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CONSTRAINTS ON ADMINISTRATIVE
PRODUCTIVITY IN THE CIVIL SERVICE

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Introduction

The growth, as well as the stature of Kenya's Civil Service during the last ten years of independence can earn, in the writer's opinion, a prominent place in the array of other independent African Civil Services. Despite the periodic parliamentary attacks against it, relating to over-expenditure, the alleged arrogance of certain officers and to excessive participation in private business, the service has managed to make itself felt in development activities as well as in routine administration. This is generally true despite certain basic but unavoidable constraints which, if minimized, would probably mean increased productivity in the public service. On the balance, however, the service has continued to enjoy public confidence and good will—a tacit recognition of a live and effective Civil Service.

It cannot be pretended that measuring results in the public service setting is one of the simplest feats to accomplish. The task, though possible, is intricate and requires the creation of special personnel teams of numerate "work auditors", conveniently removed from the daily administrative routines*. Civil servants in responsible positions would also have to be highly trained in organization and methods, in work study, work simplification and in improvement techniques to be able to adopt innovative work attitudes so as to be liberated from excessive regulatory and bureaucratic preoccupations.

Definition of Roles

It is a well-known management fact that an organization grows or "dies" (actually disintegrates) depending on the presence or absence of those factors which motivate workers towards continuous self development. People make organizations. It is they who are therefore the cause for organizational old age and decay, or its sustained growth. Rejuvenation may call for constant injection of young blood, properly trained in the relevant policies, purpose, procedures and practices within the organization for the perpetuation of the organization's activities. Motivation, and incentives such

* A nucleus has been set up in the Directorate of Personnel Management but it is only a nucleus in view of the enormous task it has to face, being responsible as it is for the entire public service.

as the individual reward practice (desirable but absent in the Kenya Civil Service), can be seen as “organizational fuel” helping employees to see new challenges, and to develop new hopes and interests in their work schedules so as to keep moving productively. But even the injection of new blood, coupled with the institution of reward systems and other motivation plans will not necessarily help to sustain organizational growth if the component parts of such an organization (people), do not understand their role and purpose within the organization. This in itself is one of the greatest motivators of people in all working situations. Various inborn or acquired human constraints are responsible for the constant administrative behaviour demonstrative of despondency, frustration and purposelessness. The chief of these is ignorance about policy, about goals, and about individual roles and the extent of an officer’s responsibility. It is submitted that the Kenya Civil Service suffers acutely from vague and incomplete job descriptions with their tendency to dwell on bare inputs, omitting entirely any mention of the expected results from an officer’s labour.

Ministerial job descriptions are regarded as complete when they tell us that Mr. C. S. Kenyan “Plans, co-ordinates, supervises or maintains . . . ” without telling us for what purpose or even to what standards. Many Ministries do not have job descriptions worth the paper they are written on.

Here are some job descriptions taken from the current Central Government Directory which further illustrate one source of the constraint already mentioned:

<i>Ministry</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Post Held</i>	<i>Subject</i>
X	Mr. A. B. “Cog”	Undersecretary	In charge of the “table”*
	Mr. D. E. “Kaziwapi”	Senior Executive Officer	Communications
	Mr. F. G. “Whereishe”	Ag. Accountant Grade I	Below the line Accountant

To say the least, these are not the type of descriptions that can motivate officers in terms of delineating their powers and responsibilities. Apart from being no description at all, they make no

* The actual word used for table has been altered to avoid direct identification of the Ministry.

attempt to remind officers of the importance of seeing responsibility in terms of national duty.

The work of the Republic can be likened to a load which is divided into 120,000 pieces*. Each one of us has been asked, and he has agreed, to carry a small piece of that load. Some carry heavier pieces, others lighter ones. The destination to which we are required to deliver our bits of the national load is the people, but the journey is unending in as much as the people will continue to require services indefinitely. It is the writer's opinion that anything that serves to remind schedule officers of their role in terms of national responsibility should be written in job descriptions and schedules. Certain words such as national, the public, public funds, national projects, nationals, national interest, public welfare, national safety, public housing, citizens' rights, Kenya's this and Kenya's that, etc., would serve as constant reminders of the main purpose for which we are employed. Thus a job description like:

Mr. C. S. Biashara :

"Internal Trade Policies. External Trade Policies. Overall Administration and Supervision of the Division. East Africa/ European Economic Commercial Policies (including Trade Agreements)"

tells us nothing about what the officer is required to achieve for Kenya, leave alone how he should go about achieving anything. Nor does it contain any aids to remind the officer of his national responsibilities. Examine the same job description put in a more concrete and exhaustive form to reflect the national expectation of the officer's output, and, indicating, at the same time, the mode of operation:

"To play the national *executive* and *advisory* role for the formulation of *equitable* internal and *favourable* external trade policies for Kenya. Responsible for the *efficient transaction* of business between *departmental staff* and the Kenya trading public through *strict limitation* or, if possible, complete eradication of *waiting hours* and *queueing* and for the introduction of *speedy methods* of dealing with various *Government trade forms*. Responsible for *scrutinizing* the E.A. Community and European

*This figure representing roughly the current strength of the Civil Service.

Economic Community trade policies and to advise trade ministers of possible *ways and means* of *reaping maximum benefits* through such policies. *To examine* carefully in co-operation with *other trade departments* and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, all trade agreements, and to surface *any adverse aspects* that would *disadvantage* Kenya's trade with the outside world."

It will of course be argued that such an expanded job description is not necessary as all the extra additions should be understood or are implied in the shorter version. But it is also true that incomplete and vague job descriptions are among the most prevalent causes of "passing the buck" when an officer is either not sure of what is required of him, or when he does not understand the problem before him. Passing the buck is a Civil Service professional art and it ranks prominently among all the constraints militating against maximum productivity. Without clarity and precision regarding individual job descriptions, the scope of his responsibility and of the exercise of his powers, many an officer will continue to hesitate and shy away from their duties for fear of doing the wrong thing or of taking any decision at all.

The longer job description pins down responsibility more positively, reminds the officer of the magnitude of his duties and informs him with finality of the specific roles he must play, e.g. caring about favourable trade for his country and for the efficient treatment of an important section of the nation's public (traders of all levels), including pointing out the need to consult and to co-operate. It is *results oriented* as opposed to being merely inputs oriented. The priorities are right, for although administrative inputs are important, it is results that we are finally interested in.

Departmental Co-operation and Consultation

The fact that Kenya has twenty-two ministries does not in any way imply she has twenty-two divergent policies. The ministerial form of Government is simply the ultimate recognition that national decisions (or any decisions at all) must be based on as wide a source of relevant information, views and discussions, as possible. If it were not so, there would be no need for cabinet meetings and the attendant principle of collective responsibility. There would be no use for the frequent Permanent Secretary meetings, or the inter-

ministerial meetings below these which take place every day. The principle behind these practices is the search for unified Government policy in all it undertakes to do, whether in agriculture, transport, in education, in natural resources development, or in any other endeavour going under one single portfolio. Twenty-two ideas and views are capable of being welded into a policy through discussions and consultancy. Recognition of the vital role that all government departments play in the interest of promoting departmental and interministerial co-operation and consultancy on an "equal partners in progress" basis is therefore one of the inescapable prerequisites of a progressive service.

The danger, however, of one ministry feeling superior to the other, or of an official feeling that the entire well being of the government rests squarely on his shoulders, or on his department, is incalculable. It is a constraint which ranks high among those under discussion here. No one single person has a right to claim the superiority of his position or department to the exclusion of all others. Civil Service personnel are indispensable parts of the same ship however irrelevant some may appear. It has already been recognized that some departments and individuals have been made to shoulder tougher responsibilities than others, but this is only natural—resting as it does on the indisputable possessions of different talents and aptitudes for different jobs by different individuals.

Dangers of Rigid "Professional Rectitude"*

Individual officers, or even groups of officers working in the same ministry can often develop a strong "professional" sense of rightness in their advice, or in some stand they may take on certain issues. We often tend to forget that any one issue has moral, social, political, economic and indeed legal implications when seen from national considerations. The civil servant who realizes that many issues of government are influenced by a multiplicity of such factors must necessarily be able to make only temporary or provisional stands on certain national issues, leaving adequate room to contain the views of other civil servants from his own ministry or from other departments. Rigidity of views does not always assist in resolving problems, and in any case, it pays to realize that we are

* The word "professional" is used in the wider sense so as to treat ministerial responsibilities as professional areas.

everywhere surrounded by hundreds of other officers who are perhaps wiser, if not more experienced, than ourselves.

A professional's immutable conviction, for example, of the need to expand the forest resources of an area at the risk of dispossessing a whole forest-dwelling community would be narrow and parochial if it did not recognize the relative importance of human beings to trees. Even if the settlement of such a community on alternative land were possible, there would still be the question relating to the community's environmental change to consider. Their cultural and social life would be disrupted. Would they be prepared to live a sedentary life at the stroke of a pen, and to cultivate the land for their food instead of fruit gathering and hunting? Would it not be better to "go it slow" through education to modernize their attitudes towards life? These and many other related questions would require many more "professional" minds beyond the specialist conviction of the forester. Departmental decision makers should always be prepared to benefit from the views of other departments, especially those involved in functions almost similar to their own, and in the field of rural administration, from the provincial administration.

The Place of Co-ordination in Field Administration

The field co-ordinator of our provincial service is a generalist whose chief qualification, among others, for holding such a role is his appointment within the Office of the President—the seat of all executive power, and in particular, for the maintenance of law and order. Section 23 of the Constitution of Kenya provides legal authority for this:

23. (1) The executive authority of the Government of Kenya shall rest in the President, and, subject to this Constitution may be exercised by him either directly or through officers subordinate to him.

For purposes of Civil Service administration, Permanent Secretaries and Provincial Commissioners are "officers subordinate to him" and at the same time, his personal appointees—(we must recognize, of course, that Permanent Secretaries work under Ministers appointed by the Presidency). It would follow, therefore, that the co-ordination of field administration is the rightful responsibility of the Provincial Commissioner with his other ranks of provincial administration, down to the sub-chief.

Co-ordination is the type of role that can harbour different interpretations to senior field staff who are heads of various Ministerial departments. It does not mean policing every department and issuing random instructions to everyone at will. It should, however, be seen as the focal point at which the "unity of purpose" mentioned earlier resides. Secondly it is an office available to all Heads of Departments for consultation, for settling differences, and a place where useful information within a geographical area is centralized for use by all field services. In the interests of giving the best service to the public, decisions carrying the greatest index of agreement, as a result of the widest degree of consultation must be preferable to unilateral ones. The Provincial Commissioner is also the most senior official within his administrative unit.

In the writer's opinion, Provincial Administration personnel should not be wilfully driven to querying the conduct of certain activities that went wrong simply because the "sectoral" head of department failed, by design or careless neglect, to consult because of the all too common temptation to go hunting for personal and unshared credit.

An example once cited by a P.C. while lecturing at K.I.A. illustrates the point very satisfactorily. A certain Government Board was instructed to expand a certain agricultural activity. The area involved was inhabited. The land belonged to a County Council. Upon receiving the instructions, members of the board went ahead to give notice to the inhabitants to vacate the earmarked area. The inhabitants obviously refused to budge because they had nowhere to go and in any case, they did not "know", i.e. recognize such orders from anybody who was not a Chief, a D.O., a D.C., or the P.C.

The delay caused by this departmental attitude of self-sufficiency was felt by the entire nation through the shortage of whatever commodity was to be expanded because it was not available when it was required. A department that knew its work would have realized that although the project expansion proposals emanated from some Government Ministry Headquarters, it had more than one side to it. First and foremost, it had to seek the co-operation of several government departments, the chief of which

was the Ministry of Local Government and the relevant County Council, because alternative land had to be found to settle the inhabitants living in the area earmarked for the new project. Perhaps the Commissioner of Lands might have been involved. Then the entire line of provincial administration, including the chief and the sub-chief should have been high on the list of consultancy. The survey department, town planning and the roads department of the Ministry of Works had important inputs for the project as had other departments, e.g. Health and probably Education. They had a right to be consulted and even used. As things were, the interests of the public were sacrificed on the altar of departmental self-sufficiency.

Recognition of Status

Contrary to common belief, it is not the proud, arrogant and officious civil servant that gets the most recognition from either the public, his peers or his juniors. Such officers normally have something very basic to hide through arrogance and "status protocol"; it is usually ignorance and general mental bankruptcy. Such officers find it degrading to call at other officers' rooms for discussions and consultancy. They use the telephone to order other more junior officers to "come to my office at once." They carry office symbols into clubs and social places and the result is disastrous for departmental efficiency and relaxed performance. It can be proved that the officer who has the greatest recognition for whatever office he/she holds is that one who knows his work, gives the best advice to colleagues, is not a slave to protocol and, above all, knows that even the most junior of officers can, and often do have something they can contribute, given the chance. He therefore knows how to listen, and to generously acknowledge the worth of those who work for him.

The Paramountcy of the Public Interests

The Civil Service is a public instrument for the efficient provision of those services that the public require in order to live and work as comfortably as possible. The interests of the public are paramount and if and when those interests and the private interests of the civil servants should conflict, the former must prevail. Private interests can be divided into two: those relating to departmental

“closed shop behaviour” and those relating to an individual’s disloyalty to the public in terms of how much public time is taken up by his private activities, and how much concern he possesses for the public when dealing with the day to day problems of administration.

In this connexion, it is relevant to comment briefly on the Ndegwa Commission and the subsequent Government support accorded in Sessional Paper No. 5 of 1974 to the recommendation relating to ownership of property. The recommendation is sensible, and very much in the national interest. Without such an arrangement the temptation for the civil servants to fall prey to all manner of corruption would be very high. Equally, however, uncontrolled ownership of property and involvement in the various commercial activities by civil servants has its own dangers relating to points being made under this heading.

It is admitted that an individual’s attachment to some personal property was a strong African tradition which can still be identified even today. It was the beginning of respect for law and order since each man had an interest in defending that which belonged to him. A man who could not point to his tree, his land, his bee-hive, his cattle and goats, his homestead etc. was not really “a man”.

New policies, however, must be accompanied by new checks and balances through new and relevant regulations. To leave the question of ownership open without any controls will be the surest way of inviting corrupt practices and of subordinating public interests to personal interests. It is not clear how the present method of making personal returns of ownership to the Directorate of Personnel Management helps to control the problem. What is clear is that we already have tens upon tens of civil servants who are now caring more about their own property and business than they do about their work. Admittedly, there are those with the necessary skill and moral restraint to order their time in such a manner that public duty remains paramount in relation to private interests. These, however, are the exception rather than the rule. To ensure maximum productivity in the Civil Service, a new body of regulations governing how much of what type of property may be owned by civil servants is an inescapable duty of the Government particularly as the public which the Civil Service works for has an equal right to own property, but the greatest majority of it lacks the

know-how and adequate means of acquiring property. If one of the Civil Service obligations is to help the public to acquire the means of producing wealth, there would appear to be a conflict of interests whereby the natural human selfish motive will necessarily drive those who have the means and the know-how to want to own too much at the expense of the interests of the rank and file. In such circumstances, the paramountcy of the public interest will perforce give way to the private interests. The consequences will not be in keeping with the declared policy of the Government to distribute wealth equitably.

Conclusion

In this short paper, I have endeavoured to bring out some of the commonest constraints on greater administrative productivity. Most of them are based on certain attitudes, inborn, or acquired within our own careers, perhaps because of inadequate training or because the service itself has perpetuated unfortunate colonial traditions. But the art of consultancy during colonial times was highly developed, perhaps because of the very disease of exaggerated respect for status. The few remaining files with examples of colonial administration often show how small problems could be a subject of ten or more little minutes by ten different officers. Verbal consultations are time saving, and time is our problem in terms of what we would like to achieve for this country during our lifetime.

Vague and indefinite job descriptions encourage passing the buck from one officer to a string of others. They fail to spell out what is expected of each officer, resulting quite often in large areas of Government responsibility being, unconsciously perhaps, neglected.

Professional rigidity of views works contrary to the principle of unified public policy, which must be formulated and executed co-operatively through interdepartmental consulting strategies. If the department of community development whips up public enthusiasm and is able, as it usually is, to obtain certain materials for a health clinic, the Ministry of Health must necessarily have a role to play, as will the town planning authority and the relevant local authority. Several other departments could equally be involved.

If it is accepted as a matter of policy, that public interests must take precedence to the private interests, and that there is merit in allowing civil servants to own property and to engage in business,

it must also be accepted that there is need to limit Civil Service involvement in excessive private activities for reasons already advanced above. Without such controls, a conflict of interests is bound to arise and it is not difficult to forecast which interest will prevail.

The credit that may accrue from our successes or failure is credit or debit to the entire Government. It is ironical that individual officers tend to possess an insatiable craving for being identified personally with project successes, but not with failure, even when such officers are directly responsible for such failure. The essence of *Harambee* for Civil Service performance is a little more than pulling together; it is pulling together in the same direction.