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 Subject: Comments

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I have the following comments on the Task Force Survey on Civil Service Salaries and Conditions of service.

A government is not a for-profit organisation. Apart from technically governing the society, the government must also be a moral example for the rest of the society. It should be the secular soul of the society and must rise above the greed and dehumanising competitive spirit that are promoted by some "leaders" who know no better. It must define and defend its core values. Are fairness, equality and compassion, which would enable every citizen a dignified existence, its core values?

It is commendable that the present review surveys the practices of other advanced governments rather than that of some Machiavellian commercial enterprises. Yet we still have to scrutinise every practice to ensure that they support the government's core values. In this light, the government must constantly seek ways to improve services to the community based on its core values which must undergird the services it wants to provide to the public. The government's core values must be fully articulated to all.

Currently, one major problem is that the government is overstaffed with people tasked with slowing down other productive individuals "disserving the community" in direct contradiction to its motto. Examples abound and the most prominent is the proliferation and administration of different allowances, benefits and procedures like housing. These counter-productive schemes must first be replaced by no-question-asked cash allowances or simply be built into the salary structure.

These "people-slowers" become such not so much of their own making, but because of those who hire them "senior civil servants who dream up such nonsense and perpetuate such culture. Those hired to disservise are partly victims since they have been moulded into this farcical way of approaching things. In this light, senior civil servants must bear greater responsibility and so greater accountability must be built into the pay structure to reflect this. The "people-slower" tragedy is only one of the many historical burdens laid down by bureaucrats who thrive on nonsense. These must be cured, partly through the reward (and also penalty) system.

Even though some "people-slowers" are partly victims, they must still be made to change their behaviour or explore alternatives through a flexible performance reward salary system, but to a lesser extent than for seniors.

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Given the need to use pay as one (and just one) motivation force, a 360 degree performance appraisal system MUST be put in place as a counter-balance. The current top-down appraisal has prevented management from gaining a perspective on ways to improving overall performance. In increasingly sophisticated operations, the efficiency of the whole is only as high as the weakest link! An upward-accountable appraisal system nurtures the tendency to curry superiors' favour and management blind-spots are rarely challenged, except by the courageous few who have usually fallen by the wayside. This has sometimes resulted in an inverted competence pyramid ? higher positions occupied by the less competent. A carefully thought out 360 degree performance appraisal would take more time, but would be well worth it in return for checking excesses, creating awareness and hopefully minimising self-serving interests.

To maintain stability of the civil service, broad comparability with the private sector should be maintained and affordability should thus NOT be a consideration in the salary level of the civil service. Only provision of non-essential services (internal or otherwise) provided by the government, e.g. parts of GLTA, EMSD, ITSD ... etc. should reflect government affordability.

Each department should be able to define the salary scale of each type of staff it employs within one grand scale applicable to the whole government given the need to cater to the different work natures. Currently, positions of the same rank may demand very different skill types and levels and the Procrustean bed is a recipe for demotivation, argument and muddled management. Yet, flexibility in salary definition must go hand in hand with greater authority to define work categories. For example, some departments cannot hire their own computer programmers because this category only exists under ITSD, but every department has such needs and meets them by obfuscating other categories ? the very anti-thesis of division of labour and the efficiency thereof! In a nutshell, civil service pay should be centrally administered, but much room given to departments to meet their particular needs.

Performance reward should be based on individual with an option to do it on a group basis should the members of the group unanimously desire so. The latter option may work well for certain groups depending on the nature of the work and the composition. It comes as a bonus to the government. The default (individual) would guarantee basic fairness. The higher the positions, the less the team-based approach would apply given their more individualised responsibilities.

In any change, there will always be winners and losers and morale will definitely be affected. The question is whether those affected deserve what they get. Thus the morale issue must not be viewed solely from the pay angle. I believe that only the irredeemably selfish and blind will not consider a meaningful job itself a reward which can buffer some changes in the way they are paid. The problem today is that the government has reduced work of a lot of positions to that of "people slowers" or "sycophantic coordinators / managers" through overhiring compounded with layers of demotivating bureaucracy. I

believe that a re-structuring that re-injects meaning, ownership and creativity to some work would go a long way to addressing the morale issue. Let people take pride in building a good and just society rather than just earning a pay cheque. Too idealistic? But the idealism in each of us can be awakened.

I support a centrally operated job evaluation system provided that: 1. room is made for work of different natures, e.g. routine with quantifiable outputs (quantitative assessment), routine with non-quantifiable outputs (qualitative and quantitative assessments), non-routine requiring mainly technical skill, non-routine requiring mainly managerial skills, non-routine requiring vision, creativity, initiative ... etc., and 2. each department can have some room to build on this basic structure to suit its own objective.

The boundary between disciplinary services and other work is really blur and I do not see why there should be different philosophies governing them.

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