted the nature of the work, but also non-optimal use of human resources with respect to the males; (c) a smaller proportion of males (46.8%) but still a majority, and a larger percentage of females (63.2%) did not perceive that the SSA made them feel that they were important, nor did they feel that they were being treated as though they were part of a family. This perspective on organizational behaviour is increasingly being regarded as an essential component of enlightened HRM strategy. This supports the viewpoint that team spirit and teamwork -- even if being explored -- at the time of writing, had not been fully developed in the agency in particular, and in the public sector in general; and (d) majorities in both groups males (57.3%) and females (50.0%) indicated that they were left in the dark about important issues which concerned their jobs. This suggests yet another organizational communication gap to be filled. Nonetheless, it must be reiterated that the SSA represents a very difficult management challenge in light of the circumstances surrounding the operations of the SSA, particularly in terms of demographics and employee intake.

Organizational Climate

There was more or less general concurrence – albeit negative -- regarding gender perceptions of the organizational climate then existing at the SSA. For instance, a sizeable majority of men (60.5%) as well as a majority women (40.0%) did not perceive that the different sections at the SSA helped each other achieve the goals of the organization; however a significant 30% of the women were undecided regarding this issue. Regarding communication between the sections, the results show that male and female respondents considered that this was less than frank and honest (males 52.9% and females a larger 73.7%). With respect to each section in the SSA appreciating the part played others in making the SSA successful, a smaller majority (with a large percentage of neutral or undecided responses on both sides 20% in each case) considered that this was indeed so (males 39.9% and females 42.8%). This is perhaps an indication of frustration, anger or general unhappiness with the situation. However, on the issue of sections responding to the needs of others to make the SSA successful, the two groups however were separated. Some 46.8% of male respondents agreed (a slight majority over those who disagreed) and 50.0% of females disagreed. It can be concluded then that males and females, except on the issue of inter-sectional response, saw eye to eye on the issues associated with organizational climate, although the viewpoints on the issues were not all positive.

Decisions and Decision Making

There was greater variation in the responses of the sexes regarding decisions and decision making at the SSA. However, there was consensus on two issues: the SSA's objectives, and receiving praise from the SSA's customers. On the issue of decisions being based on conditions regarding the safety and health of all employees, the majority of males (46.9%) disagreed. A slightly larger percentage of women (47.5%) agreed. However, these responses were attended by a significant level of non-committal responses on both sides (15.2% for males and 19.0% for females). This raises the following questions: Are the male and female workers at the SSA all exposed to the same working conditions? And, is there significant gender protection with respect to job allocation at the SSA? Interestingly, majorities in both groups (the men 51.5%, more so than women 44.5%) agreed that decisions about work were based on the SSA's objectives. Yet, the presence of a surprisingly large percentage of non-committal responses from the females, (perhaps a reflection of both their status in the organization and unfamiliarity with the SSA's objectives), is noteworthy. Additionally, the two groups were again separated on the issue of decisions regarding work being based on a sense of urgency. The majority of males (44.3%) agreed, but with a significant element of non-committal responses (15.2%). However, a majority of females (52.7%) disagreed. Nonetheless, a majority of both groups (males 42.1%, females 58.8%) agreed that decisions about work were based on earning praise from those whom they served, namely, the rest of the population.

However, the responses here too, were attended by a significant element of non-committal responses (25.0% for males and 23.5% for females) perhaps a reflection of disagreement with, or even surprise regarding the inclusion and presentation of this statement for consideration.

Perceptions on Productivity and Performance

Both sexes more or less concurred on the necessity to improve productivity at the SSA (males 70.6%), although females were aligned equally on opposite sides of this issue (45.0% in each case). However, males and females differed on the issue of employee knowledge of what the productivity concept was. A greater proportion of females (63.2%) indicated that they did not understand the concept compared with the majority of males (42.7%) who indicated that they did. Noticeably, there was a larger proportion of non-committal responses from males (18.3%) compared to females (10.5%) to this issue, suggesting perhaps, unwillingness to self-report ignorance of the subject matter, on the part of the males. On the other hand, it may be an indication of unhappiness or discomfort with the portrayal of the issue, granted that the organization reported having organized presentations on the matter of organizational performance and productivity.

Males (45.6%) and females (40.0%) were also divided on the issue that results from productivity measurements might prove embarrassing if they were undertaken. The more negative posture by the males (their agreement that it might prove embarrassing) may have stemmed from a greater awareness of the meaning of, disagreement with, or non-acceptance of the concept and issues, as presented to the SSA's employees. A large proportion of females indicated that they did not understand the concept. Does this underscore the presence of an organizational communication problem? It is noteworthy too, that there was also a significant percentage of non-committal responses on both sides of this issue (21.0% male, 25.0% female). This is understandable, in light of the fact that at the organizational unit level, and in the public sector as a whole, the issue of performance (productivity) improvement has been received, with a great deal of caution. At best, it has gained lukewarm acceptance on the part of Labour and its representatives. Significantly, this response is not peculiar to Barbados (see Ammons 1992). The question which emerges is this: To what extent are employee responses reflective of the position taken by Labour on the matter?

Majorities in both groups (males 47.6%, females 42.2%) agreed that there was enough information on hand to measure how well the SSA was performing, but the proportion of those who disagreed in each group was significant (males 41.5%, females 31.6%). This underscores a weakness of a performance culture within the organization, and perhaps in the public sector as a whole.

Having analyzed the perspectives of the two groups on the factors and issues represented in the questionnaire, the question which emerges is this: In the eyes

of those groups how important were the issues as presented to the individuals in the SSA's workforce, and in the final analysis for the organization itself? Does employee interest in, or the importance attached to the issues presented signal easy passage or acceptance of a performance culture within the SSA?

Importance of Issues to the SSA Workforce

A radar chart in the appendix shows the alignment behind and separation of the SSA's staff regarding the issues raised by the questionnaire statements (see Table 3 and Chart 1 in the Appendix). From the chart, it can be seen that majorities in both groups felt that the issues were important to them and/or to the organization. Having said this, there were however, significant gaps regarding certain areas, for example, with respect to issues directly relating to the decisions and decision making factor (Questions 20 through 23) and those directly relating to the organizational performance factor (Questions 24 through 27). The implications for organizational communication are obvious. Perhaps the areas of greatest consensus with respect to both groups were related to their perspectives on issues relating to the organizational climate factor (Questions 16 through 19) and those relating working conditions factor (Questions 12 through 15). However, as earlier responses indicated, they were largely negative.

3. DISCUSSION

In terms of organizational rewards, it does appear that the SSA gives intrinsic or extrinsic rewards to those who help it with its organizational performance. However, members of the managerial/supervisory group, and males in particular apparently were happier with their levels. This perhaps emerges from greater opportunities and mechanisms available within the SSA to reward this category of worker, the absence of a large number of females at the senior level, and in the organization as a whole.

It can be said therefore that although there is the perception among the workers that good use is being made of their skills, knowledge and abilities, some responses suggest that this may not be strictly accurate. This is so in light of the fact that performance reviews are not routinely, or may be poorly undertaken. This also suggests a degree of irresponsiveness to external and internal environmental change, especially in view of the efficiency and effectiveness concerns of the new public management. It may mean also that within the organization, there is no great thrust for persons to upgrade their skills, nor any hope for upward mobility particularly among the non-supervisory and non-management workers. For those workers, it may be simply a dead-end job.

Overall, the responses suggest: (a) that working conditions were not generally conducive to greater employee performance, nor was it forcefully encouraged or promoted within the organization; and (b) that although work conditions were unsatisfactory with respect to both broad groups of employees, in certain

respects, responses from subordinate staff suggested that they were worse off. From the data analysis perspective, the level of noncommittal responses to certain questions indicate a degree of intimidation perhaps induced by the data collection method, resignation or even fatalism on the part of lower level employees.

Unlike the other dimensions of organizational behaviour and performance so far discussed, there are apparent divisions within the agency in terms of perception at the broad levels of managerial/ supervisory and "Other" staff, with respect to relationships between sections of the agency. Managerial/supervisory staff members generally, tend to hold a more positive view of the inter-sectional relationship -- all except on the issue of organizational communication (although this is not strictly an inter-sectional problem). In all, but on this single issue, the different groups viewed organizational cooperation differently. Nonetheless, the responses tend to support the expected class divisions regarding workers, granted the nature of the work at the SSA. Similar to many other government agencies, the SSA in terms of the new public management had not yet developed a customer-orientation. This suggests that there may be a great deal of work left to be done in this regard in the sector, in terms of the new emphasis on efficiency and effectiveness.

Overall, it can be said that there was general consensus on the issue of room for improvement in productivity or organizational performance improvement at the SSA. However, there remains a sizeable gap to be breached, in terms of familiarity with or acceptance of the concept at the two basic organizational staff levels as defined. The managerial/supervisory level staff responses suggest however, that any level of productivity measured, is either explainable and/or would not be anything about which the organization would be embarrassed. There was also a general convergence of opinion at both levels, that there is enough information to measure productivity.

That there was a divergence on the perception of male and female employees on the issue of organizational rewards is not surprising, granted that the SSA remains a male-dominated workplace. Correspondingly, the perspective of females regarding organizational rewards can be expected to improve should there be opportunities for the advancement of more females into senior positions. The foregoing supports the view that there remains significant variability in the perceptions on the part of both males and females regarding decisions and decision making in today's workplace.

The organizational communication problem however, being experienced at the SSA is not unusual given the nature of the work being carried out by the agency, and the mobile nature and other characteristics of the workforce. Nonetheless, channels of communication will have to be developed to achieve greater effectiveness and operational performance.

Reliability and Validity

Recall that a secondary objective of the analysis was an attempt to identify factors responsible for organizational performance in the public sector. Figure 1 below shows the results from the Chronbach Alpha for the identified and created variables (factors) in this regard: organizational rewards, human resource utilization, working conditions, organizational climate, decisions and decision making and perspectives on performance. It can be said that the results indicate that the identified variables consistently measured the constructs as presented except that regarding perceptions on performance, and perhaps less so for that regarding decisions and decision making. Perhaps this represents a weakness in the survey instrument; the statements may need further refinement, and/or the concepts greater clarity.

	No. of Cases	No. of Items	Alpha
Organizational Rewards	88	4	0.8746
Human Resource Utilization	85	4	0.8297
Working Conditions	92	4	0.8218
Organizational Climate	91	4	0.8907
Decisions and Decision Making	80	4	0.7665
Perceptions on Productivity	92	4	0.5441

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Closing the Gaps

The results from our analysis indicate that the SSA will have some work ahead of it to communicate its strategic objectives to employees. There are several avenues available to the organization. For example, the necessary communication might come in the form of the issuance of a mission statement with associated organizational objectives. These might be jointly signed by Labour and management. Video presentations, training and training material, and wall posters (visual management) might be specifically designed and introduced for behavioural modification.

All of this is going to be important. First, there is a need to close the knowledge and other gaps between upper and lower level employees. Secondly, it is necessary to bring the perceptions of subordinate level employees in particular,

into alignment with clearly articulated organizational goals and thinking. This is to ensure that organizational performance enters the calculus of every personnel action undertaken in the organization. The same can be said too, with respect to getting things done with as sense of urgency and earning praise from the public. In terms of an organizational performance culture, these issues not only affect how employees view the decisions taken by the organization regarding day-to-day decisions in relation to work, but also their motivation to accomplish organizational goals.

The results from the survey also indicate that the gaps in perception on the importance of the issues surrounding productivity and organizational performance might be a cause for concern. This may not be so only in relation to the SSA, but may have implications for the wider public service.

There exists a gulf between perceptions of senior employees and lower-level employees regarding the importance of improving the productivity of the SSA. Subordinate level staff members proportionately do not regard it as important as do the higher level employees. Analogously, a large percentage of lower level employees do not seem to care very much, whether employees in general understand what productivity is all about. The question that emerges from is this: Does this betray resistance to the acceptance of performance (productivity) improvement as understood by or has been presented to these employees? Should this indeed be the case, then there is now greater clarity regarding the change effort required.

Additionally, the results show that the management/supervisory, as opposed to subordinate staff, do not attach great importance to the issue of embarrassment of the organization regarding results from measuring the organization's productivity. When juxtaposed against their earlier responses, it would appear that the more negative responses (it would cause embarrassment) from the subordinate staff, tend to stem from a disinterest in measuring the performance of the organization altogether. This too tends to explain, in part, the more negative responses in relation to having the necessary information on hand to measure that performance.

However, perhaps of all the issues presented to the employees, the responses to which might be the considered the most revealing, and simultaneously troubling in terms of assessing the performance of the organization is that which relates to the importance attached to the ability of the SSA to measure how well it was performing. It is noteworthy, that this matter revealed that both employee groups proportionately showed about the same attitudinal intensity or direction regarding this issue. An insignificant 0.7% difference separated those two groups. Although both groups saw the matter as being important to them, and granted that the organization then might not have reached the stage of discussing measurement, could it be that the SSA might have to expend a great deal of effort to persuade both groups to accept a performance measurement system? Based on the

dictum: "If it is measured, it can be improved". a perverse synergy can be at work here.

Organizational efforts thus far, may have achieved philosophical commitment. However, this can be very different from actual commitment. To achieve the latter it may be necessary to promise employees that employment reductions arising out of productivity improvement initiatives by the organization will be effected through normal attrition, and/or redeployment (see Ammons 1992).

From the rudimentary gap analysis above, it appears that management will be heavily tasked and tested, if all workers at the SSA are to get into alignment behind the objectives of the organization regarding performance improvement.

Granted the difficulties experienced with the constructs on decisions and decision making and perceptions on productivity and performance, based of this single case, only tentative conclusions might be drawn from the survey. This is so particularly in terms of reliability and projectability with respect to the public sector in general. The way forward in terms of the instrument might be to reconstruct it along the lines of the Lewin OD change model using force field analysis. This would help identify which opposing (negative change) factors might be removed to allow the inherent natural positive change factors to drive performance improvement (see Schein 1997).

Overall, there was general satisfaction with the reward system at the SSA. Human resource utilization there however produced mixed reviews. Employees were generally dissatisfied with working conditions, but indicated varied perceptions on the organization's climate. Perceptions on decisions and decision making tended to vary according to the worker's status in the organization, and perceptions regarding organizational performance were again mixed. In terms of gender, females were more dissatisfied than males with the performance of the SSA. However, in fairness to all stakeholders, it bears repetition that the SSA's workforce represents a difficult management proposition granted the nature of the work, employee intake and the general demographics of the workforce. What then does the foregoing indicate with respect to the direction regarding the governance of public sector agencies?

On the gender issues raised, there is insufficient evidence and analysis to make definitive statements. Yet, the issues raised are important in bringing to light, areas for further investigation. For example, is it that females in the public sector may need greater sensitization regarding performance measurement?

Further Research

There remains too, some other areas of interest to be explored: first, to what extent is the degree of issue importance reflected in the earlier responses on agreement and disagreement by different level personnel? Secondly, what are

the similarities and differences between the managerial/supervisory group and subordinate workers, as opposed to the male versus female perspectives? In addition, are there significant differences between male and female perspectives regarding work and job/organizational performance in the Barbados workplace? These are just some areas, which require further exploration.

There appears to be some relevance of the first four factors to assisting with the assessment of organizational readiness for performance improvement, but further study is needed, before definitive statements can be made. Emerging from a combination of such studies too, can be some insights or discernment regarding whether Caribbean organizations can claim to be operating under a unique management style. Although it is dangerous to extrapolate from this one case, with the SSA probably not being the most appropriate public sector organization to gauge the rate of penetration of the new public management ideas being promoted, and as a test for sectoral readiness for performance improvement, the case nevertheless points to where some of the deficits may lie. In any event, should conditions at the SSA be atypic, and be unrepresentative of the receptivity of the notion of performance improvement, conditions nonetheless indicate how far away from the target present approaches may be in some public sector organizations, and the gaps that may have to be closed.

The levels of discomfort with performance improvement, amplified by response levels regarding agreement and importance, suggest the need for segmental thinking. It follows therefore that in fostering a performance culture within the SSA and the larger public sector, there is a need to build block by systematic block. It is inconceivable how Caribbean economies can move towards accelerated development and wealth creation in the face of the uncertainties and opportunities of globalization, if the public sector in its new role as enabler of the combined process, is lagging behind the private sector model both philosophically, and in consequence, operationally.

ENDNOTES

1. Hereinafter, unless otherwise indicated, the presentation of two sets of figures in brackets means that the first figure represents the percentage for managers and supervisory staff; the second figure represents the percentage for "Other" staff members.

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